

## **Traditional Spanish music and dances**

While many first-time travelers to Spain think of passionate flamenco as being Spain's so-called "national" music, traditional Spanish music is far more complex. In fact, flamenco music didn't even formally hit the Spanish music scene until around the beginning of the 19th century, centuries after the evolution of other traditional Spanish music. However, while most of Spain's regional dance and music fly well beneath the international music radar, flamenco has become a recognizable sensation around the globe.

### **Traditional Spanish Music – history**

Spain's traditional music is essentially a multi-faceted mosaic of the many cultures of Spain's long and colorful history. For this reason, the traditional music and dance vary as you travel from region to region. The traditional music of the Islas Canarias (Canary Islands), for example, boasts influences from the archipelago's mysterious indigenous Guanche civilization while the bagpipe music of Galicia and Asturias speaks volumes about these northern regions' rich Celtic heritage.

Traditional Spanish music throughout Spain's vastly diverse regions first flourished while the country was still under Moorish rule. For much of these period (up to eight centuries, in some areas), Spain's Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities coexisted rather peacefully and various facets of their respective culture were free to develop. With the Reconquest, the development of traditional Spanish music came to a temporary standstill, as the ultra-Christian Spanish monarchy (Fernando and Isabel were called the "Catholic Kings," after all) eventually banned Sephardic and Islamic music.

The Renaissance and Baroque periods were clutch for the evolution of traditional Spanish music. However, the classical music typical of the Renaissance fell into the shadow of the light-hearted folk music of the Baroque. The zarzuela, an immensely popular light Spanish opera, is based on popular music and culture.

During the 35-year dictatorship of 20th century Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, regional music and dance were banned. Intent on creating a uniform and nationalist country, he wanted to do away with all things regional- languages, literature, festivals, music, etc. His death in 1975 sparked a huge boost in regional pride, which has in turn yielded a major revival of Spanish traditional folk music.

### **Traditional Spanish music & dances**

There are many types of traditional Spanish music (very often associated to dance). That shouldn't come as a surprise, considering that Spain is a varied country with many different sub-cultures, so each one has its own - and more than one. Spanish culture is jam-packed with traditional music and dance- in fact, at one point there were over 200 traditional dances documented in Cataluña alone. Below you'll find a brief run-down of some of Spain's most popular music and accompanying dances.

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•**Jota:** The fast tempo jota originally hails from Aragón but is popular - with minor modifications - throughout the rest of Spain. With probable Moorish influences, the jota is typically danced in two's as couples raise their hands above their heads playing castanets.

There are many other songs/dances called "Jotas" throughout Spain (Jota castellana, jota valenciana, jota manchega...), but the best known one is the Aragonese version.

•**Fandango:** Until flamenco came along, the fandango was Spain's most famous dance. Lively, energetic and happy, it's a traditional Spanish dance performed in couples.

•**Flamenco:** Attributed to Andalucía, flamenco is a passionate form of music and dance combining Jewish, gypsy, Moorish and Andalusian influences. The guitar is the chief instrument of the flamenco, and strumming a flamenco beat is not easy. The rhythm is multifarious and is usually accompanied by the clapping of hands known as palmas

•**Paso Doble:** The paso doble is a quick and lively one-step traditional Spanish dance.

•**Sardana:** Danced in a closed circle by several couples joined at the hands, the sardana is a popular form of traditional Spanish music and dance from Cataluña.

•**Muñeira:** To summarize, the North & North West (Galicia, Asturias, parts of Cantabria) have a long tradition of bagpipe music, that some relate with a probable "celtic" background. This music is marked by the gaita, or bagpipes, along with drums. These regions do share common Atlantic cultural traditions with other European areas. A common dance of Galicia is the "Muñeira".

•**Bolero:** A fast and spirited dance, the bolero - featuring unexpected pauses and sharp turns - is one of the oldest and most traditional Spanish dances.

•**Sevillanas:** Sevillanas are, in many ways, reminiscent of flamenco. Joyful and undeniably happy, a sevillana is a four-part music with an accompanying four-part dance.

•**Zambra:** The zambra actually got its start as a Moorish dance. While Moorish and Jewish music and dance were banned following the Reconquest, the Moors managed to conserve this particular dance by adapting it to traditional Spanish music and dance trends.

•**Auresku:** is the extremely elegant a traditional welcome and respect dance from the Basque Country.

Also the most popular kind of Basque music is named after the dance trikitixa, which is based on the accordion and tambourine.

