

# Spanish spice

Islamic palaces, Gothic churches, picturesque villages, rugged mountains and an endless coastline make Spain a firm favourite among language travellers, as GILLIAN POOLE reports.

Spaniards have an infectious exuberance for life. Cities and villages alike have colourful street festivals throughout the year. Most cafés, bars and nightclubs are alive through the night with everything from traditional Spanish guitar music and Flamenco to modern pop. Language schools throughout the country are keen to introduce students to this side of Spanish life, while helping them to mix with the local population.

"We offer all those students with an intermediate or advanced level of Spanish the possibility to participate in a linguistic exchange programme with local students who are studying English," explains Margaret Fortmann at Escuela Montalbán in Granada. This is because "students want to learn more than just a language, they want to familiarise themselves with a new culture and make contact with native speakers".

The welcoming nature of Spaniards is evident throughout the country,

including in its capital, Madrid, where international visitors quickly feel at home. At Madrid-based Instituto Hernán Cortés, students are introduced to the city by their teachers. "Teachers eat with the students once a week, and a teacher takes them on a tour [of the city]," explains Paloma Galán Redonda at the school. Madrid's highlights include a medieval centre dating back to the Habsburg Empire and the famous Prado Museum.

Barcelona offers an exciting range of architectural styles from its Gothic and Art Nouveau buildings to ultra-modern architecture that has been built since the Olympic Games, which were held there in 1992. For students keen to combine language learning with sports, the Open Sports Club, part of the Schiller American Academy in Barcelona, offers this combination. "We are located in a sports club," says Françoise Bailey at the



school, "[and] our student body consists of tennis players, horse riders and golfers." The school also organises a whole timetable of excursions including trips along the famous Ramblas, a boat tour of the city's harbour and a visit to the Picasso museum. Summer heat and year-round passion characterise Seville. A perennial favourite among visitors and students alike, it is the birthplace of the legends of Carmen and Don Juan. "There are many things to do in Seville, with all the monuments, museums and festivities," says Ignacio Duran, Director and Owner of Idiomas Babel in Seville. Seville's famous festivals include the Semana Santa and the Feria de Abril. "We encourage students to go [to the festivals] and we have special texts and classroom sessions [about them]," says Duran.



**Plaza Mayor, San Isidro**  
The festival of San Isidro in Madrid runs for a week in May and, as well as featuring traditional bullfighting, it offers locals and tourists the chance to enjoy live music and sample food from street stalls

## Agent viewpoint



"We represent schools all over Spain. Barcelona is the most popular destination among our clients [as] there is [a lot of] interest in the city, culture, and beaches and shopping. Malaga is favoured because of its nightlife, beaches and the [good] course prices. Our clients generally enjoy the beaches and sun, the kindness of the people, the nightlife and the fiestas in Spain. The schools we work with have highly qualified and

motivated teachers, intensive activity programmes, well-chosen accommodation [and] are members of professional associations. Highlights of Spain [include] the Alhambra in Granada, National Park of Donana in Sanlucar de Barrameda, the famous Gaudi architecture in Barcelona, the Prado in Madrid, and the university atmosphere in Salamanca and Valencia."

**Arne Schmagar, Vamos Sprachreisen, Germany**



"We represent schools in Malaga, Salamanca and Alcala de Henares Madrid. The most popular destination for my students is Malaga. [It] is a big city, with lots of cultural and entertaining activities to be enjoyed. Also, Malaga is situated by the sea with beautiful beaches. My clients like the language, the Spanish culture and the excellent climate."

**Thomas Schramm, MTS Languages International, Denmark**



*The rugged landscape of Andalusia (main picture)*

"[Students] love to know how to make Spanish omelette, seafood paella, a refreshing gazpacho and sangria."

The Costa del Sol, particularly Malaga and Marbella, attracts not only thousands of tourists each year but is also a popular language travel destination. Both Malaga and Marbella are lively, fun cities, which have retained their historic charm. Being a tourist destination has its advantages for students studying in Marbella as jobs are readily available, says Mansilla. "Many students from the school find their first job in Marbella, and indeed many of them decide to live in Spain."

Going to an area that is off the beaten track can be one way of ensuring full immersion in the Spanish language and culture. One such place is Castellon on La Costa del Azahar (Orange Blossom Coast), north of Valencia. "La Costa del Azahar is a delicious mix of all that is good about Spain," enthuses Simon Hobson at Audio Gil in Castellón. "[The region] is deeply rooted in tradition but, at



**View of Peñíscola, Castellón**  
Built by the Knights Templar, the fortress that dominates the town of Peñíscola dates from 1294. The area also boasts extensive beaches and beautiful coves flanked by steep cliffs

the same time, it has a wonderfully dynamic economy which makes it one of the wealthiest areas of Spain."

Another area that is less well known on the language travel circuit is Castilla y León, Spain's largest region. Its importance in medieval Spain has left a legacy of cathedrals, monasteries, castles and walled towns. Escuela CF Idiomas is one of the few language schools in the region. "We offer courses of Spanish in various places in Castilla y León, mainly in Aranda de Duero, Valladolid, Sotilla and El

Espinar (Segovia)," reports the school's Director, Mercedes Calvo. "Aranda de Duero is well known for the quality of the Ribera del Duero wines, for the fabulous roasted lamb and for its underground *bodegas* (wine cellars) from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries." □

Eastwards from Seville is Córdoba, once the largest city in Roman Spain and the most important city during the Moorish era. The Moorish legacy is evident today in its Mezquita, which dates from the seventh century and is said to be the most beautiful mosque ever built by the Moors. The city's attraction does not end there, however, as Klaus Hack, Managing Director of Centro de Idiomas Larcos, is keen to point out. "In Córdoba, you can experience a mix of Roman, Jewish, Moorish and Christian cultures, which, along with its proximity to Arab-African culture, makes it like no other place," he says. Students at the school can

enjoy typical cultural events such as Flamenco nights and Spanish guitar concerts. Integration into

*"I get students to tell me what their interests are and then try to [give] those interests a Spanish dimension. A good example is a female Danish student who loved playing football. I got her into the local women's team and she loved it - [she] even [appeared] in a special report in the local newspaper."*

**Simon Hobson, Head of the International Department Spanish Institute at Audio Gil, Castellón**

the local community is also important to Larcos. "The best way of becoming involved in the local community is living with a Spanish host family where students will get to know their daily life, make many Spanish friends and, of course, enjoy the excellent Andalusian cuisine."

"[Students] like to live like true Spaniards, changing their way of life, [and] what they eat," agrees José Manuel Martín Mansilla, Marketing Director at the Spanish Language Centre, which has a string of schools in Spain, including in Salamanca, which is home to the oldest university in Spain; the seaside resort of Marbella; and the capital Madrid. Mansilla adds,



**The Mezquita in Córdoba**  
Considered to be the best Islamic church in the world, the Mezquita in Cordoba was built on the site of the Christian Basilica of San Vicente. The Patio de los Naranjos forms the inner court



"Generally, Spain has become a very popular destination for language tours, as [Spanish] is very rarely taught in school. We generally rate the quality of language schools in Spain quite highly. Most of them offer very modern equipment [and] facilities, have [well-qualified] teachers and offer a good student service."  
**Berhard Druba, Perelingua-Sprachreisen, Germany**