



Spain

Sunny plazas, Moorish palaces, Gaudí's dreamlike buildings and long, late dinners with friends.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Madrid

POPULATION

About 50 million (49.8 million in mid 2026)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Spanish (Castilian), with Catalan, Galician, Basque and others co-official in their regions

CURRENCY

Euro

AREA

About 506,000 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary constitutional monarchy (constitution of 1978)

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Teide, 3,715 m, on Tenerife in the Canary Islands (Mulhacén, 3,479 m, is the highest on the mainland)

LONGEST RIVER

The Tagus (Tajo), about 1,007 km, which it shares with Portugal

NEIGHBOURS

Portugal, France, Andorra, Morocco (at Ceuta and Melilla) and Gibraltar (British)

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+34

A 45-minute trip to Spain

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Spain together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 218 BC: Romans land in Hispania; 1808: The Peninsular War begins; 2002: The euro replaces the peseta. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Paella valenciana and Gazpacho. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Buenos días" (Good morning, hello), "Buenas tardes" (Good afternoon, good evening), "Buenas noches" (Good evening, good night). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/spain/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Spain and its cities



- Madrid (Community of Madrid): The Prado Museum, The Royal Palace, Puerta del Sol and Plaza Mayor
- Barcelona (Catalonia): The Sagrada Família, Park Güell, La Rambla and the Gothic Quarter
- Valencia (Valencian Community): Paella, The City of Arts and Sciences, The Fallas festival in March
- Seville (Andalusia): The cathedral and the Giralda, The Royal Alcázar, Flamenco
- Bilbao (Basque Country): The Guggenheim Museum, Pintxos, Its old town, the Casco Viejo
- San Sebastián (Basque Country): La Concha beach, Pintxos, Its film festival
- Santiago de Compostela (Galicia): The cathedral, The Camino de Santiago, Galician food such as octopus
- Toledo (Castilla-La Mancha): Its old town, El Greco, Sword-making and marzipan
- Córdoba (Andalusia): The Mosque-Cathedral, The Roman bridge, The patio festival in May

- Granada (Andalusia): The Alhambra, The Albayzín quarter, Free tapas
- Málaga (Andalusia): Picasso's birthplace, The Costa del Sol, Its Moorish fortress, the Alcazaba
- Palma (Balearic Islands): La Seu cathedral, Its harbour, The Bellver Castle

A short history of Spain

Romans, Visigoths, Moors and Christian kings all shaped Spain. From a patchwork of kingdoms it became a world empire, lived through a civil war and a long dictatorship, and then built one of Europe's young democracies.

218 BC **Romans land in Hispania**

During their war with Carthage, Roman troops landed at Empúries on the Catalan coast. Over the next two centuries Rome conquered the whole peninsula, which it called Hispania, and left behind roads, bridges, aqueducts and the Latin language.

AD 711 **Muslim armies cross into Iberia**

A Muslim army led by Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed from North Africa and defeated the Visigothic kingdom. Within a few years most of the peninsula was under Muslim rule, known as al-Andalus.

1469 **The Catholic Monarchs marry**

Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon married in secret. Their union joined Spain's two largest Christian kingdoms and laid the foundations of the Spanish state.

1492 **Granada falls and Columbus sets sail**

In January Isabella and Ferdinand captured Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. That summer they sponsored Christopher Columbus, who reached the Caribbean in October. In the same year Spain's Jews were ordered to convert or leave.

1522 **Elcano completes the first voyage around the world**

Ferdinand Magellan's expedition left Spain in 1519. Magellan was killed in the Philippines, and Juan Sebastián Elcano, a Basque sailor, brought the ship Victoria home in 1522, completing the first voyage around the world.

1561 **Madrid becomes the capital**

King Philip II moved his royal court to Madrid, then a modest town in the centre of the country. Apart from a few years when the court was in Valladolid (1601 to 1606), Madrid has been the capital ever since.

