

# Cultural Guide

FOR STUDENTS STUDYING IN  
*ALICANTE*



SPANISH  
STUDIES  
ABROAD

The Center for Cross-Cultural Study

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## Know Before You Go: A Survival Guide to Alicante, Spain

As part of your cross-cultural experience, you will encounter different cultural attitudes and behaviors while you are abroad. This is a guide to help you better understand the cultural norms of where you will be studying, as well as to offer useful information about the city and country. The Handbook relates to Spanish Studies policies and program-related information, and it is equally important to review that information as well. Think of this as an insider's guide to help you quickly and effectively acclimate to your new city and become an *alicantino/a* in no time. ¡Buena suerte y buen viaje!

### Country Profile: Spain

At the end of your program, you'll know more about Spain than you ever could have expected. The following information will give you some idea about Spanish life before you go. Further up-to-date details on Spain and other European countries can be found on the website of the U.S. Department of State at <http://travel.state.gov>.

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF SPAIN

The Iberian Peninsula has been settled for millennia and is home to some of Europe's most impressive Paleolithic cultural sites including the famous caves at Altamira that contain spectacular paintings dating from about 15,000 to 25,000 years ago. The Basque people, Europe's oldest surviving ethnic group, are also the first identifiable people of the peninsula.

Beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, Phoenicians, Greeks, and Celts entered the region. The Romans followed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and established the Roman province of *Iberia*, laying the groundwork for Spain's present language, religion, and laws. The Visigoths arrived in the fifth century AD after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Then in the year 711, North African Moors sailed across the Mediterranean Sea, swept into Andalusia, and within a few years captured most of the peninsula. *La Reconquista* — the centuries-long efforts to drive out the Moors — lasted until 1492 with the defeat of the last Moorish armies in Granada by Spanish forces under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. By 1512, the unification of present-day Spain was complete.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spain became the most powerful nation in Europe, due to the immense wealth derived from its extensive empire in the Americas. This period was also marked by what would be known as the Spanish Inquisition, a religious tribunal within the Spanish government that sought to maintain the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church by repressing and expelling non-Catholics. The Inquisition would last until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A series of long, costly wars and revolts, capped by the defeat by the English of the "Invincible Armada" in 1588, began a steady decline of Spanish power in Europe. Controversy over succession to the throne consumed the country during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, leading to an occupation by France during the Napoleonic era in the early 1800s, and led to a series of armed conflicts throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the revolt and independence of most of Spain's colonies in the Western Hemisphere: three wars over the succession issue; the brief ousting of the monarchy and establishment of the First Republic (1873-74); and, finally, the Spanish-American War (1898), in which Spain lost some of its last colonial possessions – Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines – to the United States. A period of dictatorial rule (1923-31) ended with the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic. It was dominated by increasing political polarization, culminating in the leftist Popular Front electoral victory in 1936. Pressures from all sides, coupled with growing and unchecked violence, led to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936.

Following the victory of his nationalist forces in 1939, General Francisco Franco assumed power and would rule for the next 36 years. Spain was officially neutral during World War II but followed a pro-Axis policy. Therefore, the victorious Allies isolated Spain at the beginning of the postwar period, and the country did not join the United Nations until 1955. In 1959, under an International Monetary Fund stabilization plan, the country began liberalizing trade and foreign direct investment.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Spain was transformed into a modern, industrial economy with a thriving tourism sector. Its economic expansion led to improved income distribution and helped develop a large middle class. Upon the death of General Franco in November 1975, Franco's personally designated heir, Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón, assumed the titles of King and Commander-in-Chief. The new King Juan Carlos replaced Franco's last Prime Minister with Adolfo Suarez in July 1976. Suarez's administration moved to enact a series of laws to liberalize the new regime and Spain's first democratic elections since 1936 were held on June 15, 1977. Prime Minister Suarez's *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD), a moderate center-right coalition, won the largest bloc of seats in the *Cortes*. Under Suarez, the government drafted a democratic constitution that was overwhelmingly approved by voters in a national referendum in 1978.

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

A member of the European Union since 1986, Spain is a highly developed and stable democracy with a modern economy. Additional information on the country may be obtained from the Tourist Office of Spain online at [http://www.spain.info/en\\_US/sobre\\_espanha/](http://www.spain.info/en_US/sobre_espanha/).

<b>Capital:</b>	Madrid
<b>Population:</b>	47 million
<b>Religions:</b>	Roman Catholic (predominant), some Protestant and Muslim communities
<b>Native Languages:</b>	Spanish (official) 74%, Catalán/Valenciano 17%, Galician 7%, Basque 2%.

### Principal Government Officials

Unfortunately it still forms part of the culture, so the men might not think that what they're doing is offensive- King of Spain, Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish Armed Forces (*Rey de España, Capitán General de las Fuerzas Armadas de España*)

**Pedro Sánchez** - President of the Government (*Presidente del Gobierno*)

**Santiago Cabanas Ansorena** - Ambassador of Spain to the United States (*Embajador de España en los Estados Unidos*)

## **Government & Legislature**

The Kingdom of Spain is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy in which the King is recognized as Head of State. The current monarch, *His Majesty* King Felipe VI, is widely respected by many Spaniards for his efforts to promote democracy in the country since he assumed the throne in the 1970s. Although he technically holds considerable political and military authority, in reality the King's position is largely ceremonial and he mostly serves as a cultural figurehead for the nation. Most of his powers have been devolved to the Spanish national parliament. The leader of parliament is styled as the President of the Government, a position comparable to the office of Prime Minister in other countries. As a democratically elected official, the President of the Government exercises actual political authority.

The bicameral national parliament of Spain, the *Cortes Generales*, consists of a 350-seat Congress of Deputies (*Congreso de los Diputados*) and a 208-seat Senate (*Senado*). Senators are elected to represent Spain's various regions, while Deputies are elected to represent parliamentary districts based on population. Spanish law dictates that elections must be held at least once every four years. However, elections in Spain are not set on fixed dates, so voters sometimes go to the polls after less than four years. Voting in the country is open to all Spanish citizens aged 18 or older.

## **Political Parties**

Major National Parties: Spain has a multi-party system at both the national and regional level. Nationally, there are five dominant political parties: Podemos (left-wing), PSOE (center-left), Ciudadanos (center-right), Partido Popular (center-right to right-wing) and Vox (right-wing to far-right).

The current makeup makes it difficult for any other formation or coalition to achieve an electoral majority in the bicameral Cortes Generales. Regional parties can be strong in autonomous communities like Catalonia and the Basque Country and are often essential for national government coalitions.

## **Local Government & Administration**

The Kingdom of Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities (*Comunidades Autónomas*) which cover the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands, as well as two Autonomous Cities (*Ciudades Autónomas*) of Ceuta and Melilla on continental North Africa. Each of these autonomous regions elects its own government and administers a variety of areas including public education and universities, local transportation and highways, social services, health care, economic development, and public safety. Several of the *comunidades autónomas* are further divided into provinces which denote historical geographic areas.

## **Educational System**

About 70% of Spain's student population attends public schools or universities. The remainder attend private schools or universities, most of which are operated by the Catholic Church. Compulsory education begins with primary school or general basic education for ages 6-14. It is free in public schools and in many private schools, most of which receive government subsidies. After graduation, students attend either a secondary school offering a general high school diploma or a school of professional education (corresponding to grades 9-12 in North America) offering a vocational training program.

## **Economy**

Spain's accession to the European Community--now European Union (EU) – in January 1986 required the country to open its economy, modernize its industrial base, improve infrastructure, and revise economic legislation to conform to EU guidelines. In doing so, Spain increased gross domestic product (GDP) growth, reduced the public debt to GDP ratio, reduced unemployment from 23% to 15% in 3 years, and reduced inflation to under 3%. The fundamental challenges remaining for Spain include reducing the

public sector deficit, decreasing unemployment further, reforming labor laws and investment regulations, lowering inflation, and raising per capita GDP.

Following peak growth years in the late 1980s, the Spanish economy entered into recession in mid-1992. The economy recovered during the first Aznar administration (1996-2000), driven by a return of consumer confidence and increased private consumption, although growth has slowed in recent years. Unemployment remains a problem at 11.3% (2002 est.), but this still represents a significant improvement from previous levels. Devaluations of the peseta during the 1990s made Spanish exports more competitive, but the strength of the euro since its adoption has raised recent concerns that Spanish exports are being priced out of the range of foreign buyers. However, this has been offset by the facilitation of trade among the euro nations.