## Spanish food

Spain's culinary traditions rely on an abundance of locally grown vegetables and fruits as well as meats and poultry. Jamón serrano, a cured ham, and chorizo, a seasoned sausage, are popular. Seafood and fish are popular in coastal areas. Other popular foods are cheeses, eggs, beans, rice, nuts (especially almonds), and bread (a crusty white bread, baked fresh daily, is common). Olive oil and garlic are common ingredients. Spain is also known for its wines, including the rioja, made in the northern province; sherry, a fortified wine that may be dry or sweet; and sangria, wine mixed with fruit and soda water.

The best-known Spanish dish, a stew called paella (pie-AY-ah), originated in Valencia, an eastern province on the Mediterranean Sea. Rice, a main ingredient, is grown in Valencia's tidal flatlands. Though there are numerous variations, paella is usually made of a variety of shellfish (such as shrimp, clams, crab, and lobster), chorizo (sausage), vegetables (tomatoes, peas, and asparagus), chicken and/or rabbit, and long-grained rice. Broth, onion, garlic, wine, pimiento (sweet red pepper), and saffron add flavor to the stew.

Every region has its own distinct cuisine and specialties. Gazpacho, a cold tomato soup, comes from Andalucía in southern Spain. Traditionally, a special bowl called a dornillo, was used to pound the ingredients by hand, but modern Spanish cooks use a blender. Andalusians also enjoy freidurías (fish, such as sole or anchovies, fried in batter). Cataluña, in northeastern Spain, is known for its inventive dishes combining seafood, meat, poultry, and local fruits. In the northern Basque country (país Vasco), fish is important to the diet, with cod, eel, and squid featured prominently. The signature dish of Asturias, in northwestern Spain, is fabada, a bean stew. In the interior regions, such as Castilla, meats play a starring role. Tortilla española, a potato omelet, is served throughout the country. It can be prepared quickly and makes a hearty but simple dinner. Spain's best-known dessert is flan, a rich custard.

### Top 10 dishes in Spain:

#### 1. Croquettes

You can find Spanish a plate of croquetas in almost any restaurant or bar, each made to the establishment's own recipe. It makes food comparison throughout Spain a delight, and not at all a bad idea for judging up a restaurant's quality (hint: the traditional, scrubbed-down bars serve the best). While the creamy cheese (queso) croquettes pack a smooth flavour, try croquettes filled with a mixture of béchamel and Spanish cured ham (jamón), or the local sweet-spiced black sausage (morcilla) for something stronger.

#### 2. Tortilla Española

A great starter or meal for breakfast, lunch or dinner, no doubt you'll come across a Spanish potato omelette during your time in Spain. Like croquetas, you can find them in almost any bar and to varying degrees of quality and flavour. The best ones are from slow-cooked potato in olive oil, which make a soft centre once egg is added to create an

omelette cake; even tastier when onions are added to the slow-frying process for a sweet underlying flavour. You'll also find wedges of Spanish omelette squeezed between a bocadilla for a tasty sandwich snack.

### **3. Gazpacho or salmorejo**

This cold tomato soup has claimed space in many supermarkets around the world, but carton gazpacho compares little to the Spanish tangy, refreshing variety. Usually eaten as an appetizer – and sometimes straight from a bowl or glass – its thickness is derived from blending a whole heap of fresh tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers, garlic, onions, vinegar, and herbs. Salmorejo is a similar Andalusian version combining pureed bread, tomatoes, garlic, and vinegar – also served cold – and sometimes varied with a bit of ham or egg.

### **4. Pisto –Spanish ratatouille**

This vegetarian option is enjoyed by all, as a tapa, starter, a side dish to meats, or even with a fried egg on top. It's a Spanish ratatouille of tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, onions, garlic, and of course, olive oil. The palatable competition of intense roasted flavours makes this a tasty recipe.

### **5. Cured meats –jamon, chorizo, salchichón**

Jamon is ubiquitous in Spain, carved thinly off cured legs of pork that you will see hanging in most bars and restaurants. Jamon is a serious business and an art in Spain, with many varieties that determine quality, such as what the pigs are fed and the curing process. Jamón ibérico de bellota is the top category, where the pigs are free-range and acorn-fed. Chorizo is identified by its red smoked-pepper colouring, and is a dried sausage with sweet and spicy hints. You'll also see the softer-flavoured salchichón served on mixed charcuterie platters.