- 1588** **The Spanish Armada sails against England**
Philip II sent a great fleet to invade England. It was beaten off by the English navy and then wrecked by storms around Scotland and Ireland.
- 1605** **Don Quixote is published**
Miguel de Cervantes published the first part of Don Quixote, the story of a man who reads so many tales of knights that he sets out to become one. It is often called the first modern novel.
- 1808** **The Peninsular War begins**
Napoleon's troops occupied Spain and put his brother Joseph on the throne. On 2 May 1808 the people of Madrid rose up, a scene later painted by Goya. The war ended with the French driven out in 1814.
- 1898** **Spain loses its last major colonies**
After a short war with the United States, Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam. The defeat, called 'the Disaster' in Spain, ended its overseas empire in the Americas and Asia.
- 1936** **The Civil War begins**
An army uprising against the elected Republic started a bitter civil war. It ended in 1939 with the victory of General Francisco Franco, who then ruled Spain as a dictator.
- 1975** **Franco dies**
General Franco died on 20 November 1975. Two days later Juan Carlos I was proclaimed king, and he helped lead the country's peaceful move to democracy.
- 1978** **Spaniards approve a new constitution**
On 6 December 1978 Spaniards voted in a referendum for a democratic constitution that is still in force. 6 December is now a national holiday, Constitution Day.
- 1986** **Spain joins the European Community**
On 1 January 1986 Spain and Portugal joined the European Economic Community, which later became the European Union.
- 1992** **Barcelona hosts the Olympic Games**
A big year for Spain: Barcelona held the Summer Olympics, Seville hosted a world fair, Expo '92, and the first high-speed AVE train line opened between Madrid and Seville.

2002

The euro replaces the peseta

Euro notes and coins replaced the Spanish peseta, which had been the national currency since 1868.

What people eat in Spain

Spanish food is built on olive oil, garlic, fresh vegetables, fish and cured pork, and every region has its own specialities. Lunch, eaten around 2 pm, is the main meal of the day: a primer plato (first course, often vegetables, soup or rice), a segundo plato (meat or fish) and a postre (dessert). Dinner comes late, often after 9 pm, and between meals people meet in bars for tapas, small plates shared with a drink.

Paella valenciana

Valencia, Valencian Community

Rice cooked in a wide, shallow pan with olive oil, chicken, rabbit, green beans, large white beans and saffron. The original Valencian recipe has no seafood and no chorizo.

Gazpacho (Gazpacho andaluz)

Andalusia

A cold, refreshing soup of raw tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, garlic, olive oil and vinegar, blended until smooth. In summer it is often drunk from a glass.

Salmorejo

Córdoba, Andalusia

A thicker, creamier cousin of gazpacho, made mainly of tomatoes, bread, garlic and olive oil, served cold and topped with chopped hard-boiled egg and cured ham.

Spanish omelette (Tortilla de patatas)

All of Spain

A thick, round omelette of eggs and potatoes slowly fried in olive oil, often with onion. It is eaten warm or cold, as a tapa, a sandwich filling or a light supper.

Bread with tomato (Pa amb tomàquet (Catalan), pan con tomate (Spanish))

Catalonia

Toasted or fresh country bread rubbed with ripe tomato, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with salt. In Catalonia it goes with almost every meal.

Garlic prawns (Gambas al ajillo)

All of Spain, a classic tapas bar dish

Prawns cooked in plenty of olive oil with sliced garlic and a little dried chilli, served sizzling in a small clay dish with bread to mop up the oil.

Galician-style octopus (Pulpo a la gallega (pulpo á feira in Galician))

Galicia

Tender boiled octopus cut into slices, sprinkled with coarse salt and paprika and drizzled with olive oil, traditionally served on a round wooden plate.

Fabada asturiana

Asturias

A rich, warming stew of large white beans (fabes) slowly cooked with chorizo, morcilla (blood sausage) and pork.

Cocido madrileño

Madrid

A hearty stew of chickpeas, vegetables and several kinds of meat. It is traditionally served in stages: first the broth as a noodle soup, then the chickpeas and vegetables, then the meats.

