Spain

Overview

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Spain is a politically stable, well-developed constitutional monarchy in Western Europe bordering France and Portugal. The nation has modern infrastructure and good facilities and public services. In recent years, Spain’s economy has faced some challenges amid the global economic downturn, and higher unemployment rates, particularly among Spanish youth. Dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the economy in recent years has led to a rise in street protests and strike actions in major cities, with several related violent protest actions occurring in recent years. Persistent economic and social issues have also led to a rise in secessionist sentiment in the northeastern Catalonia region and the north-central Basque Country.

Spain has some of the lowest rates of violent crime in Europe. However, petty crime poses a notable concern and is common in all major cities and tourist areas, especially in the city of Barcelona and the capital Madrid. Spain’s risk of terrorism is LOW; the most recent prominent attack occurred in 2017, when Islamist terrorists attacked pedestrians in Barcelona and Cambrils, killing and injuring numerous people.

Political conditions

Political

- Although political tension is a LOW area of concern for Spain, economic issues have heightened risks for demonstrations as well as aggravated separatist tensions in the northern, autonomous Catalonia region.

Although Spain has a stable political environment, the country experienced difficulties forming a new government in the months following December 2015 national parliamentary elections. Mariano Rajoy’s government led by the center-right People’s Party (PP) lost its majority, and the new parliament was deadlocked, unable to elect a prime minister. A new election was held June 2016; while the PP gained seats, it still fell short of a majority. Following a lengthy dispute, Rajoy was confirmed as prime minister in October 2016 after the largest opposition group, Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), agreed to abstain from a vote of confidence. Rajoy currently leads a vulnerable government, as its minority status requires it to seek alliances and compromises with other parties. The PSOE is divided on cooperating with a PP government, while other left-wing parties are staunchly opposed. As such, it is possible that Rajoy’s government will fall in 2018, requiring fresh elections.
Both the PSOE and PP governments implemented austerity measures in response to the broader Eurozone economic crisis that began in 2010-2011. These policies included tax increases, cuts to public spending, public sector layoffs and other reforms aimed at boosting the economy. These reforms have met mixed success and have been unpopular among broad segments of the populace. Anti-austerity sentiment contributed to the ouster of both PP and PSOE governments and helped fuel the rise of the anti-austerity party Podemos, a left-wing party founded in 2014 that has since gained increasing support.

Persistent economic concerns and higher unemployment rates, particularly among youth demographics, continue to contribute to social tensions in the country. The 15-M anti-austerity movement has headed a relatively prominent protest movement in Spain in recent years. The group frequently stages mass demonstrations regarding economic issues, including budget cuts and austerity measures. Ongoing economic issues, related negative public sentiment and ongoing protest actions are expected to continue in the country for the mid- to longer-term, impacting the overall political climate in the country.

**Autonomous Areas**

Spain is a multinational state that has experienced political tensions and sporadic violence due to some areas of regional agitation for greater autonomy or independence. The northern autonomous communities of Catalonia and the Basque Country have both faced political tensions associated with their historic geopolitical statuses. The northern Basque Country has seen nationalist violence into the 21st century, with the pro-independence Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) armed group having carried out bombings across the country beginning in the 1970’s. However, a concerted effort by Spanish and French security forces significantly reduced ETA’s organizational capacity and the group unilaterally declared a ceasefire in 2011 largely ending related attacks. Although the group remains classified as a terror organization by Spain and other Western nations and multinational groups, ETA spokespersons have indicated that the group will continue efforts to seek a Basque homeland, albeit through political means.