### **6. Pulpo a la gallega**

This octopus dish is macerated with paprika (pimenton), crusty rock salt and a drizzle of olive oil. It's a signature Galician dish, and you'll find it on the menu in many Galician restaurants around Spain. It's usually served with a potato or two, on top of a wooden platter.

### **7. Bean stew**

Spain is home to a wide variety of interesting beans and legumes, and certain regions are famous for particular types, for example the dried large white beans of the region La Granja, an hour from Madrid. The Basque town of Tolosa even holds a week-long festival in November in honour of the local renown bean, alubias de Tolosa. Around the country you can find different regional bean stews known as fabada, that involve cooking the beans slowly with a mixture of meats – such as chorizo pancetta, black sausage and so on – depending on the region. The hearty Asturian version, fabada asturiana, is widely available in restaurants across Spain and commonly eaten in winter; Madrid's cocido adds vegetables and cabbage to a tasty mix of sausages and chick peas.

### **8. Paella**

This rice-based Valencian dish is well known internationally, and comes in many variations that equally vie for attention. The traditional version is a mixture of chicken or rabbit (or both), white and green beans and other vegetables, but mixed seafood is also common, where you will find an array of seafood surprises among the flavoursome rice – calamari, mussels, clams, prawns, scampi or fish, for example. For the adventurous, a black rice stained by octopus ink is a must try. Fideua is also tasty, and uses a small curly pasta instead of rice.

## **9. Fried milk**

You might not find 'leche frita' on every menu, but it is a classic Spanish dessert to try if you want something unique. Its firm, cool, milk-pudding centre contrasts with a warm, crunchy encasing of flour and egg, dusted with sugar and cinnamon. If that's not on the menu, it's hard not to like the Spanish version of crème brûlée, crema catalana, that can be found with variations of orange or lemon zest, or cinnamon.

## **10. Red or white sangria and tinto de verano**

Every meal can have an alcoholic accompaniment – coffee and whisky in the morning or after meals, or any combination of beer, wine or cava for morning break, lunch or dinner. Two Spanish specialities are the refreshing tinto de verano ('summer wine') and rebujito (white sangria), which involve little more than mixing wines with soft drinks but create a surprisingly tasty refresher. Tinto de verano is red wine with lemon soda, while rebujito is a white wine mixed with lemonade and topped off with fresh mint, and popular at the Sevillan Feria de Abril (April Fair).

## **Holidays, festivals, celebrations & traditions in Spain:**

Spain is one of the largest countries in all of Europe, occupying most of the Iberian Peninsula. Vacation-goers flock to Spain for the sunny beaches along the Mediterranean Sea to the south and the Atlantic Coast to the north, but there's much more to discover if you take the time to look. Holidays, festivals and traditional celebrations abound in Spain. Images of bullfights, matadors and flamenco dancing come to mind, but this is just the tip of the iceberg.

### **Las Fallas, Valencia**

Valencia's biggest celebration of the year takes off on March 15, when creators and builders scramble together to erect in a single day the elaborate fallas – emblematic and complex cardboard and paper-maché structures bearing a series of hand-made figurines called ninots, which climb high into the skies. The blazing finale comes just four days later, on March 19, during the feast day of Saint Joseph (who is also the patron saint of carpenters – hence all the care in the construction of the structures), when the architectural works of art are burst into flames – yes, deliberately – to the cheers of thousands.

There are many different versions of similar traditions across the entire peninsula to celebrate the feast day of Saint Joseph, commonly known in Spanish as the josefines.

### **Las Hogueras Traditions**

The most famous part of Las Hogueras de San Juan is not surprisingly the blazing hogueras (bonfires). Traditionally, these Hogueras were nothing more than piles of junk and old furniture collected during massive summer house-cleaning. Constructed of wood and paper maché, today's Hogueras are elaborate works of art, reminiscent of the massive structures of Valencia's Las Fallas.

On the big night of the hogueras, fireworks are set off from a bay in the shape of a palm tree on the picturesque castle of Santa Bárbara, just above the bay of Alicante, to mark the beginning of the fiestas with a literal bang. From that moment on, Alicante's 88 hogueras light up the night one by one. Traditionally, once the fire was blazing, you had to jump seven times around the flames or go in the water. Although the fires eventually die down – nowadays thanks to the firemen – the party continues throughout Alicante for several days and nights. Rockets blast off, balloons float up in the air, parades snake through the streets, and fireworks festively illuminate the sky each night at midnight. Finally, there is an annual competition to elect the next Belleza del Fuego (Beauty of the Fire), who then serves as the festival's queen along with her six ladies of honor.

