



# Spain



## Welcome

A range of greetings are acceptable for Spanish people, depending on familiarity. When welcoming someone from Spain for the first time, you might expect to shake hands. They may also put their left hand on your right arm to emphasise the sincerity of their greeting. Spanish men may embrace when meeting and women will exchange kisses, both with other women and men. It is good manners to give them time and space to greet each other. Many Spanish people will stand quite close together, but try not to move away, even if you find the distance uncomfortable, as this may cause offence.

**'Welcome!'**  
*Byen-ven-ee-doss*  
 ¡Bienvenidos!

In conversation, it is polite to use a title followed by their surname, but be aware that Spanish surnames work differently to British surnames. Greet Juan Benitez Sanchez as Mr Benitez. His full name includes both parents' first surnames; he is the son of his father Señor Benitez Ramirez and his mother Señora Sanchez Lopez.

## The Language

<b>Hello</b> <i>O-lah</i> Hola	<b>Goodbye</b> <i>A-dee-yoss</i> Adiós
<b>Please</b> <i>Por fa-vor</i> Por favor	<b>Thank you</b> <i>Gra-thee-yas</i> Gracias

Since Spain joined the European Union in 1986, there has been an increase in the number of young people learning to speak English, although older Spaniards and those who do not live in Spanish tourist areas are still less likely to speak English.

Castilian Spanish is the official national language of Spain, though several regional languages are also recognised and widely used. Spanish is also spoken in many countries in Central and South America but with a different accent that does not include the 'th' sound (in mainland Spain, the 'c' in a word like 'gracias' is pronounced as 'th'; in Central and South America, the 'c' is pronounced as an 's').

**Did you know?**  
 Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world. Only Mandarin Chinese is spoken by more people.



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## The Culture

There is a strong national pride that comes from the history of their Empire as well as modern events such as the restoration of their monarchy. The influence of Spain remains strong throughout Central America and most of South America, where nearly 400 million people speak Spanish as their first language. They are particularly proud of the fact that, in the space of one generation, they have become a strong economic power within Europe.

Spending quality time with the family and lifelong friends is a very important part of daily social life.

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## Customer Service Advice

The Spanish like things to be well presented and will feel comfortable in a welcoming, attractive shop or restaurant, expecting a polite greeting on arrival.

The Spanish attitude towards time is much more relaxed than in the United Kingdom. *Mañana*, which means tomorrow, describes a Spanish tendency not to rush things and punctuality may not always be considered as important.

If you are in a group of Spanish people, it may seem to you that they are all speaking loudly at once. This is not unusual or rude, but is a sign that they are interested in what is being said. Hand gestures are often used to emphasise words and emotions.

- **DO** avoid any direct confrontation in public.
- **DO** try to have menus translated into Spanish and be ready to explain food choices that may be different to those normally found in Spain.
- **DO** remember that dinner (with all the family) is taken very late in Spain, sometimes as late as 11pm.



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## Viva España

The Spanish have a long history of exploration and meeting people from other cultures. The Spanish Empire, which once covered most of the Americas and parts of the Mediterranean, North and coastal parts of Africa and the Philippines, is an important part of the country's history.

Spain has 17 Communities or regions, which include the Canary and Balearic Islands. Spain also owns Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast.

Around 11% of Spanish residents originate from other countries, many coming from Latin America or Africa. Spain has been among Europe's most popular tourist destinations for decades, so it is perhaps not surprising that about 400,000 people from the UK now live there, as do many Germans, Dutch and Scandinavians.

### Key Facts

- **Population** – approx 45,200,000
- **Capital City** – Madrid
- **Language** – Castilian Spanish ( 72%) as well as regional official languages Catalan, Basque, Galician and Aranese
- **Religions** – Catholics 94%, Muslims 2.5%, others <1%
- **Currency** – Euro
- **Exchange Rate** – €1.34 = £1.00
- **Dialling Code** – +34
- **Time Difference** – GMT+1



## Where to go next

For more information about welcoming international visitors to London, visit [www.rln-london.com/welcoming](http://www.rln-london.com/welcoming)

RLN London's *Service Finder* can help you find language and cultural services – including translation, detailed cultural briefing and language training.

[www.rln-london.com/servicefinder](http://www.rln-london.com/servicefinder)

*'Welcoming the World' is an initiative which aims to help people in frontline roles to give great customer service to international visitors. RLN London has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this country profile, which is one of a wider series. However, views or opinions presented by the contributing author do not necessarily represent those of RLN London.*

### Remember!

These are general guidelines on how people from different cultures *might* act and the customer service they *might* expect. They can't predict every individual's behaviour in every situation.