### **People**

The citizens of modern-day Spain are overwhelmingly (88%) ethnic Spaniards whose mixed ancestry dates back to the Moors of the Middle Ages, the Romans, and pre-Roman Iberian peoples. Approximately 12% of the country's population consists of foreign-born residents including temporary residents from across the European Union and a growing community of immigrants from North Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. With the exception of the highly populous inland city of Madrid, Spain's population is concentrated along the country's nearly 5,000 kilometer (3,100 mile) coastline.

Most Spaniards (94%) nominally belong to the Roman Catholic Church, though roughly two-thirds of them report that they are non-practicing. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 disestablished the Roman Catholic Church as the official state religion, while recognizing the role it plays in Spanish society.

### **Language**

The Spanish language is the country's official language and is the native tongue of the vast majority of Spaniards. Much like how the English language originated in England – a region of what is today Great Britain – the Spanish language originated in the early Middle Ages in Castile, a region of central Spain. For this reason, the language is sometimes referred to by its alternative name, Castilian or *castellano*.

In several regions of Spain, other native languages are spoken alongside Spanish. Notably, the Basque language is famously spoken in the north by roughly one-third of the population of the País Vasco and neighboring Navarra. In northwestern Spain, most residents of the autonomous community of Galicia speak Galician (*galego*), a dialect of Portuguese. The Catalán language is widespread along Spain's northeastern Mediterranean coast, in the autonomous communities of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. Catalán is also spoken in parts of the Valencia region where the local dialect is commonly referred to by the term *valenciano*. Most speakers of these various languages can also speak Spanish fluently as a second language. Likewise, many Castilian-speaking Spaniards learn these regional languages in the local public school systems.

The Spanish language in Spain is marked by the use of the *vosotros* for the plural second-person familiar conjugation. Another unique aspect is the pronunciation of the letters "z" and "ci" with a "th" sound. When traveling in the country, you will learn that there are a wide variety of different regional accents and colloquialisms, just like in your home country and in your native language.

## **ALICANTE OVERVIEW**

Alicante is one of the fastest growing cities in Spain. A port city that historically relied on sea trade, its current local economy is based mostly on tourism.

<b>Province:</b>	Alicante
<b>Autonomous Community:</b>	Valencian Community

**Population:** 334,418 (11<sup>th</sup> largest city in Spain)  
**Land Size:** 201.27 km<sup>2</sup> (77.7 sq mi)  
**Languages:** Spanish, *Valenciano*

## History

The area around Alicante has been inhabited for over 7000 years, with the first tribes of hunter gatherers moving down gradually from Central Europe between 5000 and 3000 BC. Some of the earliest settlements were made on the slopes of Mount Benacantil. By 1000 BC Greek and Phoenician traders had begun to visit the eastern coast of Spain, establishing small trading ports and introducing the native Iberian tribes to the alphabet, iron and the pottery wheel. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, the rival armies of Carthage and Rome began to invade and fight for control of the Iberian Peninsula. The Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca established the fortified settlement of Akra Leuka (Greek: *Ἀκρᾶ Λευκά*, meaning "White Mountain" or "White Point"), where Alicante stands today.

Although the Carthaginians conquered much of the land around Alicante, the Romans would eventually rule Hispania Tarraconensis for over 700 years. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, Rome was in decline; the Roman predecessor town of Alicante, known as *Lucentum* (Latin), was more or less under the control of the Visigothic warlord Theudimer. However, neither the Romans nor the Goths put up much resistance to the Arab conquest of *Medina Laqant* in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The Moors ruled southern and eastern Spain until the 11<sup>th</sup> century *reconquista* (reconquest). Alicante was finally taken in 1246 by the Castilian king Alfonso X, but it passed soon and definitely to the Kingdom of Valencia in 1298 with King James II of Aragon. It gained the status of Royal Village (*Villa Real*) with representation in the medieval Valencian Parliament.

After several decades of being the battlefield where the Kingdom of Castile and the Crown of Aragón clashed, Alicante became a major Mediterranean trading station exporting rice, wine, olive oil, oranges and wool. But between 1609 and 1614 King Felipe III expelled thousands of *moriscos* who had remained in Valencia after the *reconquista*, due to their allegiance with Barbary pirates who continually attacked coastal cities and caused much harm to trade. This act cost the region dearly; with so many skilled artisans and agricultural laborers gone, the feudal nobility found itself sliding into bankruptcy. Things got worse in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century; after the War of Spanish Succession, Alicante went into a long, slow decline, surviving through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by making shoes and growing agricultural produce such as oranges and almonds, and thanks to its fisheries. The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a sharp recovery of the local economy with increasing international trade and the growth of the city harbor leading to increased exports of several products (particularly during World War I when Spain was a neutral country).

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alicante was a minor capital which enjoyed the benefit of Spain's neutrality during World War I, which provided new opportunities for the local industry and agriculture. The Rif War in the 1920s saw numerous *alicantinos* drafted to fight in the long and bloody campaigns in the former Spanish protectorate (Northern Morocco) against the Rif rebels. The political unrest of the late 1920s led to the victory of republican candidates in local council elections throughout the country, and the abdication of King Alfonso XIII. The proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic was much celebrated in the city on 14 April 1931. The Spanish Civil War broke out on 17 July 1936. Alicante was the last city loyal to the Republican government to be occupied by dictator Franco's troops on 1 April 1939, and its harbor saw the last Republican government officials fleeing the country. Even if not as famous as the bombing of Guernica by the German Luftwaffe, Alicante was the target of some vicious air bombings during the three years of civil conflict, most remarkably the bombing by the Italian *Aviazione Legionaria* of the *Mercado de Abastos* in 25 May 1938 in which more than 300 civilians perished.

The next 20 years under Franco's dictatorship were difficult for Alicante as it was for the entire country. However, the late 1950s and early 1960s saw the onset of a lasting transformation of the city due to tourism. Large buildings and complexes rose in nearby Albufereta and Playa de San Juan, with the benign climate being the best tool to bring prospective buyers and tourists who kept hotels reasonably busy. The tourist development, aside from construction, also brought numerous businesses such as restaurants, bars and other activities focused on visitors. Also, the old airfield at Rabasa was closed and

air traffic moved to the new El Altet Airport, which made for a convenient facility for charter flights bringing tourists from northern European countries.

When dictator Franco died in 1975, his successor Juan Carlos I oversaw the transition of Spain to a democratic constitutional monarchy. Governments of nationalities and regions were given more autonomy, including the Valencian region.

The port of Alicante has been reinventing itself since the industrial decline the city suffered in the 1980s (with most mercantile traffic lost in favor of Valencia's harbor). In recent years, the Port Authority has established it as one of the most important ports in Spain for cruises, with 72 calls to port made by cruise ships in 2007 bringing some 80,000 passengers and 30,000 crew to the city each year. The moves to develop the port for more tourism have been welcomed by the city and its residents, but the latest plans to develop an industrial estate in the port have caused great controversy.

For more information visit [www.alicante.es](http://www.alicante.es).

### **Economy**

Alicante is one of the fastest-growing cities in Spain. The local economy is based upon tourism directed to the beaches of the Costa Blanca and particularly the second residence construction boom which started in the 1960s and reinvigorated again by the late 1990s. Services and public administration also play a major role in the city's economy. The construction boom has raised many environmental concerns and both the local autonomous government and city council are under scrutiny by the European Union. The construction surge is the subject of hot debates among politicians and citizens alike. The latest of many public battles concerns the plans of the Port Authority of Alicante to construct an industrial estate on reclaimed land in front of the city's coastal strip, in breach of local, national, and European regulations.

The city is the headquarters of the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market and a sizeable population of European public workers live here.

University of Alicante is located in San Vicente del Raspeig, right next to Alicante. More than 25,000 students attend the University.

Since 2005 Alicante hosts Ciudad de la Luz, one of the largest film studios in Europe. Spanish and international movies such as Asterix at the Olympic Games by Frédéric Forestier and Thomas Langmann, 'Manolete' by Menno Meyjes have been shot there.