### **La Feria de Abril, Seville**

Two weeks after the processions of Semana Santa come to an end, the atmosphere brims with the color, music, and merriment of the Feria de Abril. Given that Easter

itself is a moveable feast, the dates of the April fair of Seville are not fixed, either, although you can be certain that it will take place sometime between the first week of April and the beginning of May. Meant as a tribute of sorts to the arrival of spring, similar fairs are held all over the country during the early days of the blossoming season.

Hundreds of tents and amusement park rides are set up for Seville's week-long Feria. The fairgrounds swell with locals dressed in traditional garb and booths selling tipples and food. Live music fills the night air, and a festive mood prevails. Fireworks signal the final night of the celebration, sending the crowds into frenzied flamenco dancing.

### **Fiesta de San Fermin, Pamplona**

Los sanfermines kick into gear on July 6 with the txupinazo, when a rocket blasts off in front of the city hall to announce fiesta's commencement. This moment of deafening cheers and uncorked champagne bottles certainly sets the tone of the week, as the city dives headfirst into a week of crazed festivities.

The chaotic running of the bulls, or el encierro, is the most characteristic and internationally renowned part of the sanfermines. The running of the bulls takes place everyday at eight in the morning and consists of a crowd of primarily young men who run ahead of the clamoring bulls through an 830-meter stretch of cobbled road and into the city's bullring. After each morning is greeted with the daily Running of the Bulls, bullfights liven up each afternoon, and parades featuring bands of music. On July 7th, a procession dating back to the 13th century boasts music and enormous crowds as it passes through Pamplona in honor of San Fermín.

Every party must come to an end, and in the case of los sanfermines that inevitable moment is called pobre de mí. The crowd laments the end of another year's festivities with the traditional song, pobre de mí, literally meaning "poor me."

### **La Tomatina, Buñol**

One of Spain's other major celebrations is La Tomatina, a "tomato war" held in the town of Buñol outside Valencia. Tourists and locals gather on the last Wednesday of August each year to stage a tomato-chucking battle of epic proportions. This event is part of a week-long festival in honor of Buñol's patron saint. As with most other Spanish holidays, street parties and parades are customary. Thousands of combatants take part in the final tomato war. According to Frommer's, the actual food fight lasts for two hours. The local government sponsors the event by sending in over 88,000 pounds of tomatoes to be used as ammunition. Communal shower stations are set up around town for cleanup after the fun comes to an end.

## **Carnival of Santa Cruz de Tenerife**

One of the most famous colourful festivals in Spain are the carnivals of Santa Cruz de Tenerife held during the month of February of each year.

The carnival resembles those held in Brazil and features parades with floats and bands who perform different types of songs during the street parades. The colours and costumes worn during this festival are stunning and are a delight to see.

The parades move through the streets with energetic musical groups and well-dressed performers. The most beautiful scene of this festival is the parade of pretty, well-dressed ladies who enchant viewers with their dance moves.

The colourful costumes can weigh over a 100 kilos, and they can take takes months to make and practice in for the street parades.

## **Cádiz Carnival**

From "Quasimodo Sunday" until "Piñata Sunday", Cádiz carnival dominates the town and injects an explosive dose of color, music, and culture to the placid routine of a small provincial city. The normally laid-back atmosphere is immediately transformed into one huge street party, whose pinnacle is an enormous competition in which street musicians, choirs, quartets, troupes and chirigotas seek to create the most visually and musically original stage performances.

After the competition, both winners and losers take the Cádiz carnival to the streets, joining in the party, and moving through the Old Quarter singing songs, often with risqué, erotic, or satirical themes. If you're heading south for the festivities, a costume is a must as you'll stick out if you go wearing simple jeans and a t-shirt. Spaniards flock to Cádiz in groups from all over, wearing themed costumes that often poke fun at institutions, politics, celebrities, and current events.

## **San Juan**

If your into an all night beach parties then the annual San Juan fiesta are for you. It is held on the 24th June each year up and down the coastal areas of Spain most notably in Andalucia where the warm temperature makes for a perfect all night party.

This ancient pagan festival is now legendary for its all night long beach party which includes music, dance and fun is had by all. The night is all about fire and water and it where young to enjoy the shortest night of the year.