Catalonia, an autonomous, relatively wealthier region in the northeast of Spain, has a history of pro-independence sentiment. Spain’s economic crisis beginning in 2008 has led to a rise in public support for independence. In late 2012, provincial elections brought a pro-independence majority to the regional parliament and the legislature scheduled a referendum on independence for late 2014. Although the referendum was blocked by the Constitutional Court of Spain, the Catalan government conducted the referendum and a majority of those who voted did so in favor of independence. Subsequently, pro-independence parties gained the majority in the regional Catalan elections and vowed to engage in a process leading to Catalan independence; however, the Spanish government continues to oppose any attempts at Catalan independence. In October 2017, pro-secessionist groups held a banned referendum and subsequently declared the unilateral independence of Catalonia; the government in Madrid responded by invoking Article 155 of the constitution, suspending the region’s political autonomy and dismissing its government. Under direct rule from the government in Madrid, regional elections were held in Catalonia the following December and resulted in the three main pro-separatist parties retaining their control in the region’s parliament with a reduced majority; these parties are in the process of attempting to appoint a new government and pressing for an end to direct rule from Madrid and for a negotiated solution to the political and constitutional crisis.

**Corruption**

- Petty bribery and corruption are relatively LOW concerns in Spain.

Transparency International (TI) ranked Spain 42 out of 180 nations for perceived levels of corruption in their 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Spain received absolute scores of 57 and 58 out of 100 in 2016 and 2017, respectively, indicating perceived corruption has remained steady in more recent years.

In general, corruption is of minimal concern in Spain, with relatively lower levels of petty, administrative
and/or police bribery. However, corruption within the business environment is somewhat more elevated, with moderate levels of bribery reported by TI. Spain’s corruption levels are believed to have risen since the significant economic downturn beginning in 2008. Government measures to improve the economy have included cuts to public sector salaries and pensions, which have partially led to a rise in corruption in public services.

Security issues

General crime

- Crime is a MODERATE concern in Spain; petty crime and burglaries are regularly reported and street crime is more common in major cities and tourist areas.

Crime in Spain is generally a moderate risk. Pick-pocketing and other forms of petty theft are common in all major cities in Spain, especially in the capital Madrid and city of Barcelona. These sorts of crimes are most common in areas that cater to tourists, as well as crowded public areas such as train stations, airports, shopping centers and beaches. Particularly affected areas in Madrid include the Puerta del Sol and adjoining streets, Gran Via, Plaza Mayor, the Prado Museum at the Atocha railway station. In Barcelona higher rates of petty crime are reported in the Las Ramblas, Plaza Real and old town areas of the city. Credit card skimming has also been reported in shops and restaurants, and reporting indicates that the number of burglaries in tourist areas has risen, with rental properties and time shares being targeted. Drivers traveling between cities have been targeted for robbery by individuals impersonating traffic officers.

Spain has some of the lowest rates of violent crime, such as assault and murder, in Europe; however, the country is a principal point of entry of illegal narcotics into the European Union. Because of its popularity as a tourist destination, drug trafficking is common. Transnational organized crime groups are heavily involved in the drug trade in Spain, both in trafficking and in distribution. Spain is a transit and destination country for human trafficking also, with trafficked people most commonly coming from Eastern Europe and South America.

Terrorism

- Spain’s terrorism risk profile is LOW, though the country continues to face the threats of domestic and transnational terrorism.

Spain’s risk for terrorism is low, although the nation has been a target of transnational Islamist terrorism as well as domestic terror attacks. The last significant terror-related event occurred in August 2017, when vehicle attacks undertaken by jihadists in Barcelona and Cambrils resulted in numerous casualties. No major attacks have taken place in the country since that time. However, because of its proximity to North Africa, Spain is a common point of entry for Islamic extremists entering continental Europe. Considered a Western nation, Spain faces risks of being a target of transnational terrorism and related attacks. The country has been on high alert since the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. Despite the lack of any known specific threat, the government maintains a national terrorism alert level, allowing for increased security measures at transportation hubs, government buildings and crowded public areas. Further, security forces routinely disrupt recruitment and funding rings for militant groups attempting to draw combatants to conflict zones in the Middle East.