### **People**

The official population of Alicante in 2010 was 334,418 inhabitants and 769,284 in the metropolitan area "Alicante-Elche". About 15% of the population is foreign, mostly those from Argentina, Ecuador, and Colombia who have arrived in the previous 10 years as immigrants. There are also immigrants from other origins such as Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Morocco, many of which are under illegal alien status, and therefore, are not accounted for in official population figures. The real percentage of foreign population is higher, since the Alicante metropolitan area is home to many Northern European retired citizens, even if officially they are still residents of their own countries. In the same pattern, a sizable amount of permanent residents are Spanish nationals who officially still live in Madrid, the Basque Provinces, or other areas of the country.



## Practical Information

The following section includes some additional information and hints to help further prepare you for your time abroad and lessen any confusion you may have on simple tasks such as making calls, handling money, and knowing what to expect from the weather. Reading these tips could save you that extra headache or frustrating moment.

### MAKING PHONE CALLS

Most students find that the easiest and cheapest way to call home is through Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)). However, if your family needs to know how to call your landline or cell phone number in Spain, or if you need to be able to reach them from a regular phone, here is some calling advice below.

The major calling codes you will need to be aware of:

- Spain's country code is 34
- Alicante's area code is 96

#### Landlines

Spanish landline phone numbers total nine digits: a two or three-digit area code and a six or seven-digit phone number beginning with the digit 9 (or sometimes 8) but excluding 90 and 80.

This is what a landline number in Alicante will look like:

Area Code	Phone Number
96	xxx-xxxx

To make a call from landline to landline in Alicante, simply dial the 7-digit phone number. If you need to call a landline somewhere else in Spain, you will need to dial the 9-digit Area Code + Phone Number.

If your friends or family need to call a landline from North America, they should follow these instructions:

Exit Code	Country Code	Area Code	Phone Number
011	34	96	xxx-xxxx

#### Mobile Numbers

Spanish mobile phone numbers are assigned a 3-digit mobile code based by provider and usually begin with the digit 6 (or sometimes 7), followed by 6 digits.

This is what a mobile phone number will look like:

Mobile Code	Phone Number
6xx	xxx-xxx

When making a call to or from a Spanish mobile phone the same rules apply as in North America. You must dial the 9-digit Area/Mobile Code + Phone Number.

#### Calling North America

As we said before, Skype or calling cards will probably be the easiest and cheapest way to call North America from Spain. They will provide instructions on how to place these calls.

If you ever need to call a North American phone directly from Spain, follow these instructions:

Exit Code	Country Code	Area Code	Phone Number
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00	1	xxx	xxx-xxxx
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## EMERGENCY NUMBERS WITHIN SPAIN

General Emergency – 112

### U.S. Embassy

Embassy: Serrano 75, 28006 Madrid

Mailing address: PSC 61, APO AE 09642

Telephone: [34] (91) 587-2200      FAX: [34] (91) 587-2303

### Consulate(s) general: Barcelona

U.S. Consulate General Barcelona

Paseo Reina Elisenda de Montcada, 23

08034 Barcelona, España

Tel. (+34) 93 280 22 27

Fax (+34) 93 280 61 75

E-mail: Consularbarcel@state.gov (for questions regarding American Citizens Services only) Office

hours: 9:00am – 1:00pm

## HOW TO HANDLE MONEY IN ALICANTE

The currency of Spain is the Euro, which is commonly represented using the sign €. The best way to deal with spending money in Spain is to use a combination of a credit card, an ATM/debit card to get cash, and then keeping some traveler's checks on hand in case of emergencies. A few notes on each:

### Credit Cards\*

Major credit cards (like Visa and MasterCard, primarily) are widely accepted in Spain, although not as widespread as in North America. You can use them for purchases at most stores and at nicer restaurants, but be aware that many small restaurants, shops, pharmacies, and bars will accept cash only. It is better not to depend on cash advances from your credit card for spending money.

### ATM/Debit Cards\*

If you have an ATM/debit card, it can be used just the way you would use your credit card. It can also be used at most Spanish ATMs all over the city to obtain local currency (Euros). Any card that is on the Plus or Cirrus network will work at Spanish ATMs; check the back of your card to be sure that those symbols are listed. Please note that your PIN must be **four digits long** so if yours is not, you will have to change it before you go to Spain. Sometimes there are additional fees, which might make you want to rethink how frequently you will withdraw money while in Spain. Also be aware that you may not be able to see your balance on the Spanish ATM. Make sure you can either check your balance on-line or have someone check it for you at home.

In addition to any transaction fees that your home bank may charge, Spanish ATMs can charge fees as well, so be sure to pay attention. There are numerous ATMs located throughout Alicante, including some on the University of Alicante's campus. In the past, students have found the lowest rates at the following ATMs: Banco Cam, Bancaja, and BBVA (near the RENFE station).

### \*Note on Credit and ATM/Debit Cards

Some banks/credit card companies block international transactions for security purposes so make sure you inform your bank/credit card company that you will be living overseas and the length of time. You should also inquire at your bank about any additional charges you might encounter when using your ATM card or Credit Card abroad. If the fees seem unreasonable, you may want to shop around to see if there

is another company/bank that you want to set up an account with before you go abroad.

If you lose your debit/credit card while you are in Spain and they won't send it directly to Spain, you should have the new card sent to your home address in the US/Canada. Once received, it should be mailed to you via an express mail service (DHL or FedEx) so that you will have the replacement card in about 5 business days.

### **Traveler's Checks**

Traveler's checks, although not as common as they used to be, are good to keep on hand in case you lose your credit card or debit card. You can cash them at several places, including banks, the airport, and any number of currency exchange windows in the touristy parts of town. Keep in mind that you will be charged a commission. To avoid a higher commission, purchase travelers checks in Euros instead of dollars.

One of the advantages of traveler's checks is that if they get stolen, they will be replaced by the issuing company. Read the instructions provided with your traveler's checks very carefully for more about this. Also, if your credit/debit card is lost, stolen or demagnetized, your bank may not have a quick and efficient way of replacing it while you are out of the country. That is why it is best to have a back-up of traveler's checks in a safe place in your home. It's probably a good idea to bring \$300-\$500 in the form of traveler's checks. If you cash one or several traveler's checks at the same time, you will be charged only once so it is in your best interest to cash as many traveler's checks as you can at the same time, but do not cash traveler's checks for more than \$1,300 at one time, as the commission will be much higher. Also if you end up not using them while overseas, you can always cash them back in when you return home. If you need to receive money while you're in Spain, there are a few ways to do that. By far the easiest is if your parents or someone at home can simply deposit money into your bank account for you to withdraw at the ATM. Some banks even allow free transfers from one account to another if you both have the same bank. Aside from that, however, you can have money wired to you through Western Union, which operates at the main post office, or through MoneyGram.

### **Tipping**

In regards to tipping in Spain, they typically don't do it. Sometimes people will leave some change to round to the nearest Euro at a restaurant, but that's about it.

## **WEATHER IN ALICANTE**

Alicante has a rather dry, Mediterranean climate with mild temperatures throughout the year and limited rain in the fall and spring. Temperatures range from 16.8 and 6.2°C in January and 30.6 and 20.4°C in August. The average annual temperature is 17.8°C. Temperatures below freezing and above 40°C are unusual and the proximity of the sea limits daily fluctuations. Generally, winters are mild and summers are warm. Notable climatically is the *gota fría*, torrential rains which take place in September and October.

### **Fall**

When you first arrive in Alicante for the Fall Semester, it will be hot. The summer heat will linger probably through the end of September, with temperatures as high as 30°C (see the Metric Conversion Chart at the back of this guide). The hottest part of the day is the afternoon, which is why the Spanish people take *siesta*: it's too hot to go outside. By October and November it will begin to cool down.

### **Winter**

While it doesn't snow or get as cold as it does in some regions of North America, it does get cold and damp in Alicante in the winter. By mid-December and through February, temperatures may get as low as 6 °C at night. You will need to wear a heavy winter coat during the day and night, although you may find it a little warm on a sunny afternoon. Please note that most homes do not have central heating, so you will

most likely have a space heater in your room during the colder months. Make sure you have sweaters to wear during the day and warm pajamas for sleeping.

### **Spring**

Sometime in March the weather will begin to warm up again. Temperatures will reach the mid to upper 20's, and rain will be infrequent. Again, at the beginning you may wish to wear a light jacket at night, but by late April the weather will be warm and beautiful.