Iberian ham (Jamón ibérico)

Western and southwestern Spain

Cured ham from the black Iberian pig, sliced paper-thin by hand. The most prized kind, jamón ibérico de bellota, comes from pigs that feed on acorns in open oak woodland.

Manchego cheese (Queso manchego)

La Mancha, Castilla-La Mancha

A firm cheese made from the milk of Manchega sheep, with a zigzag pattern on its rind. Only cheese from its protected area of origin in La Mancha may use the name.

Patatas bravas

Madrid

Chunks of fried potato served with a spicy red sauce, and often with garlic mayonnaise as well. One of the most popular tapas in the country.

Crema catalana

Catalonia

A chilled custard flavoured with lemon peel and cinnamon, topped with a thin layer of sugar that is burnt until it forms a glassy crust.

Churros with chocolate (Churros con chocolate)

Madrid and all of Spain

Long, ridged sticks of fried dough dipped into a cup of thick, hot chocolate. People eat them for breakfast, as an afternoon snack, or after a long night out.

Turrón

Jijona and Alicante, Valencian Community

A nougat of almonds, honey, sugar and egg white, eaten all over Spain at Christmas. Turrón de Alicante is hard with whole almonds, and turrón de Jijona is soft and made with ground almonds.

Horchata (Horchata de chufa)

Valencia, Valencian Community

A sweet, milky-looking drink made from tiger nuts (chufas), small tubers grown near Valencia, served ice cold in summer. Valencians dip long soft buns called fartons into it.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Meals are late by northern European standards: lunch usually starts around 2 pm and dinner is often after 9 pm.
- Tapas are for sharing. Order a few plates for the table and everyone picks from them.
- Bread is served with most meals and is used to push food onto the fork and to mop up sauces.
- Waiters do not bring the bill until you ask for it. Linger at the table after a meal to talk is so normal that it has a name: la sobremesa.
- At lunch many restaurants offer a menú del día, a fixed-price meal of a first course, a second course and dessert, often with bread and a drink.

Gazpacho

A cold, refreshing soup of raw tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, garlic, olive oil and vinegar, blended until smooth. In summer it is often drunk from a glass.

Ingredients

- 1 kg very ripe tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 1 green pepper, seeds removed, chopped
- Half a cucumber, peeled and chopped
- 1 small garlic clove
- 50 g stale white bread, soaked in water and squeezed (optional)
- 80 ml extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- Salt
- Cold water to thin, if needed

Method

1. Put the tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, garlic and bread in a blender with a good pinch of salt.
2. Blend until completely smooth.
3. With the blender running, pour in the olive oil and vinegar so the soup turns creamy and light orange.
4. Taste and add more salt or vinegar. Add a little cold water if it is too thick.
5. Pass it through a sieve for a finer texture, then chill for at least 2 hours. Serve very cold, topped with small cubes of cucumber, pepper and bread.

Spanish omelette

A thick, round omelette of eggs and potatoes slowly fried in olive oil, often with onion. It is eaten warm or cold, as a tapa, a sandwich filling or a light supper.

Ingredients

- 600 g waxy potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced (optional)
- 5 large eggs (many Spaniards leave the centre soft: for pregnant women, young children, older people or anyone with a weak immune system, cook it until fully set or use pasteurised eggs)
- About 250 ml olive oil for frying
- Salt

Method

1. Heat the oil in a frying pan about 24 cm wide. Add the potatoes and onion with a pinch of salt and cook gently for about 20 minutes, until soft but not brown.
2. Lift the potatoes and onion out with a slotted spoon and let them drain. Keep the oil for another use, leaving about a tablespoon in the pan.
3. Beat the eggs in a large bowl with a little salt, stir in the warm potatoes and leave for 5 minutes.
4. Pour the mixture into the hot pan and cook over medium-low heat for 4 to 5 minutes, shaking the pan so it does not stick.
5. Cover the pan with a large plate, turn it over in one quick movement, then slide the tortilla back into the pan to cook the other side for 3 to 4 minutes, or longer if you want it fully set.

