

Culture Wise **SPAIN**

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

Joanna Styles





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& Business Etiquette

by

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WHAT READERS & REVIEWERS HAVE

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

Living France

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

Swiss News

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice. This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

American Citizens Abroad

‘Let’s say it at once. David Hampshire’s Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l’Hexagone. It is Hampshire’s meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. This book is absolutely indispensable.’

The Riviera Reporter

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

Reader

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

The Recorder

‘The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process.’

American Club of Zurich

SAID ABOUT SURVIVAL BOOKS

‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

Reader

‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT – follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.’

Living France

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life . I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the DO’s and DON’T’s for a foreigner in Switzerland. Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

Reader

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

Everything Spain

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

ICI (Switzerland) AG



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INTRODUCTION

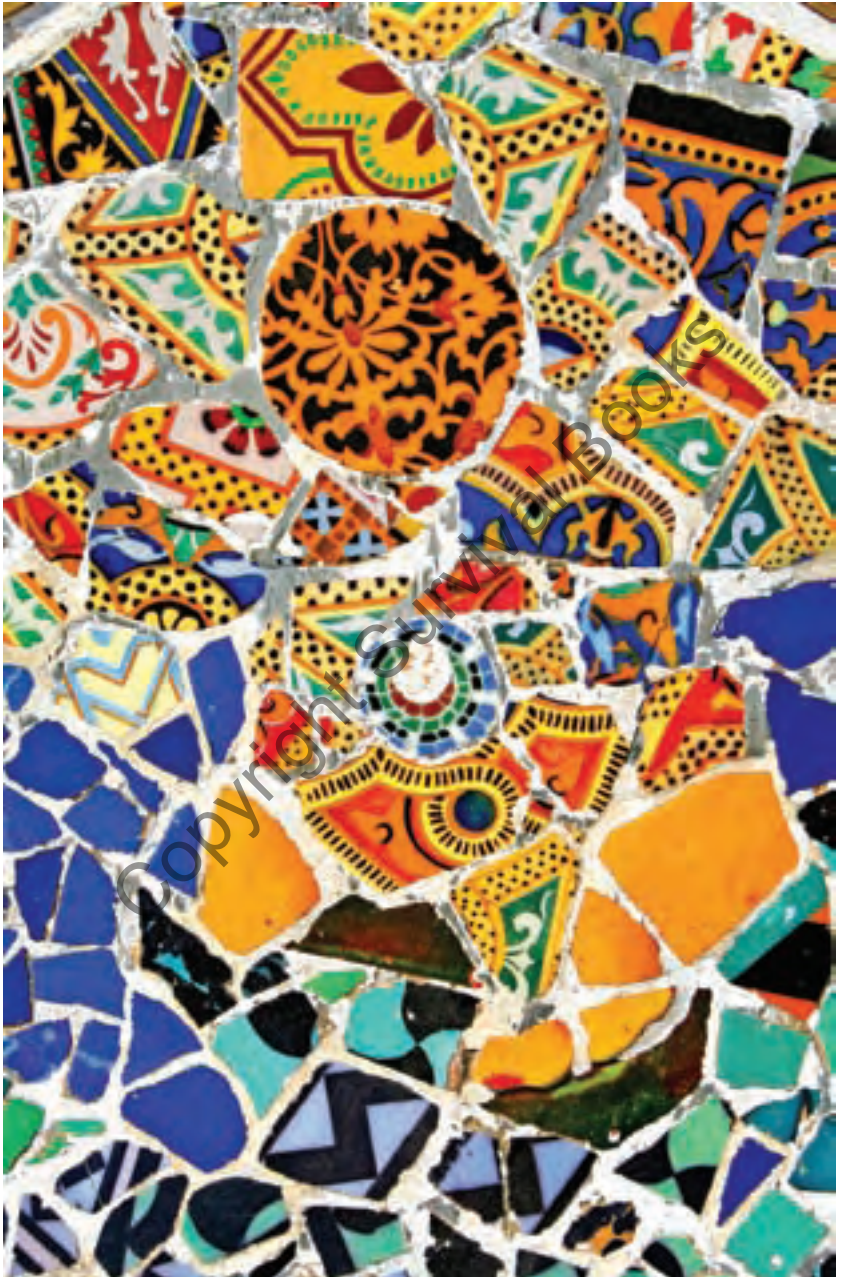
If you're planning a trip to Spain or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise Spain* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay forever, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Culture Wise Spain is essential reading for anyone planning to visit Spain, including, tourists, business people, migrants, retirees and holiday homeowners. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance their understanding of Spain and the Spanish people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water.

