

LEVELED Book • Y

# Spain



Written by Martina Deignan

[www.readinga-z.com](http://www.readinga-z.com)

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## Focus Question

What is unique about Spain's culture?

# Words to Know

aqueducts  
archipelago  
artisans  
currency  
democracy  
economy

heritage  
parliament  
plateau  
prime minister  
strait  
urban

Front cover: Built in the early 1900s, Park Güell in Barcelona, Spain, includes structures designed by famous architect Antoni Gaudí.

Title page: A family enjoys ice cream on a city street in Spain.

Page 3: Citizens enjoy a theatrical event at a festival in Berga, Spain.

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## Correlation

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## Map of Spain



### Where Is It?

Spain is a country located in southwestern Europe on the Iberian Peninsula. It lies south of the Pyrenees (PEER-uh-neeze) mountains and stretches all the way to the **Strait of Gibraltar**—a body of water that separates Spain from the continent of Africa. France borders Spain to the northeast, and Portugal borders it to the west.

The Balearic Islands off Spain's eastern coast form an **archipelago** in the Mediterranean Sea. People appreciate this string of five islands for its beautiful beaches and rich holiday traditions. People also enjoy the beaches of the Canary Islands off the western coast of Morocco.

The capital and largest city in Spain is Madrid. Its population is roughly 3.3 million, with about 6.5 million people living in its surrounding area. Madrid sits on a raised **plateau** about 640 meters (2,100 ft.) above sea level.

The Royal Palace in Madrid is one of the grandest buildings in all of Europe. King Alfonso XIII—the last monarch to live in the palace—fled the country in 1931. After the king left, the state took control of the Royal Palace, and no member of the monarchy ever lived there again. The Spanish royal family now lives in a much smaller palace outside of Madrid.

Spain's government—known as a constitutional monarchy—has a **prime minister** and a lawmaking group called **parliament** whose members are elected by the people. Their king, Felipe VI, is the head of the government. However, only the elected officials can make and pass laws.

The Royal Palace was built in the 1700s and boasts 2,800 rooms. Today it is used for state ceremonies and public tours.



Farmers grow more than two hundred types of olives in Spain. Spain overtook Italy in 2014 as the world's largest producer of olive oil.



## People

The population of Spain as of January 2016 was estimated to be fewer than forty-eight million people. The **urban** population far exceeds that of the rural areas. About three-quarters of the population lives in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and other smaller cities.

Tourism employs about two million people and is very important to Spain's **economy**. The auto industry remains one of Spain's largest employers. Other industries include textiles, food, apparel, shipbuilding, and the making of medical equipment. On top of that, Spain proudly produces and exports more olive oil than any other country in the world.

Spain is a member of the European Union (EU). The EU began in 1951 with the countries of Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, and Italy taking part. Its purpose was to have countries work together to solve common concerns such as trade, security, and the rights of citizens. Most EU members share a **currency** called the euro. As of 2015, the EU had twenty-eight member nations.

Spain's official language is Spanish, or Castilian, and most people speak it. Depending on the region, people also speak Basque, Galician, and Catalan languages.

Textile workers prepare clothing to be sold in stores (right). People enjoy a sidewalk cafe in Palma, Spain (below).



## Spain's Landforms



### Land

Spain's varied landscape ranges from high plateaus in its interior to dry desert-like regions in the south. Beautiful beaches and mountain ranges around the country create distinct environments. The Meseta Central, a plateau in central Spain, covers about half of the country. People mine silver, lead, and copper and raise livestock in the mountains that border the Meseta.