### **Summer**

During the months of May and June, the temperature will slowly climb back up to around 30°C. The sun will be hot, especially during *siesta*, but the air will be dry. July and August are the hottest months of the year, with temperatures as high as 30°C. Keep cool, drink lots of water, and take advantage of the hours of *siesta* to stay in your nice, cool home.

## **Being a North American Abroad**

Before you travel abroad to a new and unknown place, it is helpful to be aware of the different stereotypes and predispositions that Spaniards may have about you as a North American. North Americans and other foreigners in general may have a bad reputation in parts of the world. They can be perceived as demanding, noisy, not speaking the local language and expecting everyone else to speak theirs—and that doesn't even begin to cover whether people in other nations agree with your home government's policies and actions. It is important to recognize that these stereotypes exist, but it is also your job to represent your country in a positive light and try to demonstrate that not every North American fits the above stereotypes. Below are some helpful tips to think about before you go abroad so that you can come across as knowledgeable and culturally aware.

1. Educate yourself about Spain and its culture - This guide is a resource to assist you with learning background information and the cultural norms of the country, but you can also read books and go online to find out additional information before you go.
2. Read basic factual and historical information on your host country – Also, be prepared for questions that Spaniards may ask you about the United States or Canada such as basic history, politics, and current events.
3. Learn about current events in Spain - It is also helpful to be aware of what is currently going on in the country in regards to the economy, politics, news, etc. Remember, Spain is part of the European Union, so it wouldn't hurt to know a little bit about that as well.

### **CULTURE SHOCK**

Culture shock is a natural and common feeling that many students may experience when they study abroad. Basically, it is a feeling of being overwhelmed and confused by how unfamiliar your new surroundings seem. Although it might feel unconquerable when you experience it, you'll get through it as everyone does. Culture shock is generally broken down into a number of stages:

1. **Honeymoon Phase:** You arrive in Spain and you think, "This is great! Everything is new and exciting and I love it here!" You're having tours of the city, you're meeting new people, getting to understand the language more easily; everything is going really well and you're so glad you decided to study abroad.
2. **Hostile Phase:** After the excitement of being in Alicante starts to wear off, you may start to feel negative and frustrated with adjusting to the culture. You might feel like it takes forever to get anything

done, you can't talk to your parents as much as you like, you're tired of all the new foods, locations, daily routines, and having to speak Spanish all the time. You might even start to wonder why you ever decided to study abroad in the first place.

3. **Understanding/Sense of Humor Phase:** After a while, you accept the cultural differences that surround you, and things start to feel okay again. As you get to be more familiar with the Spanish culture and lifestyle, you start to appreciate it more and become more confident in your surroundings. You are able to laugh at the misunderstandings that once made you so angry.
4. **Integration Phase:** You become accustomed to the good and bad aspects of Spanish culture and you incorporate them into your own life. Spanish lifestyle becomes part of your lifestyle; you like afternoon *siesta*, you love olive oil on your toast, you feel comfortable and happy in Alicante. This phase will last for the rest of your time abroad.
5. **Re-entry Shock:** When you go home again, you will experience another type of culture shock. You find that things at home have changed and that you have changed too. You don't know any of the songs on the radio or the phrases people are using. You may feel frustrated by others' lack of knowledge about issues that affect the country you've grown to love. You will miss your daily life in Spain and worry that you're talking too much about your experiences abroad.
6. **Re-Integration Phase:** You will get comfortable at home again soon; you'll be happy to see your family and friends, and you'll always remember your time in Alicante. You'll be able to express to people what was so meaningful about your experience and will be able to take the lessons you've learned abroad with you as you go on in life. You'll find that you are a changed person, more mature, more experienced, and with great memories of Spain.

If you feel like your culture shock is overwhelming you to the point where you need to talk to somebody about it, please speak directly with the Resident Director. Our Alicante staff is very supportive and always available to help you get through any difficulties you may experience while you're abroad.

## GENDER ROLES

Although it is quickly changing (check out [this article](#)), you may notice that in Spain men and women still tend to carry out traditional gender roles. In your Spanish home, it wouldn't be uncommon to see that oftentimes your host mother does all of the cooking and cleaning; and it may appear that men in the family take that for granted.

### The *Piropo*

You will likely encounter a cultural phenomenon called the *piropo* (something like a catcall). What this means is that, if you are a woman, you may get shouted at on the streets of Spain. "*Eh, guapa, ven aquí...*" It is almost always harmless, but it can make you feel uncomfortable nonetheless. The best way to deal with a man who shouts a *piropo* to you is to just ignore him and keep on walking. **Remember that piropos are only annoying shouts. Physical contact and/or incessant harassment is never okay and is not acceptable no matter where you are.**

Things to remember when it comes to *piropos*:

- Some are worse than others but all are annoying.
- Forget your manners; it is best not to make eye contact and smile at strangers on the street, especially to strange men yelling at you on the street.
- Keep on walking and don't respond. If the person is persistent, say "*Déjeme en paz*" or something similar.
- Unfortunately it still forms part of the culture, so the men might not think that what they're doing is offensive.

- If a *piropo* turns into physical contact or you experience any other uncomfortable incident, talk with Spanish Studies staff; always feel free to call the emergency number.

## **LGBTQ+ STUDENTS ABROAD**

Spain is often considered to be relatively friendly towards individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. Federal laws have been enacted to protect the rights of these citizens and same-sex marriage has been legal throughout Spain since 2005. Many Spaniards view homosexuality with a sense of passive indifference; if you are respectful towards them, they will respect and accept you. LGBTQ+ communities and some social scenes are present in several of the country's major cities, including Seville, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and other locations.

Still, it is worth noting that LGBTQ+ acceptance is a relatively new concept in Spanish society. Some traditional conservative values do exist, particularly among the older generations and among those residing in rural areas of the country. If you identify yourself as gay or lesbian and you intend to share this fact with others while studying abroad, be prepared to answer occasional frank questions from your Spanish peers. Spaniards can sometimes be very direct and so these types of questions are simply their way of expressing interest and meeting their curiosity.

When talking with others about your sexuality, it is up to you to decide whom to tell and when to tell them. The Resident Director, as well as our staff in both Spain and the United States, is always available to answer your questions and concerns, so you can feel comfortable speaking with them on this subject. Whether or not you identify as LGBTQ+, recognize that there may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender students on your Spanish Studies program and in your classes in Alicante. It is important to be respectful and to approach this reality with an open mind.

We hope that the following resources (courtesy of IES Abroad) can be a useful guide:

[LGBTQ+ Travel Information](#) (Department of State)

[Sexual Orientation Maps](#) (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association)

[LGBTQ+ Study Abroad Guide](#) (Goabroad.com)

[Trans Legal Mapping Report](#) (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association)

## **RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

The religious make up of Spain reflects its ethnic homogeneity. Spain is 94% Roman Catholic, however, a sizable portion of Spaniards are non-practicing Catholics. Although the Roman Catholic tradition has helped form modern-day Spanish values, you will find that many Spaniards do not adhere strictly to the policies set forth by the Catholic Church.

If you are observing religious traditions different from Roman Catholicism, it is important to explain to your host family and Spanish friends what the tradition means to you. Keep an open mind about people's reactions to your religious beliefs; it is possible that they've never met someone with of your religious persuasion before. If you are respectful of other people's spirituality, they will be respectful of yours. Communities of religious minorities can be found in metropolitan centers. It is possible to become involved in any religious community while studying abroad, just ask our staff and they'll point you in the right direction!

## **RACE AND ETHNICITY IN ALICANTE**

A former Spanish Studies student was once asked by a Spanish friend about her ethnic background. She went into detail about all the different countries her ancestors had come from. The Spanish friend responded: "That's the difference between us. When I think about my heritage, I see Romans and Arabs." Spanish society is fairly homogeneous—or at least they like to think of it that way. Spaniards are Europeans and generally, they do not use terms like "Latino" to refer to themselves.

Alicante is a relatively cosmopolitan city, with a number of tourists and international students there at any given time. In recent years, Alicante has seen an increase in its foreign population, with about 15% of its inhabitants being foreign born. The majority of the immigrant populations come from Northern Africa, South America, and Eastern Europe. You will find that most people of color in Alicante are from South America and Northern Africa. As is the case in most European countries, Spain is slowly adjusting to the impact of immigration on society. Black and Asian students especially may find that they feel very different in Spain. You may get stared at in the streets or asked ignorant questions. You'll overhear some of the frustrating racial stereotypes that are built into the Spanish language (the term "*trabajo de negros*" is often used for physical work, while "*trabajo de chinos*" is used to describe detail-oriented work; Muslims of all backgrounds are often referred to as *moros*, referring to the Moors of modern-day Morocco who controlled parts of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages).

