



HOW TO

study abroad in

Spain

UPDATED
for 2018





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Introduction

Maybe you've chosen Spain because it's the country of Velásquez, Miguel de Cervantes, Fernando Torres, Rafael Nadal and Pedro Almodóvar...

If the thought of studying abroad somewhere warm and sunny, all while becoming fluent in one of the world's most-spoken languages, really appeals to you, Spain is certainly not going to disappoint.

Maybe you've chosen Spain because it's the country of Velásquez, Miguel de Cervantes, Fernando Torres, Rafael Nadal and Pedro Almodóvar...or maybe you're just a big fan of *churros con chocolate*.

Whatever the reason, you're not alone. The number of international students in Spain currently stands at just under 95,000, with many of these hailing from the UK, US, France, Brazil and Mexico.

If you're hoping to join this number, continue reading and find out about Spain's higher education system, employment prospects after graduation, funding opportunities, exchange programs and advice regarding applications and visas.



Higher education in Spain

Spain has a very long and rich history of encouraging higher education, with one of the world's oldest universities, the University of Salamanca, tracing its existence back to 1084.

With 25 universities in the **QS World Universities Rankings® 2019**, of which eight are in the global top 300, Spain boasts a handful of the world's most competitive establishments, including **Pompeu Fabra University**, the **University of Barcelona**, the **Autonomous University of Barcelona**, the **Autonomous University of Madrid**, the **Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya** and the **University of Navarra**.

Institutions in Spain tend to fall into four different categories:

- Universities (*escuelas universitarias*), which offer undergraduate courses
- University colleges (*colegios universitarios*), which cover the first three years of study leading up to a license (*licenciado*)
- Faculties (*facultades*) for longer courses
- Higher technical schools of engineering and architecture (*escuela superior de ingeniería y arquitectura*)

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There are many international universities in Spain that offer bilingual or English language education accredited by international bodies, such as the **EU Business School** and the United International Business Schools in Barcelona and Madrid.

In line with the Bologna credit transfer system (ECTS), most Spanish universities offer three levels of higher education: the *Grado* (completed in four years), the *Postgrado* (one to two years) and the *Doctorado* (three to five years).



Applications & visas

The application process and visa requirements to study in Spain will vary depending on whether you're a citizen of a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland.

There are a number of ways you could study in Spain depending on your situation and goals. You could apply for a full undergraduate or postgraduate degree at a Spanish university. Or, if you're already enrolled at an institution elsewhere, you could take part in an exchange program at a Spanish institution for a semester or two, perhaps through a scheme such as Erasmus+.

Most courses are taught in Spanish, with English-taught courses hard to find (and only available at postgraduate level). Many universities offer short-or-long-term language courses to help you improve your proficiency.

Applicants from EEA/Switzerland

If you're from a country within the EEA or Switzerland, you'll be eligible to enroll at a Spanish institution provided you have a valid high school leaving certificate from your home country, which you'll need to get verified through the National Distance Education University (UNED).

If you're applying to study an undergraduate course, you may be asked to complete an admission exam called the *Prueba de Acceso a Estudios*

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Universitarios (PAU), also known as the *Selectividad*. Valid for a period of three months, the test consists of two stages. The first stage is mandatory, and will test your language, writing and reading skills. The second stage, which is optional, will evaluate you in your chosen area of expertise.

Applicants from outside the EEA/Switzerland

If you're not from the EEA or Switzerland, you'll need to apply for a student visa, via the Spanish embassy or consulate in your home country. You should do this as soon as possible as the process can take up to several weeks.



You will need the following documents:

- Completed visa application form
- Passport – it must be valid for the intended period of your stay in Spain
- Two recent passport-size photos
- Letter of acceptance from a Spanish university
- Proof of adequate health insurance
- Proof of financial means during your stay (at least €900 a month, which is €10,800 (~US\$13,500) a year)
- Medical certificate
- Criminal record certificate

You'll also need to pay an application fee of €60 (~US\$75).

When you arrive in Spain, you should register with the local authorities within a month of your arrival and obtain a Student Residence Card for Foreigners (TIE) with a *Número de Identidad de Extranjero* (NIE).

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Working in Spain during your studies

Non-EU students in Spain on a student visa can ask for a work permit which enables you to work up to 20 hours per week, but you must not rely on the work to fund your living costs. Unfortunately, getting work in Spain can be quite difficult, as employers tend to prefer hiring Spanish students. EU students can also work for up to 20 hours per week, but don't need a work permit.



Tuition fees & living costs

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Fees for postgraduate and undergraduate courses at both public and private universities are regulated by the Spanish government on a pay-per-credit basis, with the amount of credits based on the course and university.

Tuition fees for bachelor's courses at public universities can vary between €680 and €1,400 (~US\$850-1,740) per academic year. Private universities typically charge €5,500 to €18,000 (~US\$6,850-22,400) per year for courses.

Living costs

Living costs can vary greatly depending on the city where you're based and your accommodation. You can expect to spend between €900 and €1,100 (~US\$1,120-1,370) a month on living expenses, with Madrid and Barcelona being the most expensive cities to live in.