According to tradition to be cleansed and purified you musts jump over the fires three times.



## **San Isidro**

Madrid's free pass to drink and fun is granted in the month of May when the whole city celebrates its patron saint.

During the day, the city dwellers are normally engrossed in live music concerts in city squares, which later culminate in drinking frenzies that take up the night

## **Reyes Magos Traditions**

With festive lights livening up the streets, Nativity scenes set up in various locations, and holiday tunes setting the holiday atmosphere. Spaniards celebrate the arrival of the Kings with a joyful parade called the Cabalgata de los Reyes Magos. The kings ride upon horses or elaborate floats and throw goodies down to the children lining the streets. This is also traditionally the big opportunity for children to ask the Kings for presents.

That evening, before an early night in bed, children leave out their shoes in a spot where the Kings are sure to see them. The religious monarchs, just like Santa Claus, certainly love their sweets, so Spanish children often set out goodies to entice the Kings as well as hay to feed their camels. When morning arrives, children delightedly discover that the Kings nibbled the sweets, the camels ate the hay, and by their shoes there are wrapped presents just waiting to be torn into. The magical night comes to a close with another Spanish Christmas tradition: a typical breakfast of Roscón de Reyes, a ring-shaped cake decorated with fruits symbolizing the precious gems that adorned the royal trio's lavish clothing.

## **Semana Santa - Easter**

Truly one of Spain's most breathtaking celebrations, Easter is a one-of-a-kind display of tradition, music, culture, theatre and religion. If you're thinking of learning Spanish, consider doing so during Semana Santa!

The south is the best place to experience a Semana Santa in Spain, making our schools in Granada, Sevilla and Marbella prime destinations to both learn Spanish and discover the magic of this world-famous festival.

## **When and where Is Semana Santa?**

The dates of the celebration vary on a yearly basis, given that the feast is not attached to a specific date. Linked ever since the Roman emperor Constantine the Great called the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. to the first Sunday after the full moon following the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere, Easter can never be celebrated before March 22 (the day after the vernal equinox) or after April 25. Therefore, you can roughly plan on early spring to see Spain's famous processions, but you should check your calendar before making any definite plans.

Cities, towns, and villages across all of Spain come to life during Semana Santa. While each city has its own unique Holy Week celebrations, tag sunny Seville as your main destination for an experience that will leave you absolutely speechless.

Semana Santa in Seville and Andalucía and solemn elsewhere in Spain, is practically defined by its stunning processions. Each of these processions typically boasts two intensely adorned floats, one of the Virgin and the other of a scene from Christ's Passion. Take in the lavish decoration of these incredible creations as they slowly pass before you accompanied by the music of coronets and drums; its hard to do without getting chills. There are up to forty men, called costaleros, who haul the float on shoulders and control its swaying motion. In fact, they practice so much and are so in sync with each other that the realistic figures on top look eerily as if they were walking along to the music.

Impossible to miss are the seemingly endless rows of nazarenos, or penitents, who walk along with the float.. You may even see many nazarenos walking barefoot, which is pretty impressive, considering some of the processions last up to 14 hours! Oh, and don't be thrown off by the resemblance between the pointy hoods and long robes of the nazarenos and those of the Ku Klux Klan: it's coincidental and completely unrelated.

Don't be surprised to see how nicely the people dress to watch the processions, especially during the second half of the week. Women often dress to the nines while many men brave the sun in full suits. Of course not everybody dresses up so much, but, basically, if you want to fit in watching the processions, please wear elegant clothes.

## **History of Semana Santa**

As with any cultural celebration, Spain's elaborate Semana Santa was for centuries a work-in-progress. The starting point for its extensive history is clearly the death of Christ, from which it takes its subject, however the celebration that we see today is the result of centuries of evolution.

A significant point in the history of the Semana Santa is 1521, when the Marqués de Tarifa returned to Spain from the Holy Land. After his journey, he institutionalized

the Via Crucis (Stations of the Cross) in Spain and from that moment on this holy event was celebrated with a procession. Over time, the observance of the Via Crucis eventually broke up into the various scenes of the Passion, with the incorporation of portable crosses and altars. This would eventually lead to today's elaborate processions.

Check out any map of Semana Santa routes and you will see the Carrera Oficial, or official route, clearly marked. This original route, while it has evolved since 1604, continues to serve as the backbone for the present route. The final major step took place in the 17th century, when Seville's various cofradías (brotherhoods) began dividing and organizing themselves into what they are today.