Spain is a hugely popular holiday destination and the leading European country for second homes and retirement. On the face of it, it seems an 'easy' option, with millions of visitors from all corners of the globe and well-established expatriate communities. But, don't be deceived: adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and Spain is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the Spanish way of doing things; whether it's eating dinner at nearly midnight, adjusting to Spain's frenetic driving conditions (and driving on the right-hand side of the road) or dealing with the country's oppressive bureaucracy.

Spain is a nation with a deep-rooted culture – perhaps more so than any other Western European country – where traditions and the traditional way of life remain strong. It isn't simply a sunny spot where you can eat out cheaply but an extremely diverse country populated by an even more diverse people (or peoples), whose character and culture are deeply embedded in everyday life. Above all, it's a country with an irrepressible lifestyle, a land of (almost) perpetual sunshine, where the people live life to the fullest.

A period spent in Spain is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. I trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in Spain and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.



Park Güell, Barcelona

1.

A CHANGE OF CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad have never been more accessible, and current migration patterns suggest that it has never been more popular. But, although globalisation means the world has ‘shrunk’, every country is still a world of its own with a unique culture.

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause, as non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture – for example your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic situation, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change and bring balance and meaning to your life is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

SPAIN IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign (despite the cosy familiarity engendered by cinema, television and books).

Spain is popularly perceived by many foreigners – particularly the British – as an easy expatriate option because of its well established foreign communities the length and breadth of its Mediterranean coast.

However, despite the widespread availability of all-day English breakfasts and *The Daily Mail*, it’s difficult to avoid the real Spain and Spanish culture. Moving to a *Costa*

might be simpler than moving to, say, Madrid to begin with, but sooner or later culture shock sets in. When you move to Spain you'll need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges, which may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment, which can be overwhelming – and all this before you even encounter the local culture. Those who move to a new job in Spain may encounter a (very) steep learning curve. The chances are that you've left a job in your home country where you held a senior position, were extremely competent and knew all your colleagues. In Spain, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your Spanish isn't fluent) and not know any of your colleagues.

The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Spain has many extremes of climate and weather, and you mustn't underestimate the effects that these can have on you. Extreme conditions of heat and cold can lead to a lack of energy, poor sleep and dehydration. In the summer in many parts of Spain, air-conditioning is common and if you aren't used to this it can be draining.

Even if you move to a part of Spain with a well established expatriate community, items that you're used to and took for granted in your home country may not be available, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to engage in your favourite hobby or sport, books and television



programmes in your language. The lack of 'home comforts' can wear you down. You'll also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you had a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives you could rely on for help and support. In Spain, there's no such network, which can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in Spain and what you'll be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences, although if you are, it will enhance your enjoyment and may save you a few embarrassing or confusing moments.

However, if you're planning a business trip or intend to spend an extended period in Spain, perhaps

working, studying or even living there permanently, **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country. It can even affect people moving to a new environment in their home country, where the culture, and in some cases language, may vary considerably by region or social class. Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It manifests itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate.

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

You literally feel like a fish out of water. Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse – the thousand and one clues to behaviour in everyday situations: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use a cash machine or the



telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired in the course of our life and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and social efficiency depends on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised. The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological – although you can experience physical pain from culture shock – and are caused by the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded on a daily basis by cultural differences in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references.