Bread with tomato

Toasted or fresh country bread rubbed with ripe tomato, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with salt. In Catalonia it goes with almost every meal.

Ingredients

- 8 slices of rustic country bread
- 2 or 3 very ripe tomatoes, cut in half
- 1 garlic clove, peeled (optional)
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Flaky salt

Method

1. Toast the bread until golden on both sides.
2. If you like, rub each slice lightly with the garlic clove.
3. Rub the cut side of a tomato hard over the bread, so the pulp soaks in and only the skin is left in your hand.
4. Drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and eat straight away, on its own or with cured ham or cheese.

Garlic prawns

Prawns cooked in plenty of olive oil with sliced garlic and a little dried chilli, served sizzling in a small clay dish with bread to mop up the oil.

Ingredients

- 400 g raw prawns, peeled
- 6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 small dried red chilli, broken in pieces (or a pinch of chilli flakes)
- 150 ml olive oil
- A handful of chopped parsley
- Salt
- Bread to serve

Method

1. Pat the prawns dry and sprinkle them with a little salt.
2. Warm the olive oil in a small clay dish or frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and chilli and cook gently until the garlic just starts to turn golden.
3. Turn up the heat, add the prawns and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, turning once, until they are pink all the way through.
4. Sprinkle with parsley and serve at once, still sizzling, with bread.

Crema catalana

A chilled custard flavoured with lemon peel and cinnamon, topped with a thin layer of sugar that is burnt until it forms a glassy crust.

Ingredients

- 500 ml whole milk
- Peel of 1 lemon (in wide strips, no white pith)
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 5 egg yolks
- 100 g sugar, plus about 6 tablespoons for the topping
- 25 g cornflour

Method

1. Heat the milk with the lemon peel and cinnamon until it almost boils, then take it off the heat and leave for 15 minutes.
2. Whisk the yolks, sugar and cornflour in a saucepan until smooth.
3. Remove the peel and cinnamon and pour the warm milk slowly into the yolks, whisking all the time.
4. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until the custard thickens and just starts to bubble. It must be fully cooked and thick.
5. Pour into 6 shallow dishes, cool, then chill for at least 4 hours.
6. Just before serving, sprinkle each with a thin, even layer of sugar and caramelize it with a kitchen blowtorch or a hot iron until golden and crisp.

Useful phrases

Buenos días

BWEH-nohs DEE-ahs · Good morning, hello

Buenas tardes

BWEH-nahs TAR-dehs · Good afternoon, good evening

Buenas noches

BWEH-nahs NOH-chehs · Good evening, good night

Adiós

ah-DYOHS · Goodbye

Hasta luego

AHS-tah LWEH-goh · See you later

Por favor

por fah-BOR · Please

Perdone

pehr-DOH-neh · Excuse me

Encantado / Encantada

en-kahn-TAH-doh / en-kahn-TAH-dah · Nice to meet you (said by a man / by a woman)

¿Qué tal?

keh TAHL · How are you? How is it going?

¿Habla inglés?

AH-blah een-GLEHS · Do you speak English?

No entiendo

noh en-TYEN-doh · I don't understand

¿Cuánto cuesta?

KWAHN-toh KWES-tah · How much is it?

¿Dónde está el baño?

DOHN-deh es-TAH el BAHN-yoh · Where is the bathroom?

Una mesa para dos

OO-nah MEH-sah PAH-rah DOHS · A table for two

Un café con leche, por favor

oon kah-FEH kon LEH-cheh por fah-BOR · A white coffee, please

La cuenta, por favor

lah KWEN-tah por fah-BOR · The bill, please

¡Que aproveche!

keh ah-proh-BEH-cheh · Enjoy your meal

¡Salud!

sah-LOOD · Cheers! (literally 'health')

¡Socorro!

soh-KOH-rroh · Help!