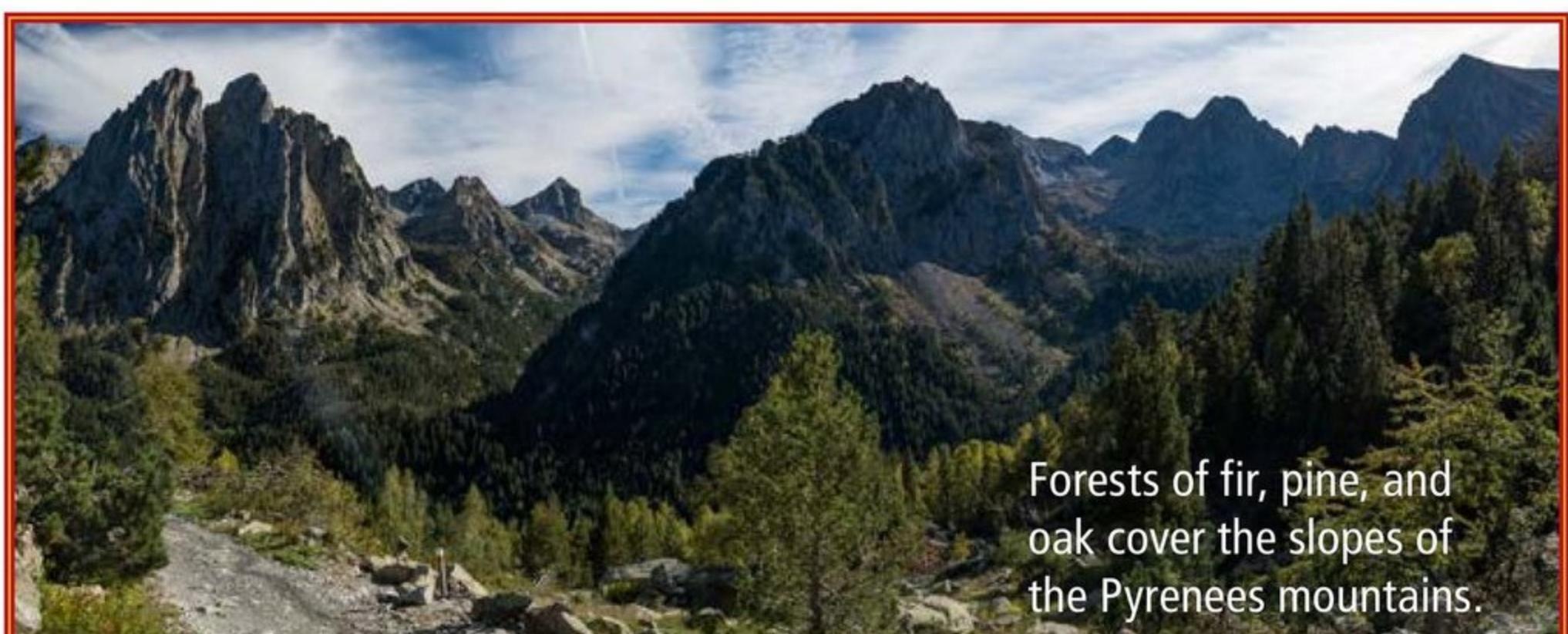
The dramatic and craggy Sierra Nevada mountain chain rises over southern Spain, with Mount Mulhacén (moo-lah-THEN) towering over the entire range. The Sierra Nevada is part of the Andalusian (an-duh-LOO-zhuhn) region in the southeast. The Pyrenees mountains lie to the north and form a solid natural border between Spain and France.

The Pyrenees mountain chain stretches from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The chain extends 434 kilometers (270 mi.) long.