However, there are also physical symptoms including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headaches) and more

serious psychosomatic illnesses brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock – often experienced when moving to a country with a different language – usually follows a number of stages. The names of these may vary, as may the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage and usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks after arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the usual pressures of life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or a short trip abroad,

Every year, a dozen or so Japanese tourists have to be repatriated from the French capital after falling prey to what has become known as 'Paris Syndrome'. This is what some polite Japanese tourists suffer when they discover that Parisians can be rude or that the city doesn't meet their expectations. The experience can be so stressful that they suffer a nervous breakdown and need to be hospitalised or repatriated under medical supervision.

when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).



2. The second (rejection or distress) stage is usually completely opposite to the first and is essentially negative and a period of crisis, as the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off and you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except of course that life is nothing like anything you've previously experienced. This can happen after only a few weeks and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish is an important symptom of this stage. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television and reading newspapers

from your home country, eating food from home and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture.

Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered.

The transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult one and takes time to complete. During this process there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction.

The period of readjustment can last six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) those who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.

3. The third stage is often known as the 'flight' stage (because of the overwhelming desire to escape) and is usually the one that lasts the longest and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people.

You may experience difficulties such as not being understood and feelings of discontent, impatience, frustration, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you're trying to adapt to a new culture

that's very different from that of your home country, and they're exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country and focus exclusively on the negative aspects, refusing to acknowledge any positive points. You may become hostile and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country.

Other people will sense this and in many cases either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. There may be problems with the language, your house, job or children's school, transportation ... even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with problems, and the fact that the local people are largely indifferent to all these problems only makes matter worse. They try to help but they just don't understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

4. The fourth (recovery or autonomy) stage is where you



begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. **The environment doesn't change – what changes is your attitude towards it.** You become more competent with the language and you also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country and can move around without feeling anxiety. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues and you won't understand everything people say (particularly colloquialisms and idioms). Nevertheless, you have largely adjusted to the new culture and start to feel more at home and familiar with the country and your place in it, and begin to realise that it has its good as well as bad points.

'Travellers never think that THEY are the foreigners.'

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

5. The fifth stage is termed 'reverse culture shock' and occurs when you return to your home country. You may find that many

things have changed (you will also have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them, with the result that some stages last longer and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably and there are certain things you can do even before leaving home:

Toledo





- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is a positive attitude towards Spain (whether you're visiting or planning to live there) – if you don't look forward to a holiday or relocation, you should question why you're doing it. There's no greater guarantee for unhappiness in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you. It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour,

the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by yours.

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about Spain before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it might otherwise. Reading up on Spain and its culture before you leave home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs and language, and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You'll be aware of many of the differences in Spain and be better prepared to deal with them. This will help you avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights and also reduce the chance of your offending the locals by cultural misunderstandings.

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its negative and depressing consequences reduced.

Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion (or worse) makes it easier to cope with it. There are literally hundreds of publications about Spain as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see Appendices B and C). Many sites provide access to expatriates already living in Spain who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also

'notice boards' on many websites where you can post messages or questions.

- **Visit Spain first** – If you're planning to live or work in Spain for a number of years or even permanently, it's important to visit the country to see whether you think you would enjoy living there and be able to cope with the culture before making the leap. Before you go, try to find someone who has visited Spain and talk to him about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before buying a home and don't burn your bridges until you're certain that you've made the right decision.
- **Learn Spanish** – Along with adopting a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will probably be the most decisive factor in combating culture shock and enjoying your time in Spain. The ability to speak Spanish (or the local language – see **Chapter 5**) isn't just a practical and useful tool (that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc.) but the key to understanding Spain and its culture. If you can speak the language, even at a low level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened beyond the limited expatriate circle.