Just as women should ignore strange men who shout and stare at them, as a racial minority in Spain, it is not your responsibility to change the views of the whole country. Comments and rude behavior from strangers do not merit a response on your part; on the other hand, we don't want you to pretend that nothing has happened. One way to get through the discomfort you might feel is to talk about it. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation or if you just need to talk about your feelings, contact the Resident Director, and let her know what is going on. Crossing cultural boundaries always involves some degree of social discomfort, at some point or another. Students of color have told us that while they have encountered isolated instances of racial prejudice in Spain, these incidents did not make their overall study abroad experience any less enjoyable.

#### **Comments from African-American Students**

Students of African ancestry sometimes ask if they will face unique challenges in Spain. We thank the following alumni for their comments directed to fellow African-American students:

"Compared to the United States, some cities in Spain are not as culturally diverse. You might receive stares or certain looks from people, perhaps out of curiosity because of physical appearance. Whatever the case may be, don't let these things hinder you. In the beginning, you may be annoyed, but try to turn the situation around by speaking to them, or just ignore it." *Erecka Matthews, Xavier University-New Orleans.*

"While in Alicante there were several instances when locals spoke to me in Arabic or French on the street. Many people from northern Africa settle in Alicante and I thought that it was interesting to blend in as a local. Although you may encounter negative stereotypes for these groups of people living in Spain, it can also enrich your cultural awareness during your time abroad." *Holley Quisenberry, Heidelberg University*

"Remember to purchase all of your hair care and hygiene products before you come to Spain. Although there are different varieties, not all of them are offered here." *Felicia Jamison, Mercer University.*

#### **SAFETY**

As a visitor in another country, it is always a good idea to not draw attention to yourself, but it is especially helpful not to draw attention to yourself as a foreigner. Many Spaniards perceive North Americans to be affluent, so you may feel that you're treated differently. At the same time, travelers of all nationalities are targets of petty theft. To avoid being labeled as a typical tourist, there are a few rules you should follow:

1. Don't speak English loudly in the streets. This can easily attract pickpockets and scam artists, and could get you in even more trouble late at night—especially if you are in a less safe area of a city.
2. Don't walk by yourself at night. Just as in any large city, nighttime is when many thieves will try to target tourists who are heading back to their hotels. Either walk with a friend or take a taxi any time you are out late. Any restaurant or club will call one for you.

3. Don't wear clothes that will instantly identify you as a tourist.
4. Don't invite thieves by wearing expensive jewelry or by carrying cameras, cell phones, or electronic music players. In Spain it is common wisdom not to take out your wallet on the street. Also, if you are at a restaurant, never put your purse on the back of your chair or on the floor where it can be easily snatched up. Try to keep it in your lap or somewhere where you can keep a close eye on it.
5. Don't leave your belongings unattended-no wallets placed on bars, no purses left at your table, no jackets left on the backs of chairs, and don't leave anything on the ground next to you.
6. Be extra cautious while using public transport (subway, bus, train) and hold on close to your belongings. Backpacks and purses are easy targets, so make sure to have your zippers somewhere where you can see them.

Students unaccustomed to city life will learn to be more cautious when walking the streets of Alicante. Spain is a safe country, but while living in Alicante, you should still follow the same safety precautions you would in any big city in North America, and basic common sense should rule your actions. Although petty theft is the most common type of crime in the city, this does not mean that you are immune from any other type of dangerous situation. If an emergency situation does arise, please contact the Resident Director immediately.

## Travel the Land...

You may be used to having a car, but obviously while abroad you will not have one, and generally people in Spain tend to use the public transportation system as well as intercity buses and trains more than in the United States.

### GETTING AROUND THE CITY

You will most likely walk or take the bus and/or tram around Alicante. The public transportation runs quite frequently and makes it easy to get around the city. There are also bicycles for rent, or if you are in a rush, taxis are plentiful.

### GETTING AROUND SPAIN

The best way to visit other cities in Spain is either the tram or train. Both run frequently from the center of Alicante. The trains are a great way to experience the countryside and are very comfortable and punctual. The tram tends to be less expensive and a great alternative for shorter distances ([www.fgvalicante.com/page.php](http://www.fgvalicante.com/page.php)). There are also buses to reach certain locations.

### GETTING AROUND EUROPE

Since all of Europe is only about half the size of the continental US it is very easy to see many different places during your time in Spain. The train is always a popular option since they often have overnight options for longer trips as well as discounts for those under 26. Trains stations are generally located in the city center making travel easy once you have arrived at your destination. The trains also serve smaller cities and towns that may not be easily accessed by planes. The airplane is an option since Alicante is served by a major airport. You will find that airlines like Ryan Air, Vueling, and Easy Jet provide very inexpensive and direct flights to many destinations around Europe. Just keep in mind that they may charge for bags and other things that may not be included.

- Ryan Air – [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)
- Vueling – [www.vueling.com](http://www.vueling.com)



- Easy Jet – [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

## FUN PLACES TO VISIT

### In and around Alicante

You may be visiting important monuments and museums with the Resident Director as a part of your Culture course. However, you are still welcome to visit them independently if you wish.

**Cuevas del Canelobre (Caves) in Busot** – Visit the prehistoric caves of Canelobre, with their cathedral atmosphere and numerous rocks like forms, as well as the 350 yards long stalactites and stalagmites hidden in the Cuevas de Canelobre. The Caves are located about 3 kilometers from the village, on the slopes of **The Golden Hill**, where you can see beautiful views of neighboring towns at a height of 700 meters!

**Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Alicante (MACA)** - Closed for many years while its premises, the splendid 17th-century *Casa de la Asegurada*, was renovated and enlarged, this splendid museum was about to reopen at the time of research. It has an excellent collection of 20th-century Spanish art, including works by Dalí, Miró, Chillida, Sempere, Tàpies and Picasso.

**Teatro Principal** – The main venue in Alicante where various events take place such as musicals, dance performances, opera and other cultural festivities: <http://www.teatroprincipaldealicante.com/> .

**Museo de Bellas Artes Gravina (MUBAG)** - Alicante's fine arts museum, with canvases from the Middle Ages to the 1920s, is within the *Palacio de Gravina*, a stalwart 18th-century mansion. The setting and presentation are terrific – perhaps more so than the paintings themselves.

**Museo de Fogueres** - In addition to a wealth of photographs, costumes and *ninots* (small effigies saved from the flames) it has a great audiovisual presentation of what the *Fiesta de Sant Joan*, all fire and partying, means to *alicantinos*.

**MARQ (Museo Arqueológico Provincial)** - The *Museo Arqueológico Provincial*, or MARQ, has a strong collection of ceramics and Iberian art. Exhibits are displayed to give the visitor a very visual, high tech experience.

**Castillo de Santa Bárbara** - There are sweeping views over the city from this 16th-century castle.

**Lucentum** - The Roman town of Lucentum, a forerunner of Alicante, is where excavations have revealed a rich wealth of pottery. You can make out its clearly defined streets and town plan.

**Pozos de Garrigós** - The *Pozos de Garrigós* are three vast water cisterns, built to collect run-off from Monte Benacantil and nowadays used as a venue for temporary exhibitions.

**Iglesia de Santa María** - The *Iglesia de Santa María* has a flamboyant, 18th-century facade and an ornate, gilded altarpiece, both contrasting with the nave's Gothic simplicity.

**Terra Natura** – *Terra Natura* is a new-generation wildlife park where you can discover the "Zoo Immersion" experience -a new concept in habitat design which will enable you to come into contact with the animals as if there were no barriers between you! The 320,000 square meters of the Benidorm Park are divided into four themed areas: visit their website for more info:

<http://www.terranatura.com/inicio/index.aspx>

### **Outside the City**

The city of Alicante sits right in the middle of Alicante province's 200-kilometer coastline known as *La Costa Blanca*. Most of the popular tourist destinations are on the water; however, there are a number of inland villages that are worth visiting as well. Cities to visit include:

- Gandia
- Guadalest
- Olia
- Denia
- Javea
- Benissa
- Moraira
- Calpe
- Altea
- Benidorm
- Villajoyosa
- Elche
- Santa Pola
- Guardamar
- Orihuela
- Torrevieja
- Murcia

### **Other cities to visit nearby:**

- Valencia
- Granada
- Madrid

There is plenty of information on nearby places to visit on the internet, in guidebooks, and on our Facebook page.