## **Spanish artists**

A number of great artists have lived and worked in Spain. Among the most famous are El Greco, Diego Velázquez, Francisco Goya, Salvador Dalí, and Pablo Picasso, one of the most prolific artists in history and a major figure in 20th-century art.

### **16th Century: El Greco (1541-1614)**

It was during the reign of Philip II that the first great genius of Spanish painting, El Greco, settled in the country. He was born in Crete and worked in Italy before moving to Toledo in about 1577. His highly emotional style gave powerful expression to the religious fervour of his adopted country but it was not to Philip's taste. El Greco produced a succession of magnificent altarpieces for churches in Toledo.

In 1586 El Greco painted one of his greatest masterpieces, *The Burial of Count Orgaz*, for the Church of Santo Tomé in Toledo. This work, still in place, portrays a 14th-century Toledan nobleman laid in his grave (in actuality situated just below the painting) by St Stephen and St Augustine. Above, the count's soul rises to a heaven densely populated with angels, saints, and contemporary political figures.

### **17th Century: Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)**

The artist probably most loved by the Spanish people is Velázquez who painted religious pictures and also occasional mythological scenes and tavern scenes with a prominent still-life element. He worked primarily as a portraitist and in this field he was acknowledged as one of the greatest artists the world has ever known.

His masterpiece, *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honour*, 1656, Prado), is a stunning group portrait of the royal family and Velázquez himself in the act of painting.

### **18th Century: Francisco Goya (1746-1828)**

The greatest painter of his time in Spain and also probably the most powerful and original figure in the visual arts in the whole of Europe was Francisco Goya. In his time he was best known as a portraitist but he is now equally renowned for other types of work including the powerful engravings that he made showing the atrocities of the French occupation of Spain during the Napoleonic Wars.

### **19th Century: Joaquin Sorolla (1863-1923)**

Goya was an isolated genius and after him there were no painters of European standing in 19th-century Spanish art although there were some charming minor masters, such as Joaquin Sorolla, whose work—influenced by Impressionism—is characterized by brilliant colour and vigorous brushwork.

His distinct ability to depict the effects of light comes across strongly in many of his beach scenes of his native Valencia.

### **20th Century: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)**

One of the most prolific artists in history was Pablo Picasso who spent most of his life in France but his work often used imagery from his native country. The bullfight was a favourite subject and his most famous painting, Guernica (1937, Centro Cultural de la Reina Sofia, Madrid), was inspired by his revulsion at the bombing of the Basque town during the Spanish Civil War.

### **Joan Miró (1893-1983)**

Of the modern Spanish painters who remained in Spain the most illustrious was Joan Miró. He spent a good deal of time in Paris but lived mainly in and around his native Barcelona and later on the island of Mallorca. An immensely prolific and versatile artist he created a distinctive and witty style blending Surrealism and abstraction.

### **Salvador Dalí (1904-1989)**

A flamboyant painter and sometime writer, sculptor and experimental filmmaker, Salvador Dalí was probably the greatest Surrealist artist using bizarre dream imagery to create unforgettable and unmistakable landscapes of his inner world. His most famous work is The Persistence Of Memory. The Dalí Museum in Figueres is one of the top attractions in Catalonia.

## **Sports popular in Spain**

### **Football**

In Spain, football (or "fútbol," in Spanish) is much more than just a sport; it's a way of life. Spain's football fans eat, drink and breathe football. Fans gather around televisions or walk through city streets with hand-held radios pressed to their ear. Neighborhood bars - and beer glasses - fill up to the brim, much to bar owners' delight, and, following a big win, you're guaranteed to hear fans cheering and cars honking in the streets.

Spain's football league, commonly known as "La Liga," is internationally regarded as one of the best professional leagues in the world. The Liga Española (Spanish league) consists of two divisions: La Primera (The First) and La Segunda (The Second). These divisions are more or less extensions of each other. At the end of each season the bottom three teams from the First Division move down to the Second Division, and the top three teams from the Second Division move up into the First Division to fill the vacancies. Less than a handful of the combined 55 football teams have managed to stay in the top division since the the Spanish league's inception back in 1928.

The organization and rules of Spain's two football divisions are regulated by the LFP (Professional Football League). Each team plays every other team twice: once at home and once away. For each win, a team is awarded three points, while a tie garners one point and a loss yields no points. At the end of the season, which frankly lasts for the bulk of the year, the team with the most points wins "La Liga."

