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 public services. In recent years, Spain’s economy has faced challenges amid the global economic downturn, as well as elevated unemployment rates, particularly among Spanish youth. 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. However, political concerns in country remain LOW.

Spain has some of the lowest rates of violent crime in Europe. However, petty crime poses a MODERATE concern, as it 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 terrorists attacked pedestrians in Barcelona and Cambrils, killing and injuring numerous people. Ongoing prosecution and anticorruption initiatives contribute to Spain’s LOW corruption rating. Civil unrest is a MODERATE concern in country due to an increased number of demonstrations in recent years. Kidnapping is a LOW risk and does not typically affect foreign nationals.

Political conditions

Political

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

The Kingdom of Spain is a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch, King Felipe VI, is merely a moderator taking a largely ceremonial role. The government is directed by the Prime Minister, who makes appointments to the Council of Ministers at his or her will. Spain has a bicameral legislature, the Cortes Generales, which forms the basis of its parliamentary system.

Spain enjoys a stable, if fractious, political environment. Following the ousting of former Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy in a vote of no confidence in May 2018, current Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez leads a minority government. As the leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), Sanchez has changed course on multiple government policies, including immigration, relations with autonomous regions and
relations with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Due to the no-confidence measure that unseated Rajoy, the PSOE holds a mere 22 percent of seats in the Congress of Deputies. The other seats are held by the former ruling conservative People’s Party (28.7 percent), the left-wing Unidos Podemos party (24.5 percent) and smaller parties such as the center-right Citizens’ Party, a pro-Catalan independence party and a left-leaning Catalan nationalist party. Sanchez has called for a general election in April 2019 to establish a new ruling government.

Economic concerns endure within Spanish politics as the country continues to meet EU budgetary guidelines. The support of the EU and associated spending goals, as well as the status of the spending deficit and state debt, remain a politically hot topic within Spanish politics and sometimes spur protests. Anti-EU sentiments in Spain are primarily tied to fiscal requirements from the super-national organization.

Despite criticism from political opponents, the PSOE remains popular in opinion polls. Sanchez has made deals across the political spectrum, gaining support from those on both the right and left. The continuing Catalan separatist movement and conservative political opposition remain challenges for the PSOE and Sanchez, and the navigation of these issues will likely remain a clear marker for near and medium term political success.

**Autonomous areas**

Spain is a multinational state that has experienced political tensions and sporadic violence due to the desire for greater autonomy or independence from some of its regions. The autonomous communities of Catalonia and the Basque Country have both faced political tensions associated with their political statuses. The pro-independence Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) group in the Basque Country carried out attacks across the country for decades; however, a ceasefire in 2011 has largely ended the attacks. Although the group remains classified as a terror organization by Spain, ETA has indicated they will continue efforts to seek a Basque homeland, albeit through political means.

Catalonia – an autonomous, relatively wealthy region in the northeast – has a history of pro-independence sentiment. In October 2017, pro-secessionist groups held a banned referendum and subsequently declared the region’s independence; the Spanish government 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 in December 2017, resulting in the three main pro-separatist parties retaining their control in the region’s parliament with a reduced majority; these parties struggled to form a new government, as many political leaders were either arrested or in exile following the referendum. In May 2018 Catalan lawmakers nominated Quim Torra, who won a simple majority of parliamentary votes to form a government. After Torra appointed a cabinet of ministers, the federal government in Madrid approved an end to direct rule. The Torra government remains in power despite ruling by a thin majority.

**Corruption**

- Petty bribery and corruption are LOW concerns.

Corruption is a low concern in Spain, with relatively lower levels of petty, administrative and police bribery. However, corruption within the business environment does occur. Business corruption in Spain is often tied to bribery and graft related to public contracts. A January 2018 ruling found a dozen people guilty of obtaining illegal commissions from public works contracts.

In 2016, Spain implemented its first anticorruption commission in a bid to fight corruption and foster trust in the government. Since the commission’s establishment, corruption trials have been ongoing, including the trial and subsequent May 2018 sentencing of a number of Spanish politicians and businessmen convicted of bribery, money laundering and tax evasion. The Spanish judicial system investigates, prosecutes and heavily
punishes those found guilty of corruption.

Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors global corruption, gave Spain a score of 58 out of 100 in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The CPI measures levels of perceived corruption ranging from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (extremely transparent). Spain’s score suggests low levels of corruption, and the country was rated as the 41st least-corrupt out of 180 surveyed.

**Security issues**

**General crime**

- Crime is a MODERATE concern, as petty crime and burglaries occur often, particularly in major cities and tourist areas.