## **Live the Life...**

You will probably find that your daily life in Alicante is not too different from your daily life in North America. You will spend most of your time studying, hanging out with friends, and participating in extracurricular activities that interest you. Although the lives of college students in Spain and North America are fairly similar, here are some differences that you should be aware of.

### **MEETING SPANISH FRIENDS**

Spanish people are very friendly, open, and generally eager to meet new people. However, you will need to make an effort to introduce yourself to them. You will be studying on the UA campus, and will have many opportunities to meet Spanish students your own age: through the Speaking Partners program (a conversation exchange with a Spaniard), attending University functions, or just by going out to the places on campus and in the city where Spanish students hang out. Be sure to take advantage of the activities offered by CSI such as international festivals, film series, round tables, etc., which will help you to become a part of Spanish university life.

There may or may not be people your age in your homestay. Make an effort to get to know everyone in the family, including friends and relatives who may visit. As part of the program you will be assigned a Speaking Partner; try to meet with this person on a regular basis, he or she will introduce you to friends

and show you their favorite spots around the city. If it is not working out and you are not able to meet up very often, inquire about a new Speaking Partner.

## HOW TO DRESS IN SPAIN

In general, you may find that most Spanish people tend to dress up a little more than what you might be used to at home. Whereas it is very common on a North American college campus to run quick errands or even go to class in sweatpants or pajamas, Spaniards 'get dressed' any time they leave the house. You will see some young men wearing t-shirts or soccer jerseys, but you'll also see a lot of people in nice pants and formal shoes. People do also wear nice fitting jeans and often combine this with trendy athletic footwear (e.g. vans or converse). The type of shoes you wear to the gym is not the kind of shoes you will see out. Most people get very dressed up when going out at night, and you will probably want to, as well. In fact, certain *discotecas* have strict dress codes and will not allow people that do not meet the standards (e.g. no sneakers, shorts, baggy pants, etc.)

If your goal is to fit in among your Spanish peers, avoid wearing yoga pants, sweatshirts, and sneakers; definitely don't wear baseball caps or athletic-looking sweat suits. Nice, fitted clothing is what most people wear, and that is a sure way to blend in as best you can. Of course, as with everywhere in the world, you'll find some people who dress a little differently, maybe more "punk" or more sporty. The main thing that you may want to avoid is dressing too casual (e.g. very short, shorts, sweatpants and sneakers or flip-flops every day), at least until you get a better idea of how comfortable you are in your new environment and with your new friends.

## UNIVERSITY LIFE: *UNIVERSIDAD DE ALICANTE (UA)*



*Universidad de Alicante (UA)* is located a 15-minute tram ride north of Alicante's city center in the municipality San Vicente del Raspeig. Founded in 1979 on a converted air force base, UA stands out from most European universities due to the fact that it is located on an enclosed campus. The award-winning campus is home to 33,000 students who participate in 49 undergraduate programs and 66 postgraduate programs. You will find that UA has most of the conveniences and aesthetics that are found on a traditional North American campus such as beautiful landscaping, modern architecture, open grassy quads, cafeterias, cafes, banks, convenience

stores, book stores, libraries, athletic facilities, computer labs, wireless internet, and museums.

All courses (excluding some Living the Culture courses) meet on the UA campus. Intermediate and Advanced Spanish Studies courses are taken through UA's international center, *Centro Superior de Idiomas (CSI)*, and have a similar feel to language courses in North America with a smaller student/instructor ratio and an interactive atmosphere. Given that these courses are offered to all non-native Spanish speakers, you will find many students in your classes who are not from North America. Integrated courses with Spaniards tend to meet in larger lecture halls and are typically more instructor-centered with less student interaction.

## HOUSING

Typically Spanish university students live at home, a student residence (privately run, not a university building), or a private apartment with other students. With Spanish Studies in Alicante, you will live in a homestay with a local family.

Homes in Spain tend to be smaller on average than a typical North American home. Many Spaniards live in flats (apartment style homes) or small houses with very little yard space, especially in and around cities and large towns. Very few Spaniards live in large detached homes with sprawling yards.

In a homestay, oftentimes “families” may not be the traditional family students expect. Your family could be a widow or single woman, an older couple whose children have grown, two sisters living together, or it could be a family with children your age and younger. Many of these families will take in students as a form of extra income. Regardless, they are all friendly, kind people who have been interviewed and whose houses have been inspected before we agree to have them provide a home for our students.

Energy costs are high in Spain, so you may notice your host family turning off the lights if you leave them on and they may ask you to take a shorter shower. Be respectful of these differences and do as your host family does—be conservative with water, heat, and electricity.

## **MEALTIMES AND FOOD**

Your host family will provide you with three meals per day: *desayuno*, *almuerzo*, and *cena*. Here is what you can expect from Spanish meals:

### ***Desayuno***

This is not a major meal in Spain. You get up in the morning, and have a small amount of food – probably just toast – and either coffee or hot chocolate/chocolate milk. You would be hard pressed to find a Spanish person who has ever eaten eggs for breakfast instead of lunch, and pancakes are unheard of (although pancake mix and maple syrup as a gift can make you a hit with your hosts for the entire stay)!

Coffee (*café*) is served many ways: *solo* (black, more like espresso), *cortado* (just a hint of milk), *con leche* (half milk, half coffee; like a latte), or as *leche manchada* (lots of milk, very little coffee).

The other morning beverage of choice is “*Cola Cao*,” a powdered chocolate milk mix that can be served hot or cold—and it’s really tasty.

Toast will be served with olive oil, butter, margarine, or jam. The bread will most likely be fresh from the neighborhood bakery, not store-bought sliced bread.

### ***Comida***

*Comida*, or *almuerzo*, is the biggest and most important meal of the day. It is generally eaten between 2:00 and 4:00 PM and consists of two dishes. One is usually vegetables or a soup and the other may be some sort of meat, fish, or eggs usually with fried potatoes or a salad. You will also most likely have either fruit or yogurt for dessert.

### ***Cena***

*Cena* is another small meal, although more substantial than breakfast. It is generally served between 9:00 and 10:00 PM and usually includes a bowl of soup and then fish, a Spanish *tortilla*, or possibly a sandwich.

### **What you might expect from Spanish food:**

Spaniards tend to rely heavily on locally raised and grown food which helps explain the differences in regional Spanish cuisine and the seasonal availability of certain foods. Although this may restrict your diet in certain ways, the food you eat will be fresher and less processed than what you are used to in North America, given that it has not traveled very far to get to your table!

You can expect to have bread with every meal. Many of the foods you will eat are fried or sauteed in olive oil. Spanish food will probably seem strange to you at first. You’ve probably never eaten fried eggs and

hot dogs together in your life, let alone for lunch. You may get a little nervous when you see the deep fryer in your host family's kitchen. Your salads may be made of just iceberg lettuce with tuna, olive oil and vinegar. Trust us: it will grow on you. Sooner than you know you'll be back home and having some major cravings for a *bocadillo de jamón serrano* or a few *churros*.

You can't expect to get the same things you'd have at home. For example, most households won't have a jar of peanut-butter sitting in their cupboard. Most Spanish families drink water at lunch and dinner—usually tap water, which may have been chilled in the refrigerator. If there is yogurt in the refrigerator, it's probably for dessert at lunch or dinner, so don't take it for a snack without asking first! In fact, always ask your host mother's permission before taking anything for a snack.

There are a number of foods that will become a part of your daily life in Alicante. Below you will find a description of some of the most important foods you may have while in Spain, but many you'll have to discover once you arrive. Don't worry: it will be a pleasant surprise.

