



Andalusia

The southern Spanish region of Andalusia has a reputation for fun and culture, a combination that attracts large numbers of language students each year, as BETHAN NORRIS discovers.

Most foreign students have an image of Spain which is, in fact, the image of Andalusia, with its typical fairs, its Flamenco, its white villages, its sun and blue skies," says Fabienne Meric from Institution de Idiomas Geos in Marbella, summing up some of Andalusia's attractions for language students.

Many language schools in this Spanish region, which spans the southern coastline from Huelva and Cadiz in the west to the Costa del Sol and Almeria in the east, agree that Andalusia typifies an innate 'Spanishness' due to its strong cultural traditions and hot sunny climate. Mike Warwick from Linc Escuela de Espanol in Seville believes this sets the region apart from the rest of the country. "Andalusia captures the true identity and spirit of Flamenco and what is perceived as being 'Spanish'," he asserts. "Therefore, by studying in Andalusia, and what's more its capital Seville, you are getting a real Spanish experience."

The region manages to combine vibrant seaside resorts with small traditional mountain villages and modern international cities, all offering students a different experience. Ernesto Sarrion from Oneco - the Training Agency in Seville, which organises tuition and work placement, is keen to point out the region's historical character. "Students are usually surprised to [discover] a much richer historical inheritance [in Seville]," he says. "Our local area has way more to offer than only Flamenco and paella. [Students] are also pleasantly surprised by the wide variety of landscapes where our traditional historical past melts with a contemporary and innovative present."

Students studying at Oneco get first-hand experience of this link with the past as Sarrion goes on to describe the school's location in

the centre of Seville. "The school is located in a thoroughly refurbished three storey 16th-century building with the typical Sevillian tiled patio and terrace overlooking a beautiful square right in the city centre," he says.

Exposing students to the more traditional side of Andalusia's character is also an important part of the language learning experience at Santa Clara Academia de Idiomas, located in C6mpeta, a small village near Malaga. Clara Verheij, Director of the school, says that students are attracted by "the peaceful location we are in: a typical white Andalusian mountain village, nestled at the foot of the Sierra Tejada natural park,

Feria del Caballo
The prestigious Feria del Caballo is an equine event held in Jerez de la Frontera. Visitors attend to see displays of horsemanship and horse choreography as well as bullfighting and flamenco.



surrounded by vineyards and olive groves". She adds, "The inland area away from the crowded towns of the Costa del Sol is so stunningly beautiful and typically southern Spanish. Being in such an authentic area yet only 20 kilometres from the Mediterranean

A typical whitewashed village in Andalusia (main picture)



– sea views from everywhere in the village – is a very pleasant combination.”

Students in C6mpeta can visit local bodegas and see how wine is made in this traditional winemaking village as well as enjoy the “discotheque, night clubs, over 30 bars and restaurants... [and] many local *dias de fiesta* with performances of contemporary and traditional music”, according to Verheij.

Further afield, the famous Alhambra palace in Granada affords visitors a stunning reminder of the many different cultures that have contributed to the history of the area. Tom Walton from Malaga Si! emphasises that this is just one of the historical sites that the region has to offer. “Andalucia is well known for its historical monuments, a legacy from the multiple civilisations that have

inhabited the [area],” he says. “[It is] a region that combines the majesty of the Alhambra in Granada with the grandeur of the many Moorish and Roman monuments in other cities.”

Music, dance and fiesta play a large role in the life of the local people and students will often be lucky enough to stumble

on an organised festival, whatever the time of year. According to Warwick at Linc, “Semana Santa [Holy week, held around Easter time] and the Feria [featuring bullfighting, dancing and parades during a week-long festival in spring] are two highlights in the Andalusian calendar – completely different but both magical in their own respect.”

In Seville, there are plenty of opportunities for students to experience the Spanish love of music and dance, and not just at festival time. “At night, Linc students like to get first-hand experience of Flamenco,” relates Warwick. “Bars such as the Carboneria are favourites as singers and dancers give spontaneous performances all night long.”

Students staying in one of the region’s many seaside resorts such as Malaga or Marbella have unlimited opportunities when it comes to going out in the evenings. According to Meric, favourite areas for students looking for nightlife include the old town in Marbella as well as the nearby marina, Puerto Banus with its many exclusive bars and nightclubs. Walton adds, “[Students] soon get used to going out eating tapas or enjoying the sun in a typical terraza bar near the seaside.”



Town hall, Cadiz
Cadiz’s town hall is just one of the city’s many attractions. Others include the cathedral and Arcos de los Blancos – which used to be a gateway between the island of Cadiz and the mainland



Alameda Principal, Malaga

This broad tree-lined avenue boasts elegant 18th-century houses and delicious tapas bars, as well as the Mercado Atarazanas, an indoor daily market selling hams and cheese



Visiting the many local beaches and making the most of the sun is a popular pastime for language students in Andalucia and those staying near Cadiz have many beaches

to choose from. "Looking out across the Atlantic Ocean from the Bay of Cadiz, El Puerto de Santa Maria is an Andalucian town set among beautiful beaches bathed in sunshine for 300 days a year," says Juan Manuel Sampere from Estudio Sampere El Puerto in El Puerto de Santa Maria. He adds, "Its position on the Costa de la Luz [Coast of Light] and its Mediterranean climate make it a popular holiday destination for Spaniards."

Sampere claims that Cadiz is "one of the best kept secrets of Andalucia", being less famous than Seville and Granada, yet having much to offer visitors as the oldest city in Europe. The city was originally known as Gadir by the Phoenicians, who founded it as a trading post in 1100BC, and is now most famous for its carnival held during Lent when local people parade through the streets wearing costumes and masks.

With a great climate and lifestyle firmly grounded in the region's cultural history, Andalucia is an inviting place for students wanting an authentic Spanish experience. However, Verheij adds that "people also choose to come to Andalucia because of the famous Andalucian mentality". She sums up, "Friendly, open, easy to make contact with and fond of parties and cultural celebrations."

Agent viewpoint

"The main reason [my students like Andalucia] would be the sea and the sun. Sweden is dark and cold during long periods of the year so when Swedes travel, they do whatever they can to enjoy a good climate. Also, many of our students picture Andalucia to be a very traditionally Spanish area. Our students love how the sea and the mountains are so close. They like the beauty found in the nature and landscapes and also very much enjoy the culture, traditions and festivals."

Viktor Sundberg, Nomad Sprakresor, Sweden

"In general, although Andalucia has an impressive cultural heritage, I think people are more interested in having fun and getting to know the Spanish people and way of life. One of the things they enjoy most is the fact that they can travel to many interesting places in a short time: Cordoba, Granada, the coast, Jerez, Cadiz, even Portugal and Morocco for the most adventurous people. The nightlife is quite exciting with long hours from 10 to 11 pm – when most Spaniards finish eating dinner – till the next morning."

Holger Dähne, Lisa! Reisen, Germany

"One of the reasons most students give for wanting to study in Andalucia is that they like to stay in the old beautiful white villages like Cómputa in the mountains and at the same time be close to the ocean and beaches. Another reason of course is the weather, which is very sunny all year. The students enjoy the easy way of living of the Andalucians. Even in a city like Malaga people still are very relaxed and friendly. And people like the Andalucian cuisine with the various fish dishes and of course, the tapas."

Lizzy Verloop, Tricolore, Netherlands