



# PROGRAM COUNTRY: SPAIN



*STS – more than 50 years of experience in student exchange programs all over the world*



Spain is a treasure-trove of arts and culture brimming with flamenco music and dance, bull-fights, fantastic beaches and lots of sunshine. In the cities, narrow, twisting old streets suddenly open out to views of daring modern architecture. Several regions in Spain

have kept a separate identity, culturally and linguistically. All of this diversity combined with a rich heritage of history, art and architecture make Spain a fascinating place to visit as an exchange student.

## COUNTRY INFORMATION

The Kingdom of Spain shares the Iberian Peninsula with Portugal and Gibraltar. France and the tiny country of Andorra are on its northeast side, boarded by the Pyrenees mountains. The Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea, the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean, and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla in north Africa are also part of Spain. Situated in a privileged geographical position and invaded by important civilizations such as: Celtic, Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek, The Roman Empire, Arab and Jew, Spain is an extremely cultural country rich in art, literature, architecture and history.

The people of Spain are called Spanish or Spaniards. Most people speak Spanish “Castellano”, but there are other languages in different parts of the country: Catalan, Basque and Galician. The religion of most of the people in Spain is Roman Catholic.

The middle of Spain is a high, dry and flat land called La Meseta. La Meseta is usually very hot in summer and cold in winter. Spain also has many mountain ranges and quite a long coastline (mountains: Pyrenees, Sistema Central, Sierra Nevada, Montes de Gredos); Beaches: Costa Brava, Costa del Sol, Costa Blanca; Plateaus: Toledo, Madrid; Cliffs: Galicia and North of Spain). Spain therefore has several kinds of climates and different temperatures. The weather is usually very sunny, with mild to warm or hot temperatures. Many people from Northern Europe take their vacations in Spain, enjoying its beaches, cities and countryside.

Five big rivers cross the peninsula, and its extremely rich soil makes any kind of agriculture and farming successful. This results in, for instance, a famous and growing wine industry. The seas and the

ocean also provide exceptional shellfish and fish. All this makes for a great gastronomy, made from natural and high quality products.

Spain is one of the most visited countries in the world. Millions of tourists come to visit every year, attracted by its landscape, climate, history, art, gastronomy and people. Spanish people like to spend time outdoors talking and dealing with people. Their hospitality, tolerance and open-minded attitude are well known by everyone who visits the country.

Spain is a democratic country, considered rich in many aspects. Spain also has modern cities: Madrid (the political and financial centre), Barcelona (industrial, cultural and cosmopolitan); and cultural ones as: Sevilla, Granada, Córdoba, Toledo.

Since 1978, the Spanish king only executes and follows decisions taken by the parliament. The parliament is called Las Cortes and its members are elected by the Spanish people. This type of government is called a constitutional monarchy. The current King of Spain is Juan Carlos and the President is José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The government and the king’s palace are in Madrid, the capital of Spain, located in the center of the country. Today Spain is a modern democratic country and part of the European Union.

## SCHOOL LIFE

Compulsory education begins at the age of six with children attending a local primary school. At fourteen years of age the student receives a “school leaving certificate”. Those with higher marks are able to enroll into a higher secondary school and other students move on to a vocational school.

Compulsory subjects in high school are Spanish language and literature, foreign languages, social science, geography, history, maths, aesthetics, physical education, religion or study activities. Optional subjects are on offer, such as physics and chemistry, biology or geology, crafts or music.

School hours vary depending on the area and type of school. One typical schedule would be classes from 9am to 5pm with a two-hour lunch break, another typical schedule would be classes from 9am to 2pm with no lunch break. When there is a lunch break of



# PROGRAM COUNTRY: SPAIN



more than one hour, students usually go home to have lunch with their family. Students are usually in the same classroom all day, where most classes take place regardless of subject. The students have the same seats all day, so they have plenty of time to get to know each other. It is the teachers who move around to the different class rooms.

Public schools are co-educational and students do not wear school uniforms. There are also a big range of "concertadas" schools, which are subsidized by the government and the parents through a monthly fee. These schools usually belong to the Catholic church.

School activities include sports/gymnastics, music, drawing and crafts. They are part of the Spanish educational curriculum and depend on the class the students are placed in. Excursions and sports competitions are also offered as extra curricular activities.

## HOST FAMILY LIFE

If you like talking, smiling, going out, being with people and enjoying life, you are coming to the ideal country. Spanish host families are very welcoming to the exchange students, and eager to make them part of the family. The students will have to adjust to some of the particularities about Southern European mentality, for example: Spanish people tend to speak very loud. So don't be alarmed if members of the family raise their voices. They are not angry!! Remember this.

Host families usually consist of two parents and children of different ages. The life in a Spanish host family tends to revolve around the host mother. She is the one who, most of the time, arranges everything and makes all the big decisions. During the weekdays/schooldays, if lucky, the student will be able to go home for a nice, freshly cooked lunch. In the afternoon the student will be able to do homework or activities, such as participating in sports, flamenco classes etc. Then later in the evening the family meets up for a nice dinner.

Timetables are really different from many other countries: lunch is normally from 2-3 pm and dinner from 9-10 pm. Prime time in television is at 10 pm! On the weekends the students normally use their time to do things with the host family and their relatives or with friends.

Spain is a very diverse country in terms of culture and ways of life, especially because of the four different languages and cultures.

Families in the North (areas of Barcelona and Salamanca) are very interested in foreign languages and cultural exchange. They are usually quite strict with their students, but love to take them around on weekends. They are very fond of cultural activities and expect students to participate in their outings.

Many host families live in Andalusia, in the South of Spain. They are very social and more laid back. On weekends most families attend folklore events or cultural activities on offer throughout the

year. Students are usually placed in small towns, where everybody knows everybody and where it's very easy to have a fun and safe social life.

Food is very important in Spain and the host family will expect the student to try most of the specialities on offer. They are all delicious and the student will enjoy them for sure! Breakfast usually consists of coffee and a roll. Many shops still close for the midday meal and the afternoon siesta. Dinners in Spain are light and eaten later in the evening. Food means communication in Spain, so it is important that the students try everything that is offered.

Showing emotion is also important and Spanish people are quite loud, so if you are very open and talkative, you will fit right in!

## PROGRAM EXTRAS

The students will receive information about the trips offered during the exchange after arrival in Spain, since they differ from year to year.

## EUROPEAN TOUR

In the end of June, STS Head Office offers an amazing three-week bustour around Europe. You get to visit 10 countries together with students from all over the world. The price includes accommodation, half board, sightseeing, most entrances and activities, Disneyland in Paris etc. Please see separate sheet for more detailed information regarding the tour.



*All information is subject to change.*