Spain's football league is extremely competitive and features many of the world's best players. While Real Madrid and FC Barcelona have run the show for much of La Liga's history, in recent years they have been met with top-notch competition from teams such as the Deportivo de La Coruña and Valencia CF.

#### **Major Football Tournaments**

- La Liga: Season-long tournament between the teams of Spain's top football division.
- Copa del Rey: Played between Spain's top football teams.
- Supercopa de España: Played between the Copa del Rey winner and the winner of La Liga.
- UEFA Cup: Played between Europe's best football teams
- UEFA European Football Championship: Played between Europe's best football teams.
- FIFA World Cup: International tournament.

### **Basketball**

While football has long been the dominating force in Spain's sports scene, basketball ("baloncesto," in Spanish) fever has been giving football a run for its money. Spain's ACB (Asociación de Clubs de Baloncesto) is not only the top competitive basketball league in Spain but is also considered to be one of the best in the world behind the NBA. Plus, with Spain-bred NBA superstars like Pau Gasol turning heads and creating even more hype in Spain's basketball scene, Spain has been garnering much more international attention.

Spain's ACB basketball league, organized and regulated by FIBA (International Basketball Federation), consists of 18 professional basketball teams. Each team up against every other team twice - once at home and once away - for a combined 34 season games. The team that comes out with the most victories at the end of Spain's basketball season wins the ACB and is a shoe-in for national tournament play.

#### Spain Basketball Tournaments

- ACB: Season-long tournament
- Copa del Rey de Baloncesto: National tournament between Spain's top eight basketball teams.
- Supercopa de España de Baloncesto: National tournament between ACB winner, Copa del Rey winner and two other top teams.
- FIBA World Cup: International tournament held every four years.
- FIBA World Championship: International tournament every four years.

#### **Tennis and pelota vasca**

Whether as spectators in the stands or as players on the court, Spaniards have an affinity for tennis and a wide range of its "cousins." In recent years, Spain has stepped into the international tennis limelight, thanks to top-notch ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) players like Tommy Robredo, Juan Carlos Ferrero and Rafa Nadal. Plus, Spain - Madrid, to be exact - has been attracting the world's top tennis players each fall since 2002 as the host of the annual Madrid Masters, the eighth of the ATP Masters Series' nine major tournaments.

Another popular sport similar to tennis is pádel, which essentially boils down to a cross between tennis, squash and glorified ping pong. The balls used and the scoring system are the same as in normal tennis, but the game is played with a hard-surfaced paddle on a smaller court. These courts are enclosed and players are free to hit the balls against the walls, like in squash.

Another handful of popular "hit a small ball" games in Spain are the variations of "pelota vasca" (Basque ball). Pelota vasca - which hails from the País Vasco (Basque Country) - is a sport that originated long ago from passing time hitting balls against church or other town buildings' walls. The term is a general one which encompasses several variations that differ in the method used to hit the small leather ball against the two walls of the "frontón" (court). You can use the bare palm of your hand, a

racket, a bat, or a basket-like contraption. Internationally, this final form of pelota vasca is popularly referred to as "jai alai."

## **Golf**

Whether you're an interested novice or a seasoned professional, nothing says "vacation" quite like a few relaxing - or competitive - rounds of golf. Spain is not only a golfer's paradise but also a country that has given rise to such PGA stars as José María Olazabal, Sergio García and Severiano Ballesterios. The results say it all! From courses looking over the Mediterranean Sea in the south to courses tucked into the verdant landscapes of the north, Spain boasts a huge variety of golf havens. Due to the mild weather around the coastline, particularly in the south, Spain is unique in that you can viably golf any time of the year and still be guaranteed pleasant temperatures and abundant sunshine! Plus, with many of its golf courses having been designed by professional golfers and the world's top golf course designers, you know you won't sink that last putt and walk away disappointed. Just because you are from out of town doesn't mean you have to leave golf out of your plans! Golf courses in Spain are remarkably easy to get to, usually just a few quick kilometers away from major airports and cities.

