

Spanish life

Incorporating the colourful customs, culture, history and Spanish way of life into language classes is where language schools throughout Spain excel, as GILLIAN EVANS finds out.

Spain has much more than its language to offer foreign students,' asserts Mauricio Lagartos, General Manager of Learn Spanish in Palmas de Gran Canaria on the Canary Islands. 'It has a vast culture, which interests many people.'

Spain is a medley of different cultures, with Roman and Moorish influences still evident today in some of the country's most famous attractions, such as the fine Roman remains in Tarragona and Granada's magnificent Alhambra, one of the most visited tourist attractions in Europe. 'Students enjoy the historic Arabic Granada with all the palaces and monuments,' reports Margret Fortmann at Escuela Montalban in Granada. Once the capital of the last Moorish kingdom in Spain, Granada today is a lively university city, with over 60,000 students, and an unending nightlife.

Another city rich in history is Valladolid, the erstwhile political, cultural and financial centre of the Spanish empire. Today it is the capital of the Castilla y Leon region. 'For students of Spanish language and culture, this region offers an enviable [collection] of cultural riches amassing more than half the historical and artistic patrimony



Castell de Montjuïc, Barcelona
The Castell de Montjuïc is situated on a hill to the southwest of Barcelona and can be reached via a funicular railway. It provides stunning views of the city and now houses a military museum

of Spain,' claims John Beavan, Director of International Programmes at Hispalengua.

Zaragoza, the capital of the Aragón region, which borders France, offers students further insights into Spain's varied past. 'The history of Zaragoza goes back 2,000 years,' says Julio Lalmolda at another branch of Hispalengua, situated in the heart of the city. Zaragoza was once an important Roman city, and then a Muslim centre for four centuries. 'Today's Zaragoza is modern, safe and lively, with an abundance of restaurants, cinemas, discos, nightclubs, theatres and whatever entertainment you could wish for, existing side by side with an active cultural life,' says Lalmolda.

The co-existence of old and new is evident in most Spanish cities, none more so than in Barcelona. Since the city played host to the Olympic Games in 1992, 'it is synonymous with good design, good weather, good food, good prices and a cosmopolitan lifestyle that makes many of our students want to

stay longer or sometimes even move here',



says Richard Young, Marketing Director of the School of Modern Languages at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). One of Spain's best-loved cities, Barcelona has many attractions, including the Barri Gotic historic quarter, the Picasso museum and its non-stop nightlife. 'Students also enjoy the many outdoor parties and festivals in this part of Spain, such as Midsummer night (St Juan) where there are huge firework displays on the beach and no one sleeps before dawn,' says Young.

Beaches and climate are two important draws for many of the language travellers who choose Spain. The country has miles

Agent viewpoint



'Our clients choose Spain for a short-term course of two to four weeks. Usually this is much cheaper because of the flight than a course in South

America. Other clients choose it because of the destination. Barcelona, for example, is trendy at the moment so many clients choose this city for their course. Seville is also popular because of the good reputation of the school [we represent there] and it is a culturally interesting city. Malaga

attracts students because of the beach life. Students enjoy the sun, beaches and temperament of the Spaniards.'

Michael Eck, STA Travel, Switzerland



'Our clients choose to study in Spain for a variety of reasons. The main factors include the desire for a 'European' experience as opposed to a 'Latin American' Spanish immersion experience; the

excellent reputation of language schools in Spain; the greater availability of alternative forms of lodgings - lodgings other than homestays are generally more difficult to find in Latin America; and a stronger perception of safety in Spain than in many other countries. Schools in Spain generally have a price advantage over locations throughout the rest of Western Europe, and are price competitive with schools in Latin America.'

Brad Sedushak, NRCSA, USA



Andalusía is peppered with reminders of its past Moorish influences (main picture)

and miles of beaches, from the more rugged Atlantic beaches on the north coast and famous surf centres on its southern Atlantic coast, to the inviting beaches of the Mediterranean. It also has a string of islands, including the Balearic Islands to the south-east, and the Canary Islands to the southwest. 'Our school [Learn Spanish] is located in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 40 metres from the beach,' says Lagartos. The school's halls of residence are also close to the beach, which, according to Lagartos,



Russian students choose Spain for their studies because they are interested in Spanish culture, history and art. Students who go to Spain for the full academic year usually prefer to go to Barcelona or Madrid where they can study in the most prestigious and recognised universities of Spain. [For] summer language courses, the most desirable destination is the Mediterranean.

