

**Title:**

Overview of Spain for Travelers

**Word Count:**

388

**Summary:**

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**Keywords:**

spain, europe, spanish, spaniards, madrid, barcelona, franco, king, basque, catalan,

**Article Body:**

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**Overview of Spain for Travelers**

The official name of the country is the Kingdom of Spain. It covers an area of approximately 194,000 square miles. This includes both the mainland and the Balearic and Canary Islands. This total square mileage makes Spain one of the bigger countries in Europe, approximately the size of the combined states of Arizona and Utah.

The capital of Spain is Madrid, home to roughly 5.5 million residents. Other major cities include Barcelona with 4.9 people, Malaga with 1.3 million, Seville with 1.8 million and Valencia with just over 2 million residents. The terrain of Spain varies from flat to mountainous. Temperatures range from cool in the winter to baking hot in the summer, particularly in cities such as Madrid, which do not have access to costal breezes.

Until 1975, Spain was a functional dictatorship ruled by General Francisco Franco. Following his death in 1975, the Prince Juan Carlos de Borbon y Borbon was named King and Chief of State. He subsequently moved to liberalize the country and assigned an independent head of state that is now an elected official.

Spain has been in a near constant state of civil war for much of the last 100 years. Basque factions seek independence from the rule of the King and federal

government. This has manifested itself in the form of bombings and such. Barcelona is considered a Basque city, which makes for a major rivalry between the city and Madrid. If you have an opportunity to attend a soccer game between the two, do so! Violence is rare, but the insults are definitely unique.

The people of Spain are known as Spaniards or Spanish. The total population is just over 44 million and growing at one percent a year. Ethnic breakdowns are geographically oriented, but include Basques, Catalans and Galicians. The religious tendency of the country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic.

The official language of Spain is Spanish. That being said, Catalan-Valenciana, Galician, and Basque languages form a prevalent minority. Education is compulsory through age 16 and literacy rates are in the 98 percent range.

Spain is a unique country. Whereas much of Europe seems to be in a rush to mesh cultures, Spain stands uniquely apart.