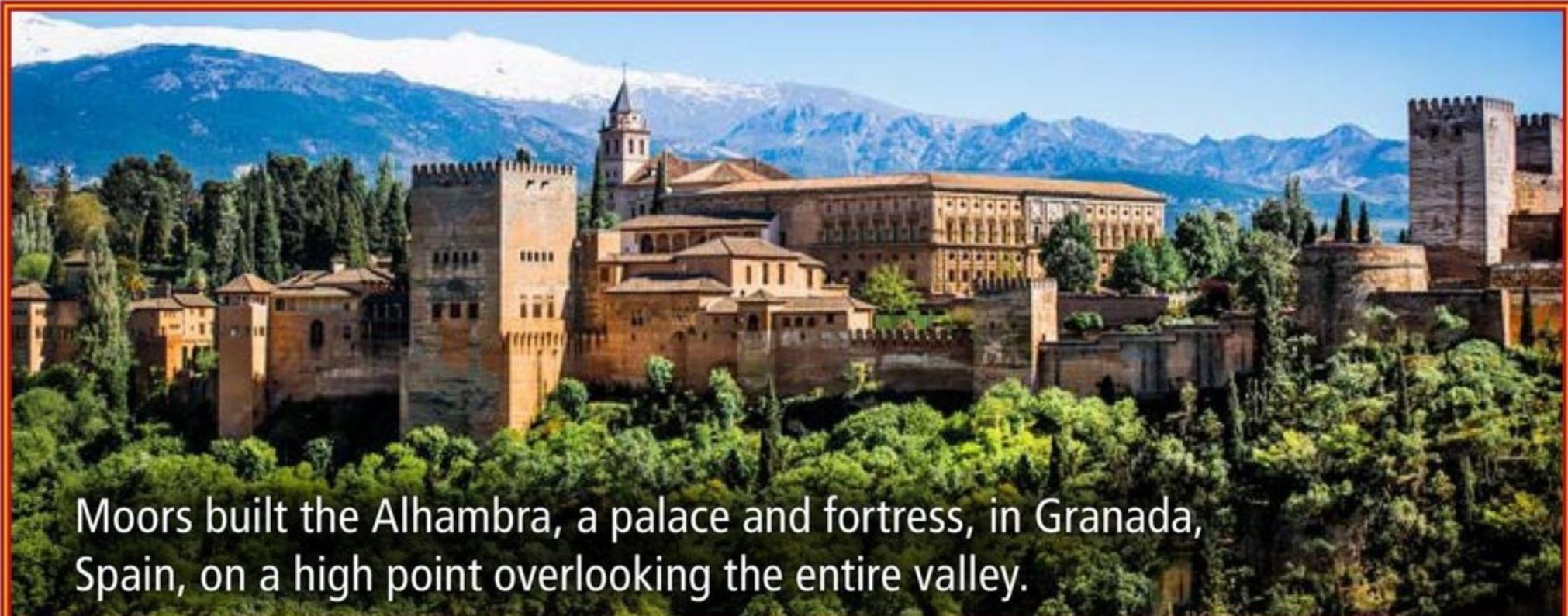
The western part of the mountain range is a lush, rolling, heavily wooded countryside. In the east, vineyards and orchards are plentiful. The central region includes a rich display of glaciers, granite peaks, deep canyons, waterfalls, and hundreds of mountain lakes.

Several groups of people—the Andorran, Catalan, Béarnese (bair-NEEZ), and Basque—call the Pyrenees mountains their home. Traditionally, they make a living through agriculture and raising livestock.

A wide variety of animals also live in these mountains. The brown bear, a species of goat-antelope called the *chamois* (sham-WAH), and the rare bearded vulture all live in the Pyrenees.



Forests of fir, pine, and oak cover the slopes of the Pyrenees mountains.



Moors built the Alhambra, a palace and fortress, in Granada, Spain, on a high point overlooking the entire valley.

## History

People from Phoenicia (fi-NEE-shuh) settled southern Spain around 800 bc. Phoenicia is Lebanon, Syria, and Israel today. Phoenicians were skilled **artisans** and sailors who traded ivory and perfumes for bronze and silver goods.

Greek traders from Carthage (now Tunisia) followed around 500 bc and brought with them olive trees and grapes. Then, around 200 bc, the Romans arrived and ruled Spain for about six hundred years. They constructed roads and bridges that connected towns. They also built **aqueducts** that carried water from rivers to cities.

Germanic people came from the north after the Romans. Then, Muslim settlers known as Moors arrived in the AD 700s and forced the Germanic people from power. Moorish buildings can still be seen in Spain today, including monuments such as the Alhambra, a palace in Granada built in the 1300s, and the Great Mosque of Córdoba.

For many centuries, Spain had been divided into kingdoms. The main ones were Aragon, Castile, and Granada. Two of these kingdoms became one when King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile married. The king and queen were Catholic monarchs who won a war against the Moors for control of Granada.

Ferdinand and Isabella paid explorers such as Christopher Columbus to find new trade routes for Spain to Asia. When Columbus discovered the New World (islands in the Caribbean Sea), Spanish colonies were set up there, and gold, silver, and spices were sent back to Spain. This period became the “Golden Age” of Spain. However, much wealth was spent on wars with northern Europe. Spain’s riches began to disappear.

The next four hundred years were a time of great unrest in Europe. Countries fought for control of land and territories well into the twentieth century.