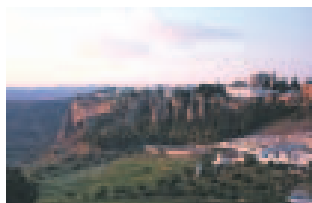
Manuel Gonzalez, Holiday Club, Russia

makes it 'even more attractive to our students to follow a Spanish course with us as they can combine their studies with a beach holiday'.

Another area popular with tourists and language students alike is Andalucía, particularly the resorts on the Costa del Sol. Despite Marbella's popularity with international visitors, Fabienne Meric, Manager of Geos Spain in Marbella, says that many students are surprised to find how unspoilt the city and much of the surrounding area is. 'Marbella, apart from being a very cosmopolitan city, is still a Spanish village with its typical Andalusian old town, and [students] can meet many Spanish local people who do not speak English.'

Bob Burger, Marketing Director at Malaca Instituto in Malaga, makes a similar observation about Malaga. 'Many people [are] not really aware of the depth of history and culture to be found in Malaga before coming,' he says. 'Also, the fact that Malaga - although [home to] the airport for the Costa del Sol - does not have the mass international tourism associated with the area, is a big relief to many people. Malaga really is a totally Spanish city and the tourism is almost entirely domestic Spanish tourism - apart from language school students, of course.'

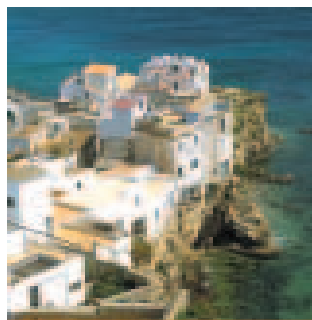
Introducing students to Spanish culture and customs is important to all schools in the country. 'We have Spanish cookery lessons twice a month,' says Maria del Mar Garrido, Director of Linguae Mundi, set in the historic town of Jerez de la Frontera, not far from Cadiz. 'We cook paella, tortilla español [and] gazpacho. After cooking we go to the *azotea* [open-air terrace] and we eat and have a party.'



Ronda
The town of Ronda is perched on the side of a sheer cliff face and was one of the last Moorish cities to fall to the crusaders. The *Puente Nuevo* [new bridge] divides the old city from the newer city

'Two students staying at our student residence thought the storage heater on the wall was the air conditioning unit so they switched it on (they obviously didn't read their welcome pack). The storage heater [timer] switched on automatically in the middle of the night transforming their apartment into a sauna in mid July. They came out drenched and laughing in the morning, saying, 'We knew Barcelona was hot - but not this hot!''

Richard Young, School of Modern Languages, UAB, Barcelona



Ibiza, Balearic Islands
With the most extreme landscape of the Balearic Islands, Ibiza attracts over one million visitors a year who flock to sample its famous nightlife and sunbathe on its picturesque beaches

At Malaca Instituto, Burger says, 'We bring local musicians and dance enthusiasts to the school to entertain, teach and encourage the students to participate in local art forms.' Meric at Geos recounts that one of their Japanese students extended his stay in Spain to two years because he was so taken with flamenco dancing. 'He finally graduated from a dance school here, and went back to Japan to open a flamenco academy,' says Meric.

At Elemadrid in Madrid, students can learn about a wide range of topical issues in their classes, as Pierre Elsaesser, Director of the school, reports. 'In group and [one-to-one] lessons, topics like the media or terrorism by ETA are integrated in the classes. In order to learn more about the Franco dictatorship, we invited an ex-political prisoner to the school and the students interviewed her.'

Spain's capital, Madrid, attracts all kinds of language travellers and is home to 11 public and private universities. There are many places of interest in this city such as one of the world's most famous art galleries, the Prado Museum, and the elaborately decorated 18th-century Palacio Real.

Complementing the country's rich landscape and abundant cultural and social activities are the Spaniards themselves. Many schools, such as Escuela Montalban, UAB's language school and Geos Marbella organise *intercambios* (conversation partners) with Spaniards. Generally, locals are said to be very welcoming to foreigners. Burger says, 'The Spanish people are famously friendly and live life to the full, making them excellent hosts for language students.'