Crime in Spain is 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 in Barcelona. These crimes are most common in areas that cater to tourists and in 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 Vía, Plaza Mayor, the Prado Museum and the Atocha railway station. In Barcelona higher rates of petty crime are reported at Las Ramblas, Plaza Real and old town areas of the city. Credit card skimming has also been reported in shops and restaurants, and reports indicate that the number of burglaries in tourist areas has risen, particularly at rental properties and time shares. 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 homicide, in Europe; however, the country is a principal point of entry for illegal narcotics into the European Union. Drug trafficking is common in Spain because of its popularity as a tourist destination. Transnational organized crime groups are heavily involved in the drug trade, both in trafficking and in distribution. Spain is also both a transit and destination country for human trafficking.

**Terrorism**

- Risks from terrorism are LOW, though the country faces threats from transnational terrorism.

Terrorism concerns are low, though recent attacks have taken place. The last significant terror-related event occurred in August 2017, when extremists used vehicles to attack pedestrians in Barcelona and Cambrils, resulting in multiple casualties. In recent months, Spain has experienced multiple terror threats, including a bomb threat in April 2019 against the Australian Embassy and a threat against public transportation in December 2018. No major attacks have occurred in country since 2017, but due to its proximity to North Africa, Spain is a common point of entry for extremists entering continental Europe. 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.

**Civil unrest**

- Civil unrest is a MODERATE concern, as large-scale protest actions have increased in recent years.
Spain has seen an increase in protests and large-scale public demonstrations in recent years, particularly in the capital Madrid and in Barcelona. A large number of demonstrations have been connected to the Catalonian independence movement. Social tensions stemming from this movement have at times led to elevated risks of civil unrest. Barcelona, the largest city in Catalonia, has seen widespread, largely peaceful street demonstrations in favor of and in opposition to independence. Further similar actions are expected in the near term as secessionist groups continue to press for greater autonomy.

Strike actions connected to economic and other concerns also occur periodically and can prompt service disruptions, although large-scale work stoppages are not as common as street demonstrations. Transportation workers – including aviation and public transportation employees – frequently conduct strike actions, which often cause travel and transport disruptions.

**Kidnapping**

- Although kidnapping is a LOW concern, express kidnapping has occurred in country in recent years.

Incidents of kidnap 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 typically focus on activities such as narcotics and human trafficking, prostitution and cybercrime.

**Travel logistics**

**Entering the country**

**Entry Requirements**

- Most travelers require a visa to enter Spain.
- 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 must 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 should consult their nearest embassy or consulate 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 unrest as well as aggravated separatist tensions in the northern, autonomous Catalonia region.
- Petty bribery and corruption are LOW concerns.
- Crime is a MODERATE concern, as petty crime and burglaries occur often, particularly in major cities and tourist areas.
- Risks from terrorism are LOW, though the country faces threats from transnational terrorism.
- Civil unrest is a MODERATE concern, as large-scale protest actions have increased in recent years.
- Although kidnapping is a LOW concern, express kidnapping has occurred in recent years.

**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 traveling 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.

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 exchange services, 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 exchange services, 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 opportunistic crimes occur on public transportation. Pre-arranged transportation through a trusted provider is recommended for all travel in Spain.

- **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.
  - **Self-Driving** - Rental vehicle services are widely available in the country, including at airports and in cities and larger towns. There are a number of toll roads throughout Spain, and tolls must 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. Many local bus services only offer reduced services on weekends, especially in and between smaller towns. Intercity bus services in major cities are generally good, with most lines running during the late evening hours. Some larger cities, such as Madrid and Barcelona, have limited bus service after midnight.
  - **Taxi** - Taxis are readily available in most urban centers. Travelers are advised to only use taxis that display a special license and to ensure that taxi drivers always start the meter at the beginning of journeys. 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 during the early afternoon.
• In business circles and tourist areas, English is often spoken. In more remote areas of the country, it is likely that only Spanish is spoken.
• Punctuality is expected in business situations.
• Individuals are required to provide proof of 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 individuals 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 a passport that can be presented to hotel staff.
• A service charge is included in the price of meals and drinks across Spain. However, tipping is a common practice at bars, restaurants and hotels, as well as for taxis; five to ten percent of the total price is normal.
• Much of the population is generally accepting of LGBTQ people; however, LGBTQ individuals should exercise caution.

Important Dates in 2019

• 1 January – New Year’s Day
• 6 January – Epiphany
• 19 March – St. Joseph’s Day
• 19 April – Good Friday
• 21 April – Easter Sunday
• 22 April – Easter Monday
• 1 May – Labor 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 may be less available outside of urban centers. Although many doctors speak some English, Spanish may be necessary. 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, chickenpox (or varicella), 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, limit their exposure to the sun at the hottest times of day, and stay properly hydrated.

Money

• **Currency** - The currency in Spain is the euro (EUR). 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 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 have currency exchange services.