**Tapas** - *Tapas* could be anything- this is a way of eating rather than a type of food. *Tapas* are small servings of food. You'll typically have them at a party or out at a restaurant with friends, when you just want to have a bite to eat while socializing. You'll get to try all sorts of things at once. (See photo right)

**Jamón serrano** - *Jamón* is a very important food in Spain. You will probably be surprised at how much ham there is in Spanish cuisine. The favorite ham product in Spain is *jamón serrano*, a salted, cured ham that is sliced thin and is typically served either on its own or in a *bocadillo*. *Jamón serrano* is often compared to prosciutto. It is such a big part of life there that you will see it everywhere. You'll probably see a leg of *jamón* in your kitchen; you'll certainly see one in bars and restaurants around the city.

**Tortilla** (*tortilla española* or *tortilla de patatas*) - This is one of the favorite and most common dishes in Spain. It is, for all intents and purposes, an omelet, but not the type of omelet you are accustomed to. This *tortilla* is chock full of fried potatoes (sometimes onions or another vegetable as well), and very thick and dense. It is served everywhere and for everything. You can get it in little pieces for *tapas* at a party, it will be served in big wedges at your place of residence for a meal, or it can even be sliced up and stuck between two halves of a baguette for a sandwich or *bocadillo*.

**Bocadillo** - A *bocadillo* is a sandwich served on a baguette. It usually only has one filling, which can be ham or pork, sausage, tuna, cheese, *tortilla*, and a few other items, depending on where you go. A *bocadillo* may be served with mayonnaise, ketchup, or spicy *salsa brava*.

**Paella** - One of the most popular dishes in the coastal region consisting of rice, vegetables, and either meat or seafood. Great with all of the fresh seafood available near Alicante! (See photo left)

**Sweets** - Alicante is famous for its chocolates from the factories in the region, as well as an almond brittle called *turrón*. There are also various pastry shops in town that have delicious cakes and other sweets.

### **Special Dietary Needs: Vegetarians, Vegans, And Gluten-Free**

Although this is rapidly changing, there are relatively few vegetarians in Spain compared to the United States. As you can see from the description of the importance of ham and other pork products, Spanish culture is not particularly vegetarian-friendly. It is possible, however, to be a vegetarian in Spain, and it's even easier to be a pescitarian in Alicante since seafood is so popular and accessible here. While the salad game isn't anything comparable to the USA, Spain offers some delicious breads and cheeses (like the famous *manchego* sheep's milk cheese), and a number of great vegetable dishes.

As a vegetarian, you should be very careful in restaurants and make sure that dishes that are seemingly vegetarian don't have ham in it. Some people in Spain don't even consider fish or chicken as a real

“meat”, so it’s better to play it safe and tell your host-family and waiters exactly what you are not able to eat. The same goes for students who have gluten/lactose intolerances - although you might think there’s no way that certain dishes have bread/lactose products in them, think again; Spanish people love adding bread and/or cream to soups and other dishes to add flavor and texture. Always specify your allergies when dining out as well as to your host-family to avoid any digestive issues. Many vegetarians will opt to eat fish while in Spain; this will give you more options and probably allow you to eat more well-balanced meals while abroad. Vegans will be hard pressed to eat very well in Alicante. While most food is cooked in olive oil rather than butter, you will have to make sure you are getting the nutrients you need.

If you’re dining out, you can try looking for a Fresco Co franchise, a veggie-friendly buffet that can be found in many big cities in Spain. <http://www.fresco.com/>. And of course, don’t forget to ask the Resident Director for their recommendations - they are experts in everything Barcelona, after all!

If you plan to change your diet and begin eating fish, meat, or dairy, you should start incorporating these foods into your diet before you leave, so that you will not be sick at the start of your program in Alicante. You must let us know about any dietary restrictions or food allergies by emailing [info@spanishstudies.org](mailto:info@spanishstudies.org) or calling (413) 256-0011. **NOTE: Some dietary accommodations may require an additional fee.**

For more information on being a vegetarian in Spain visit this link.  
[http://www.spainexpat.com/spain/information/the\\_vegetarians\\_survival\\_guide\\_to\\_spain](http://www.spainexpat.com/spain/information/the_vegetarians_survival_guide_to_spain)

## SIESTA

Every day after *la comida* people usually take a *siesta*. You’ve heard of *siesta* before, but you may not be familiar with what it really means. We generally take it to mean “nap.” Really, *siesta* is a time to rest. It generally starts around 4:00 PM—when most shops begin to close—and can last until 7:00 PM. It can be very disconcerting to find out that there is little to do during *siesta*. Almost all the shops (except for the big shopping centers) are closed. Depending on your class schedule, you will go home for lunch with your family after which they may sleep or watch TV. You really have no choice but to relax, read or study, go for walks, or possibly go meet friends for a *café* or *cerveza* toward the end of the *siesta* period. If your class schedule does not permit you to return home for lunch, your *señora* will pack you a lunch to enjoy while relaxing wherever you like. This is another aspect of Spanish life that will probably throw you off at first. But, as with the food, you’ll probably be desperate for a *siesta* when you head back to college for the next semester!

## SHOPPING

As mentioned before, some shops begin to close down around 3:30/4:00 P.M. every afternoon so that the employees can go home for *la comida* and *siesta*. Most stores will begin to open again between 5:00-6:00 PM and will stay open until around 8:30 or 9:00 PM. In the city center however, shops and the large department store *El Corte Inglés* are open all day. Shops are generally open these hours from Monday through Saturday and are closed on Sunday.

Shopping in Spain is very specialized; you buy medicines at the pharmacy, and only the pharmacy. You buy shampoo or feminine hygiene products at the grocery store. If you need your watch fixed, you go to the watch store; if you need an alarm clock, you go to the electronics store, etc. You will also get a lot of individual attention at all Spanish stores. You should greet the store employees when you go in, and say “*hasta luego*” when you leave. If you need something specific, the easiest and most common thing to do is simply walk into the store and ask the employee for what you need. Browsing on your own is not something people usually do, except at large clothing stores like Zara or H&M.

Here are a few helpful hints on where to look for what you need:

I need to get...	Go to...
School supplies (notebooks, folders, pens...)	<i>Una papelería</i>
Stamps	<i>Correos or un estanco/una tabacalera</i>
Cold Medicine	<i>Una farmacia</i>
Batteries ( <i>pilas</i> ), headphones ( <i>auriculares</i> ), etc.	<i>Una tienda de productos eléctricos</i>
Memory cards	<i>Un estanco/una tabacalera, una tienda de fotografía</i>
Condoms	<i>Una farmacia</i>
Toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush...	<i>El supermercado, una droguería</i>

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

We want you to have fun in Alicante; your social life is a big part of your education abroad. However, you are expected to meet all your academic responsibilities. Make sure you don't let hanging out with friends interfere with your school work.

There are a variety of other social activities in Alicante:

**The promenade along *La Explanada*** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0ny-vTXWCw>) is the perfect place to meet for a drink, chat, or simply to take a break. Here you will find restaurants, cafés, bars, *chocolaterías*, ice-cream parlors, vendors, and street performers. On weekends many *alicantinos* meet friends here to enjoy the sun, chat, and people-watch.

Within walking distance from *La Explanada* is ***Playa del Postiguet***, a beach located in the heart of the city that is easily accessible by many modes of public transportation. If you want to get away from the city center, there are also a number of beaches just outside of the city. Ask your Resident Director for her recommendations!

If you're more athletically inclined or if you just like to stay in shape, there are plenty of opportunities to do so. You can run or walk in the city parks or join a gym. There are also places in the city where students can play tennis, swim, or go horseback riding. CSI also offers students the opportunity to use the **UA's sports facilities**, and participate in tournaments and leagues. You can ask about these options at orientation.

The largest and most popular night and weekend hotspot—one that could be said to be suitable for all ages, beliefs, and convictions—is "***El Barrio***". At night it has a lively atmosphere that caters to all tastes, offering frequent live music and art exhibitions.

For more modern entertainment, visit **the port and the marina**. Here you will find exclusive restaurants, pubs, cafés, and shops exuding a nautical flavor. Additionally, this area offers fantastic views and great art and music shows during the summer months.

Besides going out to bars and clubs at night, there are lots of other things to see and do in Alicante. For example, there are several movie theaters and ***filmotecas*** (small film clubs) where you can see new

Spanish movies as well as some of the latest American films dubbed into Spanish. Movie tickets typically cost around \$6 (5,50-6,70 Euros). There are also opportunities to see theater, classical music performances, and opera, though these are probably a bit more costly.

Many students also enjoy taking time on the weekends to take day-trips to surrounding beaches and towns.