Domestic terrorism is also a risk in the country, although this threat has decreased in recent years. More specifically, Spain has experienced significant domestic terrorism perpetrated by the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) since the 1970s. The organization, seeking independence for the northern Basque Country, carried out numerous deadly terrorist attacks throughout Spain before 2011. ETA did not
specifically target foreign nationals; however, foreign bystanders were injured as a result of large scale bomb attacks. Effective counter-terror operations by the Spanish and French governments largely curtailed ETA’s effectiveness, with the last major attack occurring in 2006 and minor incidents ceasing in 2009. ETA declared a unilateral ceasefire in 2011, but has pledged to pursue Basque independence through political means. Spain has also continued operations against the ETA – which it classifies as a terrorist organization – arresting members in 2012 and 2013 in connection with previous attacks. In early 2014 ETA surrendered part of its arsenal to the Spanish government as a first step toward disarmament and is believed to have largely completed this process.

Civil unrest

- While civil unrest is an area of LOW concern, Spain has seen a rise in mass protest actions and street demonstrations since 2010 and an independence movement in Catalonia can be considered an ongoing area of concern.

Spain has seen an increase in protests and large scale public demonstrations since 2010, particularly in the capital Madrid and city of Barcelona. A large number of demonstrations in recent years have been connected to ongoing economic concerns in the country and austerity measures. The 15-M anti-austerity protest movement has been prominent in organizing such demonstrations, with some of these events having garnered tens of thousands of participants. The group continues efforts to protest over persistent economic issues and further such demonstrations are possible. Large-scale demonstrations have occurred sporadically since 2011 and while most remain generally peaceful, clashes with police and isolated incidents of violence have occurred in the past during such actions.

Strike actions connected to economic and other concerns also periodically occur and can prompt service disruptions, although large-scale work stoppages have not been as frequent as street demonstrations. Transportation workers – including aviation and public transportation employees – carry out strike actions most frequently. Such actions often cause some travel and transport delays/disruptions.

Protest actions and civil unrest concerns also extend to the notable autonomous communities of Catalonia and the Basque Country. Both areas are affected by autonomous movements and associated social tensions that can at times lead to elevated risks of civil unrest. Barcelona, the largest city in Catalonia, has seen widespread, largely peaceful street demonstrations in favor and opposition of independence and further such actions are expected in the near-term as secessionist groups continue to press for greater autonomous powers. Associated incidents of violence are possible during this time period also, although widespread unrest is not expected in the region. Similarly, efforts for regional independence are also a concern in the northern Basque Country. Although the separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) group has apparently suspended armed actions in the region in recent years, heightened social and/or political tensions could lead to a resurgence of social unrest or protest-related violence. There are, however, no immediate indications of such impending destabilization in the region.

Kidnapping

- Although express kidnapping is a LOW concern for Spain, there have been spates of such attacks in the country in recent years.

Incidents of kidnapping-for-ransom and express kidnappings – during which victims are taken for shorter periods of time and forced to empty financial accounts of funds before being released – undertaken by organized crime groups are relatively rare in Spain. The country has one of the lowest rates of reported kidnapping in Europe where criminal gangs typical focus more on other activities such as narcotics and human trafficking, prostitution and cybercrime.
Travel logistics

Entering the country

Entry Requirements

- Citizens of European Union member nations, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein require only a valid passport or a national identity card to enter Spain. Nationals from a number of other countries, including the U.S., Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as well as most countries in Central and South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) do not require visas to visit Spain for stays of up to 90-days. Travelers from other countries generally require a visa to enter the country.
- Travelers must have a passport valid for three months beyond their intended period of stay in Spain.
- Travelers planning to stay in Spain for more than three months are required to register in-person at their nearest Office for Foreigners, which can typically be found within town halls or designated police stations.
- As entry requirements are subject to changes, travelers are advised to consult their nearest embassy or consulate or their country of residence’s foreign service travel advice website for the latest information regarding entry requirements.

Political/Security Risks

AIG Travel ranks Spain as a LOW threat location; however, there are travel risks associated with terrorism and higher rates of petty crime in cities.

