

Valladolid

Home to Cervantes and Christopher Columbus, Valladolid has great historical credentials, offering language students an opportunity to uncover a quintessential Spanish city. BETHAN NORRIS finds out what makes the city different from other Spanish language travel destinations.

The capital of Castilla y León and the original capital of Spain, Valladolid is a city with much to offer those keen to find out more about the culture and history of Spain and its empire. Isabel Hong, from International House Valladolid, says of the city, “It reflects a perfect balance of Old World Spain and all the modern conveniences necessary or desired.”

John Beavan from Hispalengua adds, “As the capital of Spain during the Spanish Empire and the Golden Age of Spain, [Valladolid] is culturally rich in patrimony – more than 50 per cent of the artistic [heritage] of Spain is found in the region of Castilla y León.”

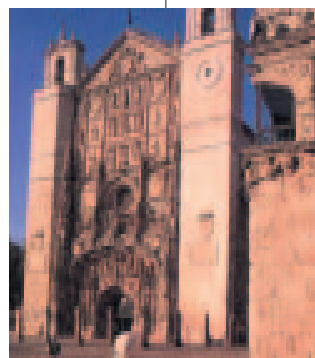
However, despite its important historical and cultural background, Valladolid is a little known destination for language travellers and, according to Hong, is “largely unexploited by the travel abroad market”. This has many advantages for students wishing to truly immerse themselves in the Spanish way of life, as Beavan explains. “It is impossible to study Spanish in Valladolid and not become involved with the local people,” he says. “People want you to speak Spanish – it is the way to

know Spanish people, Spanish culture and the Spanish way of life. Host families want you to participate in their daily and family life, young people want you to go to discos and cafés with them.”

Hong agrees that having fewer foreign students in Valladolid can be beneficial and says, “The novelty of having foreigners in some of the villages makes them centre of attention and everyone makes them feel at home.”

She goes on to add that students learning Spanish at International House Valladolid

are given a unique opportunity to integrate with the local people. “We are the only school that has a *Peña*, a formalised group of friends that participates in festivals and events together,” she says. “Each weekend this summer we have been going to different villages together to immerse ourselves in the different cultural celebrations, from running with baby bulls to



Church of St Paul
Iglesia de San Pablo, or Church of St Paul, was once a 17th-century Dominican monastery. The impressive facade of the church, with its lacy stone sculpture, is in the Isabelline-Gothic style

partying with local villagers. When we show up with typically Spanish party uniforms – T-shirt and handkerchief around neck – we are always treated well. The oriental students love it when everyone wants to take photos and dance and drink with them all night.”

As well as being willing to help language students practise their language skills, the local people of the Castilla y León region also have a

reputation for speaking the purest form of Spanish. “It is said that the Spanish is better

[in Valladolid] because the origin of the Castilian language is from around here,” explains Clemente Sanchez of Páramo, Academia de Español.

Valladolid is a university city, which means that there is a vibrant youth scene in which language students can easily take part. Isabel Paul, from the Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad de Valladolid, says that Spanish language courses have been offered to international students at the university since 1949. “One of our tasks is integrating students into the university and social life of the city,” she says. “All our



University of Valladolid
The city's university was founded in the 13th century and is the third oldest university in Spain. There are numerous cafés and bars near the campus and the student population numbers over 40,000

The local architecture in Valladolid maintains the city's charm (main picture)



programmes include a wide range of activities in the language centre or in the city – exchange parties with Spanish students, Spanish films and music [and] guided tours in the city.”

All schools are keen to make sure their students feel at home in the city. Sanchez says, “We try to show students all the places they can [visit]. We also go out with stu-

spend their free time. Cultural attractions include the houses of the writer, Cervantes, and explorer, Christopher Columbus, who both lived in the city. Museums celebrate the achievements of their lives. There are also

students to have some tapas, or go to concerts, so that they continue learning in a different way.”

And students have many ways to

many other museums, including the famous sculpture museum, the museum of contemporary Spanish art and nearby palaces.

Beavan adds, “There are cinemas, libraries, discos, bars, cafés, sports complexes and parks.” And he mentions a particularly popular way for students to spend their evenings in Valladolid. “Don’t forget to spend an evening in one of the *bodegas* – underground wine cellars – converted into restaurants or tapas bars.”

Valladolid’s old quarter is home to many historic and religious buildings such as the cathedral, which was commissioned by King Felipe II in the 16th century, the Gothic church of Santiago and the church of Santa

Agent viewpoint

"It is said that the Spanish spoken in Valladolid is the purest form of the language. Valladolid is very traditional and close to many other interesting cities and towns. Also, it has a very safe atmosphere and is not overcrowded by English speaking tourists, thus giving [students] more opportunity to practise their Spanish. In the evenings, students can visit any of the many rustic Bodegas or spend time in the old quarter. Alternatively, there is a lively area just 15 minutes from the town centre that offers all types of entertainment, from all-night discos to restaurants and piano bars. During the day,

[students] can take trips to many places of interest within Valladolid Province."

Doreen Rutherford, Caledonia Languages Abroad, UK

"Students go to study in Valladolid because they want something different from the big cities and the [beaches]. It is part of old Castile and is off the beaten track, which is an attraction. Valladolid is a very cultural city, as it used to be the old capital of Spain, and the local people are very welcoming because there are not so many tourists. Also, the

accent spoken there is very clear for people learning Spanish. There is a very good fiesta and the activities surrounding Holy Week are very interesting for visitors. It is very authentic and I think that's what people want when they go there. Connoisseurs of wine are also attracted to the city because of the very good wine grown locally. There is a lively nightlife in the city because it is a university city with lots of nightclubs and places to go in the evenings. [However], there are also lots of things for the older person to do."

Martin Pickett, Lanacos, UK

María la Antigua. Religious festivals are synonymous with the city, the most important of which occurs during Holy Week, leading up to Easter. The festival reaches its climax on Good Friday, when a procession of religious sculptures is carried through the streets. "Our Easter [festival] is famous all around the world for its magnificent sculptures," comments Sanchez.

As well as the Easter festival, Paul points out that the city is host to many musical and cultural exhibitions year round, including "the Cinema Festival and [the Ferias of] San Mateo in September". The week-long Seminci Film Festival, which, according to Hong, is "one of the best in

Europe", provides a showcase for the best European, American and world cinema, and gives talented Spanish filmmakers the opportunity to screen their films for a wider international audience.

Different areas of Spain are famous for their food and drink specialities and the city of Valladolid is no exception.

"[Valladolid] is at the foot of the valley containing the Ribera de Duero, home of world class red wines," says Hong. Students can

visit the nearby wine regions or alternatively sample the produce a little closer to home at a café or restaurant in the city. Francisco

Javier Leon de la Riva, Mayor of Valladolid, says that the city's many gastronomic specialities, along with its festivals and museums, all contribute to its unique character. "Clay-oven baked lamb, its bread, cheese and its outstanding Ribera, Rueda and Cigales wines [all help make] Valladolid unique," he comments. □



Main square and town hall

The Valladolid market area was rebuilt after a fire in 1561, when King Felipe II commissioned a newly designed main square. The impressive town hall, or Ayuntamiento, dates from 1908