### Nightlife in Spain

Spanish nightlife is probably unlike any social scene you've experienced before. Don't be surprised if your Spanish friends ask you to meet up with them at midnight or later – that's just the start of the evening. Many of the friends you meet will stay out until 6 or 7 in the morning; when one set of bars and clubs closes, another set opens up. People can go out to clubs until 9:00 or 10:00 AM and then head straight to breakfast. Although going out until the next morning is a common option, there are tamer social options if you are not a night owl as mentioned above.

## Learn the Language...

### Speaking Spanish In Alicante

Spain is divided into various administrative regions known as *comunidades autónomas*. The city of Alicante is found in the southern part of a region known as the *Comunidad Valenciana*, along with the cities of Valencia and Castellón to the north. The *alicantinos* have a clear accent that is easy to understand and you will not have difficulty communicating in a variety of contexts.

Virtually all residents of Alicante use the Spanish language as their primary means of communication. Nevertheless, you should be aware that at the institutional level, all cities of the *Comunidad Valenciana* have two official languages: Spanish and *Valenciano*, a derivative of *Catalán*. Generally, speakers of *valenciano* tend to reside in the northern parts of the region. Alicante is located further south in an area where the Spanish language is predominant. It is also important to note that due to the large and diverse immigrant population in Alicante you will probably hear many different Spanish accents and vocabulary. In the city and at the *Universidad de Alicante* campus, you will see some signs written in both Spanish and in *valenciano*. You may notice some references to *Alacant*, the *valenciano* name for Alicante, and you might occasionally see some magazines and other media available in this dialect. *Valenciano* looks and sounds rather similar to Spanish, so its presence in the city should not cause you too much difficulty.

Furthermore, you will not need to use or understand *valenciano* in your daily life since nearly everyone in Alicante speaks Spanish as their first language. Being exposed to *valenciano*, however, will add richness to your linguistic and cultural experience.

### Vosotros

Contrary to what you may have been taught in high school Spanish, in Spain they absolutely use "vosotros" for second person plural. Learn *vosotros* before you go to Alicante, so you'll have an easier time getting used to it once you start hearing it every day. Here is a quick refresher:

Tense	-AR VERBS	-ER VERBS	-IR VERBS
Present Indicative	-áis [Vosotros] <i>habláis siempre.</i>	-éis [Vosotros] <i>coméis mucho.</i>	-ís [Vosotros] <i>pedís mucho.</i>
Preterit	-asteis [Vosotros] <i>llegasteis tarde.</i>	-isteis [Vosotros] <i>pudisteis venir.</i>	-isteis [Vosotros] <i>dirigisteis bien.</i>
Imperfect	-abais [Vosotros] <i>contabais historias.</i>	-íais [Vosotros] <i>movíais mucho.</i>	-íais [Vosotros] <i>dormíais siempre..</i>



Present Subjunctive	-éis <i>Espero que mandéis la carta mañana.</i>	-áis <i>Quizá leáis el libro hoy.</i>	-áis <i>Es preciso que vengáis a tiempo.</i>
Imperative	-ad (afirmativo) <i>Mandad esta carta. No mandéis esta carta.</i>	-ed (afirmativo) <i>Leed este libro. No leáis este libro.</i>	-id (afirmativo) <i>Venid a verme. No vengáis hoy.</i>

There are obviously more tenses and verb forms to be studied, so get out your old grammar books! This should give you a start in the right direction.

## HELPFUL VOCABULARY AND EXPRESSIONS

- **Ir/Salir de marcha (or movida/juerga/farra)** – to go out and party and have a good time
- **Pasarlo bomba/en grande** – to have a good time.
- **Picar** – to have a snack
- **Ir de tapeo** – go out for tapas
- **Guay** – cool
- **Una pasada** – a super cool experience
- **Estar pachucho** – to be somewhat sick or ill
- **Ser un coñazo** – to be dull and boring (both people and things - this is pretty informal so make sure you use only with friends)
- **Vale** – ok or “I agree”
- **Tio/Tia** – casual expression used by young people, mostly girls use “Tia” with other girls and boys use “Tio” with other boys, kind of like “dude”.

People also can add “-ito/illo” and “-ita/illa” to the ends of their words.

## SUGGESTED READING/VIEWING/LISTENING

To try and get an idea of what life might be like in Spain, it's a good idea to do a little research. Here's a listing of some recommended online resources, books, movies, and CDs. If you can't find them elsewhere, most of these titles are available at Amazon.com or Netflix. You should also ask your Spanish professor or any friends who might have just returned from studying in Spain if they have any other suggestions for you.

### Current Events

- El País ([www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com)), Spain's most widely distributed newspaper

### Reference Books

- Lonely Planet Guides: [Lonely Planet](#).
- Margarita Gorrissen, [Barron's Foreign Language Guides: Mastering Spanish Grammar](#).
- Christopher & Theodore Kendris, [Barron's Foreign Language Guides: 501 Spanish Verbs Conjugated](#).
- Whereabouts Press: [Spain: A Traveler's Literary Companion](#)

### Books

- Alberto Méndez, [Los girasoles ciegos](#).
- Dulce Chacón, [La voz dormida](#).
- Ernest Hemingway, [The Sun Also Rises](#).
- Federico García Lorca, [Collected Poems](#).
- Giles Tremlett, [Ghosts of Spain](#).
- Jason Webster, [Duende: A Journey into the Heart of Flamenco](#).
- Javier Cercas, [Soldados de Salamina](#).
- John A. Crow, [Spain: The Root and the Flower](#).

- John Hooper, The New Spaniards.
- Whereabouts Press, Spain: A Traveler's Literary Companion
- Penelope Casas, Tapas: the Little Dishes of Spain.
- Washington Irving, Tales of the Alhambra.
- María Dueñas, El tiempo entre costuras

### Spanish Movies

- Llenos de Gracias, Directed by Roberto Bueso(2022)
- *Érase Una Vez en Euskadi*, Directed by Manu Gómez (2021)
- *Mientras Dure La Guerra*, Directed by Alejandro Amenábar (2019)
- *La Llamada*, Directed by Javier Ambrossi y Javier Calvo (2017)
- *Ochos Apellidos Vascos*, Directed by Emilio Martínez-Lázaro (2014)
- *Tres Bodas De Más*, Directed by Javier Ruiz Caldera (2013)
- *Biutiful*, Directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2010.
- *El orfanato*, Directed by Juan Antonio de Bayona, 2007.
- *El laberinto del fauno (Pan's Labyrinth)*, Directed by Guillermo Del Toro, 2006.
- *Volver*, Directed by Pedro Almodóvar, 2006.
- *L'auberge Espagnole*, Directed by Cédric Klapisch (French film but based in Barcelona)
- *Todo sobre mi madre*, Directed by Pedro Almodóvar, 1999.

### Music (Artists originally from Spain)

- Rosalía (urban/flamenco)
- C. Tangana (reggaeton/urban)
- Viva Suecia (rock)
- Vetusta Morla (rock/indie)
- Califato  $\frac{3}{4}$  (urban flamenco)
- Rigoberta Bandini
- La Bien Querida
- La Maravillosa Orquesta Del Alcohol (La M.O.D.A.)
- Los Planetas
- Lori Meyers
- Xoel Lopez
- La Pegatina
- Guitarricadelafuente
- Melendi

### Series

- *Las Chicas Del Cable*
- *Merlí*
- *Valeria*
- *La Casa De Papel*
- *El Gran Hotel*
- *El Ministerio Del Tiempo*
- *Paquita Salas*
- *El Internado*
- *Aquí No Hay Quién Viva*
- *El Tiempo Que Te Doy*

## Conversion Charts

### MEASUREMENTS

Length		Volume		Weight	
English	Metric	English	Metric	English	Metric
1 in.	2.54 cm	1 fl oz.	30 ml	1 oz.	28 g
1 ft.	30 cm	1 pt.	0.47 l	1 lb.	0.45 kg
1 yd.	0.9 m	1 qt.	0.95 l		
1 mi.	1.6 km	1 gal.	4.5 l		
0.4 in	1 cm	0.03 fl oz.	1 ml	0.035 oz.	1 g
3.3 ft.	1 m	2.1 pt.	1 l	2.2 lb	1 kg
1.1 yd	1 m	1.06 qt.	1 l		
0.6 mi.	1 km	0.26 gal	1 l		

### TEMPERATURE