'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)



Mojacar, Almeria

Obviously not everyone is a linguist and learning a language can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance virtually anyone can learn enough of another language to participate in the local culture. Certainly the effort will pay off and expatriates who manage to overcome the language barrier find their experience in Spain much richer and more rewarding than those who don't. If you make an effort at communicating with the local people in their own language, you'll also find them far more receptive to you and your needs.

- **Be proactive** – Make an effort to get involved in your new culture and go out of your way to make friends. Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or

a social activity. There are often plenty of local clubs where you can engage in sport or keep fit, draw and paint, learn to cook local dishes, taste wine, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet people and make new friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club, perhaps because the language barrier is too great, then you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the most popular destinations. Look upon a period spent abroad as an opportunity to redefine your life objectives and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.



- **Talk to other expatriates** – Although they may deny it, they've all been through exactly what you're experiencing and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even if they cannot provide you with advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone and that it gets better over time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.

The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land. '

G. K. Chesterton (English writer)

- **Keep in touch with home** – Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.
- **Be happy** – Don't rely others to make you happy; otherwise you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are things in life which you can change and if you need them to change you must do it yourself. Every day we are surrounded by things over which we have little or no control and to wail about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend and nurture your own capacity for happiness.



Avila

FAMILIES IN SPAIN

Family life may be completely different in Spain and relationships can become strained under the stress of adapting to culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be much more luxurious or significantly smaller) and the climate may be dramatically different from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.

In a situation where one spouse is working (usually the husband)

and the other not, it's usually the latter (and any children) who's more affected by culture shock. The husband has his work to occupy him and his activities may not differ much from what he'd been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in a totally new environment, which differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often, as there will be no close relatives or friends on hand.

However, if you're aware that this situation may arise, you can take action to reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be raised and, if

'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'

James A. Michener (American writer)

possible, answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult your situation may appear at the beginning, it will help to bear in mind that it's by no means unique and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted only in order to help you prepare and adjust to a new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**



As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in Spain or any other country. Treat Spain and its people with respect and they will do likewise.

The majority of people living in a foreign land would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent abroad is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager. We trust that this book will help you to avoid some of the pitfalls of life abroad and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding future in your new home.

'Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.'

Mark Twain (American author)



2.

WHO ARE THE SPANISH?

For years, Europe's second-largest country has tempted foreigners to its shores, and nowadays Spain is more popular than ever: it tops the European retirement location charts and, with over 55m visitors annually, it's the world's second-most popular tourist destination after France. It's also a popular relocation spot, not only for those from less-developed countries looking for better opportunities in the buoyant job market, but also for thousands of European Union (EU) citizens attracted by the unique combination of sunshine, low cost of living and relaxed lifestyle.

But Spain isn't just a sunny spot where you can eat out cheaply: it's an extremely diverse country populated by an even more diverse people, whose character and culture are deeply embedded in everyday life.

The regional variety found in Spain is perhaps unique in Europe and few countries can rival it for contrast. Its contrasts mostly co-exist peacefully, but every so often they clash – Spain has a chequered history and is the EU country with the most recent civil war and dictatorship. However, although they don't agree on many things, the Spaniards are unanimous that 'Spain is different' (not for nothing was this the Tourist Board's slogan during the '80s).

To help explain this diversity and who the Spanish are, this chapter provides information on Spain's history and the Spaniards' character. A list of Spanish cultural icons can also be found here.

America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, a member of Columbus's crew and the first person to realise that they had discovered a new continent.

TIMELINE

Like many other European countries, Spain has a rich and chequered history. The main events are as follows:

First Arrivals

400,000 years ago – First inhabitants are cave dwellers and their remains provide some of the world's most important clues to prehistoric man.

5,000BC – Celts inhabit much of the north of the peninsula; recent research suggests that they originated in Galicia, from where they migrated to Ireland, Britain and France.

800BC – The Phoenicians, who establish many maritime settlements, including Cadiz, Europe's oldest city.

600BC – The Greeks, who go no further than the north-east of the peninsula

200BC – The Romans, who stay for