- Although political tension is a LOW area of concern for Spain, economic issues have heightened risks for demonstrations as well as aggravated separatist tensions in the northern, autonomous Catalonia region.
- Petty bribery and corruption are relatively LOW concerns for travelers in Spain.
- Crime is a MODERATE concern in Spain; petty crime and burglaries are regularly reported and street crime is more common in major cities and tourist areas.
- Spain’s terrorism risk profile remains LOW, though the country continues to face the threats of domestic and transnational terrorism.
- While civil unrest is an area of LOW concern, Spain has seen a rise in mass protest actions and street demonstrations since 2010 and an independence movement in Catalonia can be considered an area of ongoing concern.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure concerns are LOW in Spain; the country has relatively extensive and reliable air, water and ground transportation as well as utilities and telecommunications networks.

Air travel

Domestic flights connect all major cities in Spain, including Madrid, Barcelona, Burgos, Alicante and Cordoba. Visitors should book well in advance, especially if travelling during the peak summer months (June to September). Strikes by air transport workers, such as pilots and baggage handlers, as well as day-long general strikes, have caused significant transportation disruptions in recent years. Clients are advised to confirm flight times before departing for the airport.

Madrid-Barajas Airport (LEMD/MAD) is Spain's busiest airport. Located 11 miles (18 km) northeast of the
city center, it has four terminals and offers a free shuttle transfer service between terminals for passengers. Facilities at the airport include banks, currency exchanges, ATMs, shops, restaurants and information desks. Regular and reliable bus, rail, metro and taxi services link the airport to the city center. The airport is linked to other major cities in Spain via bus and rail.

Barcelona Airport (LEBL/BCN) is located 10 miles (17 km) southwest of Barcelona. The airport has a comprehensive range of facilities, including a tourist information office, banks, currency exchanges, ATMs, a post office, a pharmacy, 24-hour medical service and restaurants. Transport to the center of Barcelona is provided by airport bus, train and taxi. The airport is also connected to intercity rail networks via a shuttle bus.

Getting around

Spain has an extensive public transport system and a well-maintained road network. Spain has experienced terrorist attacks on its public transport system in the past, and many petty and opportunist crimes reported occur in such means of transportation. As such, travelers should exercise caution at all times and report any suspicious items or persons to local authorities.

- **Road** – Road conditions throughout Spain are good and an extensive road network connects all major cities and towns throughout the country; however, conditions of the roads in rural areas may vary depending on location. Driving standards tend to be more aggressive than in most Western countries.
  - **Self-Driving** - Rental vehicles are available at the airport and other cities and towns. There are a number of toll roads throughout Spain and tolls have to be paid at certain payment points along the road. Prices are fixed and are charged per vehicle type.
  - **Bus** - There are numerous companies offering long-distance and regional services. Buses are often the only option for reaching remote areas of the country. Many local bus services only offer reduced services during weekends, especially in and between smaller towns. Intercity bus services in major cities are generally excellent, with most lines running until midnight. Some cities, such as Madrid and Barcelona, have limited bus service after midnight, but this is not available everywhere.
  - **Taxi** - Taxis are readily available in all urban centers. Travelers are advised to only use taxis that display a special license and to ensure that taxi drivers always switch on the meter at the beginning of their commute. Taxis can be flagged down from the street or located at taxi stands. Licensed taxis are required to be clearly marked.

- **Water** – Ferry services connect Spain's mainland with Ceuta, Melilla, the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands. There are numerous companies offering these services. Information on timetables, prices and tickets are best obtained from the respective companies operating in harbor cities, as well as online.

