

IDENTITIES ABROAD: SPAIN*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for Spain as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. We understand the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to Spain, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Madrid

Population: 50,015,792 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): Castilian Spanish (official nationwide) 74%, Catalan (official in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the Valencian Community (where it is known as Valencian)) 17%, Galician (official in Galicia) 7%, Basque (official in the Basque Country and in the Basque-speaking area of Navarre) 2%, Aranese (official in the northwest corner of Catalonia (Vall d'Aran) along with Catalan, <5,000 speakers)

Religions: Roman Catholic 68.9%, atheist 11.3%, agnostic 7.6%, other 2.8%, non-believer 8.2%, unspecified 1.1% (2019 est.)

Ethnic groups: Spanish 86.4%, Moroccan 1.8%, Romanian 1.3%, other 10.5% (2018 est.) Note: data represent population by country of birth



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Spain is the third most popular destination for U.S. study abroad students. Engulfing its Iberian neighbor Portugal, Spain has coasts along the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, with the Strait of Gibraltar to the south separating it from Morocco. Spain is also mountainous (the second-most in Europe), and the Pyrenees Mountains to the north separate it from Andorra, France, and the rest of continental Europe. Spain's mountainsides, beaches, pastoral countryside and cosmopolitan cities all beckon international visitors.

U.S. students are attracted to study abroad programs in Spain for a variety of reasons, particularly the study of its language, as well as business and international relations, among other subjects. As with other visitors, students seek out Spain for its architecture, culture and nightlife, not to mention quick access to Western Europe. Higher education institutions in Spain enjoy good international reputations. There are a variety of options there for students across disciplines, depending on the study abroad program. Although Castilian Spanish is the national language and many Spaniards also speak some English, regional dialects are still very pronounced in Spain. Some provinces, such as Catalonia, Valencia, Galicia and the Basque country, have their own dialect as the official language. Despite this language variety, even students with low proficiency levels in Spanish should be able to navigate life in Spain, as there is a robust infrastructure for accommodating international visitors.

Travelers should explore some of the [Best Places to Visit in Spain](#). Recognized as a [World Bank High-Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living in Spain](#) is 19% lower than in the United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not taken into account).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for Spain:

- [U.S. Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to Spain](#)

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) [Open Doors Report 2019](#), almost 32,411 students from the United States studied abroad in Spain, this is roughly a 3.8% increase from the previous year recorded.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SPAIN

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

Spain's government has taken a closer look at the issue of ethnic discrimination in recent years. Despite unsavory reports on the pitch, the government has focused on integrating Spain's over 4 million immigrants, many arriving from Eastern Europe, Russia, and North Africa. Though government policy may be aimed at restitution, the attitude on the ground may present a somewhat different story for students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. For example, some students from Latin American heritage studying in Spain have reported feelings of isolation due to their use of Spanish language. Students should be aware of the different forms of language use that come with particular communities and prepare themselves for those differences whenever possible.

Well-publicized incidents repeatedly occur where Spanish soccer fans are known to dress in blackface, throw bananas at players of African and Hispanic descent and jeer them by calling them monkeys and other epithets. Although examples of racist behavior in Spain are common, positive experiences of U.S. travelers of color to the country also abound.

NOTES:

- Although most U.S. travelers of color to Spain do not report experiencing racist interactions, minor encounters of racist prejudice or epithets are not uncommon in Spanish public life.
- Students of color may be one of the few minority members within their program and thus study and live with individuals who have limited understanding of African-American cultures and cannot provide adequate support.
- Some students of color may be assumed to be an immigrant of African descent.
- Spanish versus Spain Spanish: One of the main differences is that many Spaniards often pronounce the *z* and the *c* before *i* or *e* like the "th" in "thin," while many Latin Americans pronounce it the same as the *s*.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [World Directory of Indigenous People](#), Minority Rights Group International

Last reviewed by IEGI 8/10/20

- [What does it mean to be Spanish in Spain?](#) Global Voices
- [Navigating Spain as a Black Person](#), Diversity Abroad Student Blog
- [Some Tips for Students of Minority Populations Studying Abroad in Spain](#), ISA Student Blog

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN SPAIN

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2005, making Spain the third country to do so. Spaniards took little time adopting the new law, with over 4,000 same-sex couples marrying in the first year alone. Barcelona is recognized as a hotspot for those searching for a lively gay scene. Some of the other popular areas include Sitges, roughly an hour outside of Barcelona. This city is home to the largest gay event in Spain.

Spain is widely considered a progressive country that protects gay and minority rights. Although the country is predominantly Catholic, the influence of conservative groups on social policy is not as strong as in other heavily Catholic European nations.

Acceptance of homosexuality exists across most of Spanish society, although soccer stadiums are known to be particularly boorish. Spain is widely considered a top gay travel destination, with Ibiza and the Balearic Islands perhaps the most prominent. LGBT students should feel comfortable being open about their sexuality in Spain. Barcelona is the gay capital of southern Europe, so you'll be free to express yourself.