## **Skiing**

There are few countries that boast a landscape as geographically diverse as Spain. From tropical beaches to verdant hills, plunging cliffs and plains, Spain literally has it all. In fact, Spain is actually the second most mountainous country in Europe, a feature which makes it a prime skiing destination. Get ready to hit the slopes! Whether you're an novice or a veritable fiend on skis, skiing in Spain is a favorite winter time activity and there are plenty of options dispersed through the country. Nearly 1,000 kilometers of ski trails comprise 36 top-notch ski resorts, 13 of which have been awarded a Q for their unbeatable tourist quality. Skiing resorts in Spain offer their skiers and snowboarders a huge array of unbeatable features. For one, Spain is graced with abundant winter sunshine, which means great visibility and comfortable temperatures- even at the peak! Aside from natural snow, skiing resorts in Spain have excellent snow-making services to ensure the best snow conditions possible. Excellent amenities ensure a great time. Plus, if you hadn't originally planning on skiing in Spain or if you simply couldn't fit your snowboard into your hand luggage, you're in luck! Almost all of Spain's ski resorts offer complete and affordable equipment rental, from skis and poles to coats, gloves and ski pants! Take your pick and hit the slopes! Skiing resorts in Spain have been grouped into six main areas:

- Sistema Penibético: The Sierra Nevada mountain range in Granada.
- Sistema Central: The sierras around Madrid, Salamanca and Segovia.



- Sistema Ibérico: Mountains in La Rioja.
- Cordillera Cantábrica: Mountains along the Cantabrian Coast in Asturias and León.
- Aragón: Mountains in the region of Aragón.
- Pirineo Catalán: The Pyrenees mountains, especially in Lleida and Girona.

## **Formula 1**

Thrilling, competitive and undoubtedly noisy, Formula 1 car racing is one of those high-intensity sports guaranteed to keep you perched on the very edge of your seat. The roar of revving engines is practically deafening as sleek cars carrying daredevil drivers fly around circuits at speeds up to 300 km/h (190 mph)!

Formula 1, an international competition, is the top-notch level of auto racing and is both organized and controlled by governing body the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). Not only is it the world's most expensive sport, but it's also one of the world's most popular; while Formula 1 is most popular in Europe, people throughout more than 200 countries tune in each week of the season to watch the world's top drivers battle it out at circuits around the globe.

With Europe as its main market, Formula 1 racing has always had a steady fan base in Spain. In the last couple of years, however, a young maverick by the name of Fernando Alonso has been causing quite a stir. In fact, Formula 1's popularity in Spain has quite literally skyrocketed.

Alonso first turned heads when, in 2003, he became the youngest driver to achieve a Formula 1 pole position at the Malaysian Grand Prix. Just a few months later, he became the youngest driver ever to win a Formula 1 race when he drove to victory at the Hungarian Grand Prix. His international fame was set in stone in 2005 when, at the tender age of 24, he became the youngest Formula 1 champion in history.

Formula 1 races are shown on Spanish television channel "Telecinco," but if you want to be a part of the live action you'll have to act fast, as the major international Formula 1 races consistently sell out weeks before the season even starts. The Formula 1 comes to Spain twice a year for the Spanish Grand Prix in Barcelona and the European Grand Prix, held at a new circuit in Valencia.

## **Bullfights**

The history, the music, the pageantry... ironically, one of the most intrinsic facets of Spain's culture is also one of the most controversial. Bullfighting is right up there with tapas, sangría and flamenco on the checklist of Spain's so-called "traditional" elements. The event essentially comes down to a performance between a highly trained professional "torero" (bullfighter) and a bull, whose fate is pretty much sealed before he even enters the arena.

Bullfighting season in Spain lasts from March to October and is often a featured part of local festivals. If you're looking for the heart of bullfighting, head to Andalucía, where many of Spain's most famous bullrings are found in cities and towns like Sevilla ("La Maestranza"), Málaga ("La Malagueta") and Ronda, where you can take in the action at Spain's oldest bullfighting venue. Not surprisingly, many of Spain's most revered bullfighters - whose celebrity status rivals that of royals, actors and other common tabloid subjects - are also products of Andalucía.

A traditional bullfight in Spain - known as a "corrida de toros" - consists of three bullfighters, each of whom performs twice. The highly ritualized event has three parts, with a trumpet announcing each part's commencement. The first part features the "picadores" (lancers on horseback), the second part features the daring "bandilleros" (flagmen) and for the grand finale the "torero" finally emerges, sporting one of the famously shiny, skin-tight "suits of lights" and wielding a sword and scarlet red cape.

The bullfight comes to an end when, having pleased - or, in some cases, angered - the crowd with his close-range and ideally confident and graceful maneuvers, the "torero" wraps things up with a well-placed sword.