Things you might not know

1. Spain's national anthem, the Marcha Real, has no official lyrics. As of 2026, it is one of only three national anthems in the world without them, along with those of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.
2. On New Year's Eve, Spaniards eat one grape at each of the twelve strokes of midnight for good luck. Millions watch the clock of the Puerta del Sol in Madrid on television to keep time.
3. A plaque in Madrid's Puerta del Sol marks Kilometre Zero, the point from which distances on Spain's main national roads are measured.
4. Spain's highest mountain, Teide (3,715 m), is a volcano on the island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, not on the mainland.
5. Guinness World Records lists Sobrino de Botín in Madrid as the oldest restaurant in the world, open since 1725. Some historians say the present restaurant only dates from 1865.
6. Every year on the last Wednesday of August, thousands of people pelt each other with ripe tomatoes in the town of Buñol, near Valencia, at a festival called La Tomatina.
7. As of the 2020s, Spain is the world's largest producer of olive oil.
8. Spaniards traditionally have two surnames: the first surname of their father and the first surname of their mother. Women keep their own surnames when they marry.
9. The daisy-shaped Chupa Chups lollipop logo was designed in 1969 by the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí.
10. As of 2025, Spanish is the second most spoken native language in the world, after Mandarin Chinese, with more than 500 million native speakers.
11. Work on the Sagrada Família began in 1882. As of 2026, it is the tallest church in the world, even though it is still not finished.
12. Spain has two cities in North Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, so it shares a land border with Morocco.

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Spain, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Paella valenciana or Gazpacho? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- Spain joins the European Community (1986). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Barcelona hosts the Olympic Games (1992). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Sagrada Família, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Spain, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Spain?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

- 1. '¡Que aproveche!' is said to wish people an enjoyable meal.**
 - A) True
 - B) False
- 2. Andalusian gazpacho is a soup that is served piping hot.**
 - A) True
 - B) False
- 3. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was designed by Antoni Gaudí.**
 - A) True
 - B) False
- 4. What do Spaniards eat at each of the twelve strokes of midnight on New Year's Eve?**
 - A) A churro
 - B) A grape
 - C) An olive
 - D) An almond
- 5. What is a 'menú del día' in a Spanish restaurant?**
 - A) A fixed-price lunch of three courses
 - B) A list of the day's wines
 - C) A breakfast buffet
 - D) A tasting menu of twenty small dishes
- 6. Spaniards traditionally have two surnames, one from each parent.**
 - A) True
 - B) False
- 7. As of 2026, the Sagrada Família is the tallest church in the world.**
 - A) True
 - B) False

8. In a Spanish restaurant, what is 'la cuenta'?

- A) The bill
- B) The waiter
- C) The table
- D) The menu

9. Paella comes from the countryside around which city?

- A) Valencia
- B) Madrid
- C) Bilbao
- D) Salamanca

10. How do you say 'water' in Spanish?

- A) Agua
- B) Vino
- C) Pan
- D) Leche

11. In Spain, Sunday is the normal day for shops to close.

- A) True
- B) False

12. Spain's national anthem, the Marcha Real, has no official lyrics.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. True

True. It is like 'enjoy your meal', said to people who are eating.

2. False

False. Gazpacho is a cold soup of raw tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, garlic and olive oil, perfect for hot summers.

3. False

False. It was designed by the architect Frank Gehry and opened in 1997, long after Gaudí's death in 1926.

4. B) A grape

They eat a grape at each stroke, twelve in all, for good luck in each month of the new year.

5. A) A fixed-price lunch of three courses

The menú del día is a fixed-price lunch of three courses: a first course, a second course and dessert, often with bread and a drink.

6. True

True. Traditionally the first surname comes from the father and the second from the mother.

7. True

True. It passed Ulm Minster in 2025, and its central tower reached 172.5 m in 2026.

8. A) The bill

La cuenta is the bill. Ask for it with 'La cuenta, por favor'.

9. A) Valencia

Paella comes from Valencia, from the rice fields around the Albufera lagoon.

10. A) Agua

Agua means water. Pan is bread, vino is wine and leche is milk.

11. True

True. Most shops open Monday to Saturday, and many are closed on Sunday.

12. True

True. As of 2026 it is one of only three national anthems without official words.

Spain visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

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