



PRACTICAL INFORMATION HISPANIC STUDIES

Electrical appliances

The electrical current used in Europe is 50 cycles AC rather than the 60-cycle current used in the U.S. and voltage is 220-240 rather than the standard U.S. 110 volts for small appliances. Additionally, most electrical sockets have round holes. A converter (or transformer) and adapter plugs are needed in order to use typical home appliances. Most all computers come with a built in voltage converter.

We recommend you to buy in Spain small electrical appliances such as travel irons, curling irons, blow dryers, and electric razors etc, since they are normally cheap and this way you will make sure the outlets will not be damaged.

Climate

Spain's climate is described as continental or Mediterranean, with hot summers and cold winters. The winters generally have long, cold, dry spells, with occasional downpours. The average winter temperature is 60°F, but from December to February it may be colder. Summer is generally dry and warm, sometimes reaching 80°F.

Most buildings in Spain have central heating but many apartments and buildings do not have air conditioning.

General information about Spain

The following books and guides provide helpful information:

- Lonely Planet's Shoestring Guides for Eastern and Western Europe
- Frommer's Spain
- Let's Go Spain
- Michelin Guides (red and green)
- Baedekker's Spain
- Blue Guide Spain
- Nagel's Spain
- Spanish Island Hopping—A Guide for the Independent Traveler
- Berlitz guide to Madrid.



Communication

Use e-mail, faxes, and private couriers*. The Spanish post mail system also works well. Though for critical communications and shipments we recommend to use couriers.

*UPS or DHL have offices in Spain.

Post Mail

Past students say that airmail from the U.S. takes from two to six weeks to arrive.

Packages of any kind should not be sent to the local Study Center office. You can receive small packages at your home address once settled in an apartment. Warn friends and family at home to send small packages only. Large packages are not delivered and you must pick them up. M-Bags are the cheapest way to send heavy packages, though it may take longer.

If you are planning to send expensive items we highly recommend to use UPS or DHL.

You should ask family and friends to stop sending you mail and packages at least two weeks before the program end date.

Any packages containing used books, clothes, and other personal items must be clearly marked *Efectos Personales Usados* (Used Personal Items) and *Sin Valor Comercial* (No Commercial Value).

Do not use the phrase "in care of" on any letters; the phrase "in care of" is not recognized in Spain.

Cell phones

Cellular phones are extremely common in Spain and are easy to rent or purchase. Past students have found that purchasing a cell phone that works with pre-paid calling cards (which can be recharged using a credit card) is a very convenient way to stay in touch with friends and family. Cellular phones are also advisable as they allow the program coordinator to contact you at any time in case of emergency. Cellular phones cost anywhere from U.S. \$73 to \$150. The main providers in Spain are Movistar, Vodafone, and Orange. Using a cell phone to call the U.S. can be expensive, but receiving calls (including calls from the U.S.) on a cellular phone is free for the cell phone owner. Text messaging is very popular and the cost of messaging varies. We do not recommend that you bring a cell phone from the U.S. to Spain; many do not work in Europe and the ones that do often carry high charges for calls. Check with your cellular provider for more information.



Calling cards

Many U.S.-based long distance phone companies, including AT&T, Sprint, and MCI, provide special services that make it easy for students to phone home from abroad. Some provide a toll-free access number that connects with an operator in the U.S. Some provide the means to charge long distance calls either to a credit card or to a third party. You should investigate the possibilities before departure and shop around for the best services and rates. Be sure to confirm the card you purchase will work for calls originating outside of the U.S., as many students find that some prepaid phone cards purchased in the U.S. do not work overseas. It will probably be less expensive and more convenient to purchase a phone card once in Spain. You can purchase an international calling card from any tobacco shop (estanco).

Computer Access and Use

We encourage all students to bring a laptop computer to Spain.

The majority of students (with or without laptops) utilize Internet cafés, which are quite common and popular in Spain, to check e-mail, access the Internet, and write and print papers.

Handling Money Abroad

Plan on using a combination of methods to handle money in case one doesn't work (e.g., a local ATM is temporarily out of service).

You will have to cover the costs of daily transportation, books and school supplies, and personal items, among others.

We offer you some examples of prices in Madrid

- Examples:
- 1 can of Coke: 1€approx.
 - 1 Big Mac Combo: 6 €approx.
 - 1 Restaurant menu for lunch: 8-10€approx.

Cash/ATM

Using an ATM card is by far the easiest way to access your money overseas, and the exchange rate is the most favorable. ATMs are widely available in Spain and you will receive cash in local currency (euros). You may also have financial aid or other support



funds deposited directly into your U.S. checking account by a relative or reliable friend. You can then withdraw these funds (in euros) via an ATM.

The ATM card must have an international PIN (4 digit, numerical only) in order to work in Spain. Contact your bank to change your pin, if necessary (keep in mind when choosing a PIN that ATMs overseas do not have letters on the keypads as they do in the U.S.).

In addition, ask your bank if there is a daily withdrawal limit (there may be European ATM withdrawal limitations) and obtain information on any fees your bank may charge for using an international ATM.

Before withdrawing money from an ATM check that your card is admitted without charge of commission. (As in the USA).

Credit cards

Credit cards are useful for emergencies, travel expenses, and everyday purchases. Most stores and restaurants in Spain honor major credit cards. VISA is the most widely accepted credit card in Europe followed by MasterCard. American Express is not widely accepted, but can be used to purchase travelers checks overseas. The Discover Card is not widely accepted outside the U.S.

You may obtain a cash advance with your VISA or MasterCard from a bank offering this service, though this can be an expensive way to access cash. Before departure, you will also want to find out what fees may apply for cash advances. We recommend that you obtain an international PIN for your credit card in the event that you need to obtain a cash advance after-hours. Your PIN is not usually required if the transaction is conducted inside the bank, but you must show your passport. Keep in mind when choosing a PIN that overseas ATMs do not have letters on the keypads as they do in the U.S. If you plan to use your credit card for cash advances, check with the issuing bank in the U.S. before departure to confirm that the card will be accepted by European banks and ATMs.

Since you will be paid by transfer, your bank may offer you a Spanish credit/debit card. Not all the banks have the same policy concerning credit cards, so check with your bank if they are going to charge you an annual fee for the card or other bank conditions.

Travelers checks

For everyday purchases, travelers checks are almost obsolete; you are better off relying on cash, an ATM card, and credit cards. However, travelers checks can be useful in an emergency or as an alternate source of money should you lose your wallet, or if your ATM card does not work.



American Express Travelers Checks are the most widely accepted. Be sure to make two copies of the check numbers, and give one copy to a family member or friend before you leave home. Keep the other copy for yourself, separate from the actual checks. Should your checks be lost or stolen, you will need to provide these numbers and corresponding receipts in order to obtain replacements.

Travelers checks can be exchanged for local currency (euros) at any bank marked Cambio or at exchange offices (oficinas de cambio) conveniently located throughout Madrid. A transaction fee will be charged and some banks may insist on exchanging a minimum amount.

Western Union

Western Union can be used to have money sent from home in a very short amount of time (sometimes within minutes). In most instances, you can receive local currency at competitive foreign exchange rates. Your local telephone book should have the number and address of the nearest office or check www.westernunion.com