Culture

- Business hours vary considerably, and businesses, shops and government offices may be closed in the early afternoon.
- In business circles and in tourist areas, English is generally spoken. In more remote areas of the country it is likely that only Spanish is spoken.
- Punctuality is expected in business situations.
- There is a requirement to provide proof of your identity if requested by a police officer; the only legally acceptable documents are a passport or a national identification card. The police have the right to hold someone at a police station until their identity is confirmed.
- Hotels are required to register the passport details of travelers at check-in. Rather than leaving a passport, it is advisable to carry photocopies of your passport with you which can be handed over to hotel staff.
A service charge is included with the price of meals and drinks across Spain. However, tipping is a common practice at bars, restaurants and hotels and also for taxis; five to ten percent of the total price is normal. Spain is generally very accepting of LGBT issues; however smaller or remote areas may be more conservative.

Important Dates 2018

- 1 January – New Year’s Day
- 6 January – Epiphany
- 19 March – Father’s Day
- 30 March – Good Friday
- 1 May – Labor Day
- 6 May – Mother’s Day
- 15 August – Assumption Day
- 12 October – Hispanic Day
- 1 November – All Saints’ Day
- 6 December – Constitution Day
- 8 December – Immaculate Conception Day
- 25 December – Christmas Day

Health concerns

Good medical care, both private and state-run, is available in Spain, however services can be more limited outside of urban centers. Although many doctors speak some English, medical personnel may not have adequate knowledge of the language, so the ability to communicate in Spanish may be advantageous. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate payment for medical services. Pharmacies are available in all cities and larger towns, and all basic medical supplies are readily available.

Travelers are advised to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

Natural hazards

The weather in Spain can be very hot and humid in summer, especially between June and September, which has the potential to cause heat stroke and exhaustion. Travelers are advised to take appropriate clothing, to limit their exposure to the sun at the hottest times of day, to use ample sun lotion and to drink plenty of liquids.

Money

- **Currency** - The currency in Spain is the Euro. The euro is issued in notes of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500 euros. Coins are issued in denominations of 1 and 2 Euros as well as in 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents.
- **Foreign exchange** - Currency exchange locations are prevalent in the country including at airports, ports, banks and many hotels. Smaller hotels and more remote areas may not be able to exchange large amounts of money.
- **ATMs / Credit Cards** - ATMs are widely available, including popular tourist locations, shopping complexes, large international hotels and throughout most cities and towns. Major international credit cards are accepted at most major hotels, shops and restaurants. Smaller retailers may insist on cash.
• **Tipping** - Tipping in Spain is common, but modest. Commonly, tips consist of change left behind to round up to the nearest Euro. In restaurants, as well as taxis, tips of up to 10% are expected.  
• **Business hours** - Business hours are generally 09:00 to 18:00, Monday to Friday. Normal opening hours for shops from Monday to Saturday are from approximately 09:00 or 10:00 until they close at about 13:30 for a traditional siesta or short break. After siesta, they reopen from around 16:00 until close at 20:00 or 21:00. Most shops are closed on Sundays and a number of businesses, including restaurants and bars, close for holidays in August.

**Contact Information**
International dialing code: +34  
International dialing prefix: 00  
General European emergency number: 112  
Police: 091  
Ambulance: 061  
Fire: 080

**Cultural factors**

**Etiquette and norms**

- Business hours vary considerably, and businesses, shops and government offices may be closed in the early afternoon.  
- In business circles and in tourist areas, English is generally spoken. In more remote areas of the country it is likely that only Spanish is spoken.  
- Punctuality is expected in business situations.  
- There is a requirement to provide proof of your identity if requested by a police officer; the only legally acceptable documents are a passport or a national identification card. The police have the right to hold someone at a police station until their identity is confirmed.  
- Hotels are required to register the passport details of travelers at check-in. Rather than leaving a passport, it is advisable to carry photocopies of your passport with you which can be handed over to hotel staff.  
- A service charge is included with the price of meals and drinks across Spain. However, tipping is a common practice at bars, restaurants and hotels and also for taxis; five to ten percent of the total price is normal.  
- Spain is generally very accepting of LGBT issues; however smaller or remote areas may be more conservative.

**Useful information**

**Useful information**

- [Public holidays](#)  
- [Weather forecast](#)  
- [Maps](#)  
- [Spain tourism](#)  
- [Electricity:](#) 220 volts, 50 Hz; for the most commonly used plug types, please [click here](#).