• **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. Typically, tips consist of change left behind to round up to the nearest euro. In restaurants and taxis, tips of up to 10 percent are expected.

• **Business hours** - Business hours are generally Monday to Friday from 09:00 – 18:00. Normal business hours for stores are Monday to Saturday from approximately 09:00 or 10:00 until they close around 13:30 for a traditional siesta or short break. After the siesta, stores usually 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 vacations in August.

**Contact Information**

- International dialing code: +34
- International dialing prefix: 00
- Police: 091, 112
- Ambulance: 061, 112
- Fire: 080, 112

**Cultural factors**

**General**

Spain is a culturally rich country with a lengthy and storied history. Most of the population adheres to Roman Catholicism, although roughly a quarter of the population does not practice any religion. A number of Catholic traditions are reflected across cultural etiquettes, norms and holidays. Criticism of the Catholic Church should be avoided in conversation.

**Cultural tension**

The Catalan independence movement has spurred protests and other actions since a referendum in late 2017. Those traveling to or from Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia should be mindful of the possible tensions these regions have with other parts of Spain and the Spanish government.

**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 often spoken. In more remote areas of the country, it is likely that only Spanish is spoken.
- Punctuality is expected in business situations.
- Individuals are required to provide proof of 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 individuals 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 a passport that 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.
• Much of the population is generally accepting of LGBTQ people; however, individuals are advised to exercise caution.

Dos and don’ts

• Conservative dress is recommended, especially in rural locations.
• Individuals are generally expected to shake hands when meeting others, greeting elders first.

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

• Police: 091, 112
• Ambulance: 061, 112
• Fire: 080, 112

Embassies

Australian Embassy
Torre Espacio, 24th Floor
Paseo de la Castellana, 259D
28046 Madrid
Tel: +34 91 353 6600
Fax: +34 91 353 6692
Email: madrid.embassy@dfat.gov.au

British Embassy
Torre Espacio
Paseo de la Castellana 259D
28046 Madrid
Tel: +34 91 714 6300
Fax: +34 91 714 6301

Chinese Embassy
Calle Arturo Soria 113
28043 Madrid
Tel: +34 91 519 4242
Fax: +34 91 519 2035  
Email: chinaemb_es@mfa.gov.cn

**French Embassy**  
Calle Salustiano Olozaga 9  
28001 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 423 8900

**German Embassy**  
Calle de Fortuny 8  
28010 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 557 9000  
Fax: +34 91 310 2104

**Japanese Embassy**  
Calle Serrano 109  
28006 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 590 7600  
Fax: +34 91 590 1321

**Mexican Embassy**  
Carrera de San Jeronimo 46  
28014 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 369 2814  
Fax: +34 91 420 2292  
Email: comunicacionesesp@sre.gob.mx

**Saudi Arabian Embassy**  
Calle Dr. Alvarez Sierra 3  
Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 383 4300  
Fax: +34 91 302 1212  
Email: esemb@mofa.gov.sa

**South African Embassy**  
Lista Building, 6th Floor  
Calle Claudio Coello 91  
Corner of J. Ortega y Gasset  
28006 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 436 3780  
Fax: +34 91 577 7414  
Email: madrid@sudafrica.com

**United States Embassy**  
Calle de Serrano 75  
28006 Madrid  
Tel: +34 91 587 2200  
Fax: +34 91 587 2303

**Health advisory**

Health infrastructure
Good medical care, both private and state-run, is available in Spain, but services may be limited outside urban centers. Although many doctors speak some English, a Spanish translator may be necessary. Doctors and hospitals often expect immediate payment for medical services, although the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is accepted throughout the country. Pharmacies (known locally as 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)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Measles (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), 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 any vaccinations prescribed by the doctor to take effect. If travel is to be undertaken in less than four weeks, a visit to a medical professional is still recommended.

Comprehensive medical insurance, including provision for medical repatriation or evacuation, is strongly recommended. Travelers are also advised to take an appropriate supply of any prescription medication; this should be accompanied by a doctor's written 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 Spain:

- Brucellosis, a highly contagious zoonotic infection, is usually acquired by consuming unpasteurized dairy products from infected cattle, sheep or goats. Most cases are reported in Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Aragon, Castilla y Leon and Extremadura.
- 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 disease, is reported sporadically in Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y Leon, Catalonia and Extremadura.
- Visceral leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease transmitted by the bite of a sand fly, is present across Spain. It is a significant opportunistic infection in HIV-positive individuals in Spain.

**Recent outbreaks**

- There have been no major recently reported outbreaks.

**Food and water safety**

Although water sanitation standards are adequate, travelers are advised to only drink bottled water or filtered 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 and to stay hydrated.

**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. The response time for ambulances can be slow in rural areas.

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