NOTES:

- Gay rights are protected in Spain and students should expect a level of tolerance equal to or greater than that found in the U.S.
- In 1978, Spain legalized homosexuality among consenting adults. In April 1995, the parliament of Spain banned discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- Some call Spain's gay rights laws the most progressive in the world, as same-sex couples are permitted to adopt.
- There are vibrant gay scenes across Spain, particularly in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and Ibiza.
- Many establishments exist to serve local gay communities across Spain, especially in the main cities, where university study abroad programs are generally located.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Changes in the Lived Experience of LGBT](#), Global Gayz
- [LGBT Rights in Spain](#), Equaldex
- [LGBT Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [LGBTQ+ Traveler's Guide in Spain](#), IGLTA

DISABILITY IN SPAIN

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

The governmental law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in several sectors including education, employment, and access and accommodations. The government not only provides programmatic services and increased access to information for those with disabilities, but also effectively enforces applicable laws.

Spain's sidewalks, public transport, and public buildings generally have accommodations for people with disabilities. Nonetheless, because of Spain's hillsides and mountainous terrain, people with mobility impairments may find getting around challenging. However, as Spain is a popular study abroad destination for U.S. students, a number of programs exist that specialize in accessibility accommodations for students with disabilities.

NOTES:

- Specific accommodations should be discussed in detail with program providers prior to choosing a program.
- Advisors and program representatives can help to determine if appropriate accommodations are available in Spain.

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- Spain does not quarantine cats and dogs that meet certain requirements from approved countries ([Pet Travel](#)). All requirements also apply to service and emotional support animals.
- Good medical care is available in Spain. However, regulations regarding medications are different than those in the United States and thus it is recommended by the [U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor's prescription.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Mobility International USA, Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities](#)
- [Information for Students with Disabilities Traveling Abroad](#), U.S. Department of State (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications](#), Transportation Security Administration
- [Using Power Wheelchairs Abroad](#), Spain Study Abroad Student Blog
- [Finding My Strength in Spain](#), Spain Study Abroad Student Blog

RELIGION IN SPAIN

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

In an attempt to embrace all cultures and faiths, laws on Religious Freedom are reported to ban crucifixes and religious symbols in public areas around the country. Except for those with historic or artistic acclaim, religious symbols will have to be taken down in hospitals, schools and other public places. This law however will not apply to private institutions and for ceremonies where the family requests their display. In Spain, religious fervor is thought to be dwindling with church attendance steadily declining. More than two-thirds of Spaniards consider themselves Catholic, though fewer consider themselves religious and fewer still attend mass regularly. Understanding religion in Spain can be challenging, but some things are clear. Appropriate dress is required to enter places of worship in Spain, some have been turned away for wearing shorts and other casual wear.

Following Catholicism, there are larger populations that identify as atheist (11.3%), non-believer (8.2%), or agnostic (7.6%). Estimates repeatedly indicate that religious affiliation is in a steady decline, with the proportion of Spaniards that are irreligious or atheist growing each year. There are approximately one million Muslims in Spain. As the Moors conquered and settled southern Spain until 1492, the country is home to several Islamic heritage sites, such as the Alhambra in Granada, and has large mosques in Madrid, Barcelona, and Granada. Fewer than one percent of Spaniards are Jewish, living mainly in Barcelona, Madrid, and Murcia. Very few protestant or evangelical churches exist in Spain.

NOTES:

- Discrimination based on religion is rare; freedom and tolerance of various religions is widely accepted and practiced.
- Students of all denominations should feel comfortable practicing their faith in Spain.
- More than ten mosques exist in Spain, mainly located in Spain's larger cities, where study abroad programs generally operate.
- Synagogues exist in more than seventeen Spanish cities, with the largest featuring multiple synagogues.
- Very few protestant or evangelical churches exist in Spain.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Countries and Their Cultures: Spain](#) (see section on Religion), Every Culture
- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Religious Beliefs in Spain](#), World Atlas
- [Jewish Life in Spain](#), Jewish Life in Spain
- [A Muslim's Guide to Prayer Facilities in Stunning Spain](#), Halal Trip

WOMEN IN SPAIN

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

On February 3, 2020, the US Embassy in Spain issued a [security alert](#) related to the steady increase in the number of sexual assaults nationally over the past five years. The alert reports a rise in sexual assault against young U.S. citizen visitors and students throughout Spain. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General urge U.S. citizen students and visitors to take precautions against sexual assault during their stay in Spain, including advising those to “drink responsibly” and “use the buddy system.”

Some women have reported sexual harassment in the form of cat-calling by men (shouts of ¡Ay guapa! or ¡Ay la rubia! from the streets) during their daily routine. Under the law women enjoy the same rights as men and the government generally enforces the law. Spain is generally a safe place for women to visit alone. In Madrid, there are no no-go zones in the centre – the areas around Gran Vía, Sol and La Latina are all particularly busy so women shouldn’t encounter problems. However, women travelers should exercise a little caution at night if they frequent Malvarrosa, northern Cabanyal or the Turia River area alone.

NOTES:

- Spain ranked 8th (out of 153 countries) in the [2020 Global Gender Gap Index](#) conducted by the World Economic Forum.
- Since women travelers have been more likely to be targets of high-risk crimes, it is recommended that travelers are vigilant of their surroundings and make a conscious effort to travel in groups as often as possible.
- The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape and prohibits sexual harassment and provides civil penalties.
- Women have reported safely [traveling in Spain solo](#).

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Empowering Tips for Solo Travelers](#), Pink Pangea
- [Women Going Abroad](#), Diversity Abroad
- [Tips for Women Travelers in Spain](#), Frommer’s
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook](#). Accessed online in August 2020
[IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet Spain](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in August 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.