**Contact details**
Important contact details

- International dialing code: +34
- International dialing prefix: 00

Emergency numbers

- General European emergency number: 112 (this is the best number to call for people who do not speak Spanish)
- Police: 091
- Local police: 092
- Health emergency: 061
- Fire: 080

Embassies

Australian Embassy
Level 24, Torre Espacio Building
Paseo de la Castellana, 259D
Torre Espacio - Planta 24
28046 Madrid
Tel: +34 91 353 6600
Fax: +34 91 353 6692

British Embassy
Torre Espacio
Paseo de la Castellana 259D
Madrid
Tel: +34 91 714 6300
Fax: +34 91 714 6301
Email: spain.consulate@fco.gov.uk

French Embassy
Calle Salustiano Olozaga 9
Madrid
28001
Tel: +34 91 423 8900
Fax: +34 91 700 7801
Email: presse.madrid-amba@diplomatie.gouv.fr

German Embassy
Calle de Fortuny 8
Madrid
28010
Tel: +34 91 557 9000
Fax: +34 91 557 9070
Email: info@madrid.diplo.de

Mexican Embassy
Carrera de San Jerónimo, 46
Health advisory

Health infrastructure

Good medical care, both private and state-run, is available in Spain, but services can be limited outside urban centers. Although many doctors speak some English, not all medical personnel have a good knowledge of the language, so the ability to communicate in Spanish may be advantageous. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate payment for medical services. Pharmacies (*farmacias*) are available in all cities and towns, and all basic medical supplies are readily available.

Pre-travel recommendations

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to Spain:

- Hepatitis A (recommended for travelers going to rural areas)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended for travelers at risk of bites from bats)
- It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

Travelers are advised to visit a doctor or clinic that specializes in travel-related medicine at least four to six weeks prior to their intended departure. This should allow the necessary time for most prescribed vaccinations to take effect. Even if travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks, a visit to a medical professional is still recommended.

Comprehensive medical insurance is strongly recommended. Travelers are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication; this should be accompanied by a written doctor's instruction, explaining the need for the medication and justifying the quantities required.

Significant diseases

The following are some of the more significant diseases that might affect travelers to the country:

- Brucellosis, a highly contagious zoonotic infection, is usually acquired in Spain through consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cattle, sheep or goats. Most cases are reported in Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Aragon, Castilla y Leon and Estremadura.
- Visceral leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease transmitted by the bite of a sand fly, is present across Spain. It is an important opportunistic infection in HIV-infected persons in Spain.
- Echinococcosis cases are reportedly occasionally, mainly in Guadalajara, Soria, Segovia and Caceres. Those in close contact with farm animals are at highest risk of catching the disease.
Mediterranean spotted fever, a tick-borne rickettsial disease, is reported sporadically in Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y Leon, Cataluna and Estremadura.

Recent outbreaks

- Leishmaniasis: An outbreak of leishmaniasis was reported in April 2012, mainly involving Fuenlabrada, Madrid.
- Legionnaires' disease: An outbreak was reported in Vallgorguina in July 2010, resulting in 43 cases. Cases were also reported in Alcoy in June 2010.

Food and water safety

Tap water is safe to drink throughout Spain, but we still recommend that travelers drink bottled water as a precaution. Unpasteurized dairy products should be avoided if possible; unpasteurized milk should be boiled before consumption, or powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative.

Other health risks

The weather in Spain can be very hot and humid in summer, especially between June and September, which has the potential to cause heat stroke and exhaustion. Travelers are advised to take appropriate clothing, to limit their exposure to the sun at the hottest times of day, to use ample sun lotion and to drink plenty of liquids.

Emergency response

The emergency number for an ambulance in Spain is 061, for police 091 and for fire and rescue services 080. The general European emergency number, 112, can also be used. Please note that the response time for ambulances can be slow in rural areas.

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