From 1936 to 1939, Spain fought a violent civil war. When the war ended, General Francisco Franco took control of the country and ruled as a dictator until his death in 1975. After Franco’s death, King Juan Carlos I became the next king and designated Adolfo Suárez—who brought **democracy** to Spain—as prime minister.

## Celebrations

The Spanish people look forward to local holidays called *fiestas*, or festivals. These holidays often celebrate local harvests, historical events, or saints linked to particular places. Lively and fun, they include dancing, singing, parades, and fireworks.

St. George's Day, on April 23, is a time for people to give loved ones books and red roses. In July, Pamplona hosts the Festival of San Fermín. During this festival, men and women try to dodge bulls as they run through the streets of Pamplona.

National Day takes place on October 12. This is the date that marks Christopher Columbus's landing in the Americas. For the Spanish people, it is also the date that honors Spain as an important country in the world.

### La Tomatina

*La Tomatina* is a yearly festival held in honor of a patron saint. It is likely the world's biggest tomato fight. At this festival, ripened tomatoes are brought in by the truckload, and people throw tomatoes at one another—just for fun.





## Tapas

Tapas are finger foods that can be eaten cold or hot and are usually served on small plates. People serve shrimp and squid along the Spanish coasts, while people serve sausages inland.

## Food

The Spanish love their food and usually eat three meals a day. A Spanish breakfast might have coffee, milk, or hot chocolate, a sweet roll, and sometimes cereal. They eat lunch—the biggest meal of the day—around two in the afternoon. Lunch may include soup, salad, a main course, and dessert. Dinner is a lighter meal and is served late, anywhere from nine to eleven in the evening.

Each region in Spain enjoys its own style of food. Coastal regions typically serve seafood. People in central Spain often eat beans, lentils, lamb, and pork. Valencia, known for its rice dishes, is famous for paella—a rice dish that can be made with fish, meat, and vegetables. A delicious and popular soup called *gazpacho* comes from the Andalusian region of Spain. Made with tomatoes and other vegetables, the soup is often served cold in the summer as a refreshing meal.



Antoni Gaudí designed this remarkable church, which stands in Barcelona, Spain. Construction began in 1882 and it still continues.

## Conclusion

The Spanish are a very proud people. Although many identify with the town or region they're from, their celebrations and festivals bring them together as a nation. Some regions still try to preserve their own traditions, but the country has been unified for many years.

Spain is one of the most lively cultural centers in the European Union. It boasts an amazing **heritage** due in part to the arrival of people from many different parts of the world who have brought celebrations, food, and architecture to Spanish culture. Although the Spanish treasure their rich and remarkable history, they are also a people who enjoy living in the present. Spain's beauty, its long cultural heritage, and the warmth of its people help to make our world a more interesting place to live in.



**Population:** 48,146,134

**Land:** 498,980 sq km (310,052 sq. mi.)

**Capital City:** Madrid

**Primary Language:** Castilian Spanish  
(74% of population)

**Primary Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Name of Currency:** euro



Source: Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook (2015)

## Glossary

<b>aqueducts</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	artificial channels that carry water from one place to another (p. 10)
<b>archipelago</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a cluster or chain of islands (p. 4)
<b>artisans</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who are skilled at a craft or trade and who create items by hand (p. 10)
<b>currency</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	money, in any acceptable form, used to represent the value of goods and resources (p. 7)
<b>democracy</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a form of government that is run by the people through free and frequent elections (p. 11)
<b>economy</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the circulation of money in industry, trade, and finance in a country or area (p. 6)
<b>heritage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a way of life, tradition, or characteristic that is passed down from generation to generation (p. 14)
<b>parliament</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a group of government officials who can make and change a nation's laws (p. 5)
<b>plateau</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a large raised area of flat land (p. 5)
<b>prime minister</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the leader of the government in most countries that have a parliament (p. 5)
<b>strait</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a narrow passage of water connecting two large areas of water (p. 4)
<b>urban</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to cities or towns and the people living in them (p. 6)

# Spain

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,418

## Connections

### Writing

Research to learn more about the evolution of the Spanish government. Write an essay detailing the changes in Spain's government systems from the 1300s until today.

### Social Studies

Make a timeline of at least five significant events in Spain's history. Then write a paragraph analyzing how each event helped shape modern Spain.

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