These figures from Numbeo (as of January 2018) will give you an idea of the costs for particular items:

- Meal at an inexpensive restaurant: €10
- Loaf of bread: €0.84
- Apples (1lb): €0.72
- One-way ticket on public transport: €1.40
- Cinema ticket: €8
- Monthly gym membership: €36.59
- Monthly internet bill: €36.42
- One-bedroom apartment in city center: €582.28



Funding & exchange programs

Spain is signed up to the Erasmus program, an EU initiative that allows students to study at universities in Europe for a number of months, to advance their language skills, without paying any fees to the host institution

You can search for current scholarships by consulting the funding information provided on the website of your chosen university.

The Erasmus program

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Spain is one of the most popular destinations for Erasmus exchange students, with the **University of Granada** and Universidad Pontificia Comillas currently participating.

The Fulbright US Student Program

US students enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program are also eligible to apply online to the Fulbright US Student Program with a statement of purpose, transcripts, references and various forms. The Fulbright US Student Program offers grants to graduate students seeking to study or teach English in a Spanish institution.



Fulbright currently offers a number of scholarships in Spain for students meeting specific criteria, including:

- 22 grants lasting nine months for postgraduate students in contemporary areas of mutual US and Spanish interest
- Four grants and tuition waivers lasting 11 months for students enrolled in specific graduate courses at **IE Business School**
- 115 grants issued to graduates seeking to become English teaching assistants in high schools located in Madrid, La Rioja, Galicia, Asturias, Segovia, for nine months



Student cities

Madrid

Madrid is a splendid city with an enviable cultural and art scene, a wonderful cosmopolitan nightlife, and affordable prices. It's also a great place to live if you're interested in stumbling onto palacios and architectural gems, gastronomy, Goya, and making new international friends.

Featured in the top 50 of the [QS Best Student Cities](#), it's also home to leading universities such as the [Universidad Autónoma de Madrid](#), [Universidad Complutense de Madrid \(UCM\)](#), [Universidad Carlos III de Madrid](#), and the [Politécnica de Madrid](#).

Barcelona

Home to the [University of Barcelona](#) and the [Autonomous University of Barcelona](#), which are both ranked in the top 200 of the QS World University Rankings® 2019, Barcelona is an affordable city in comparison to other major European cities such as London and Paris, and characterized by a high percentage of international students.

Barcelona's unique architecture, stretches of beaches and thrilling nightlife are no secret. Whether you're interested in music, art, rock climbing or updating your Instagram with beach selfies – Barcelona will have something for you.

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Valencia

350 kilometers south of Barcelona, Spain's third biggest city is safe, affordable and home to some of the world's prettiest beaches and most exciting festivals, including Les Falles Festival, La Tomatina and the Festival Internacional de Benicàssim. The city's **Universidad Politecnica de Valencia** and **Universitat de Valencia** are both featured in the top 600 of the latest QS World University Rankings.

Granada

Located towards the south of Spain, Granada has a distinctly North African feel, the result of centuries of Moorish rule. The most famous example of this legacy is the spectacular Alhambra, a huge castle which overlooks the city.

Granada is a major student city, with the **Universidad de Granada** ranked within the global top 500. This large university hosts more than 80,000 students across its five different campuses, offering instant access to a large and diverse student community. Regional traditions in this part of Spain include a custom of serving free tapas with every drink you order – not a bad perk!

Seville

Another charming historical city, located towards the southwest of Spain, Seville is the capital of the region of Andalucía. Like most Spanish cities, Seville is known for its festivals (Semana Santa and the Feria de Sevilla are the biggest), and its tapas, but the city is probably most famous for being

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the home of flamenco – Spain’s national dance – and the accompanying music.

In the modern age, Seville is also famous for its relaxed but exciting nightlife – so if you like to party into the early hours, this Spanish city should certainly be on your list. Universities in Seville are led by the sizeable [Universidad de Sevilla](#) (ranked 601-650 in the world in 2019).



Working in Spain after graduation

While Spain's unemployment level has fallen to its lowest rate in more than eight years, it still remains above 17 percent. There may be, however, some opportunities within retail or tourism for English-speaking workers, especially in hotspots like Cataluña, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands and Andalucía.

To search for jobs in Spain, there are many online databases you can use, such as *Xpatjobs.com*, *www.thelocal.es/jobs* or EURES – the EU's job mobility platform. Note that knowledge of Spanish is required for most jobs outside of expat communities and touristic areas.

You have the option, however, of building your CV by volunteering and/or completing work experience in Spain, where internships and work placements are highly valued and essential to access most graduate positions. EU students can apply to opportunities through organizations such as the British Council, AIESEC and the International Association for the Exchange of Students with Technical Experience (IAESTE).

EEA and Swiss nationals have the right to work in Spain without a work permit, enjoy the same benefits and tax as nationals and remain in the country once their contract has terminated.

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If you're from outside the EEA and Switzerland, you'll need to obtain a renewable one-year work permit unless you're an academic, scientist or close family member of someone who has been working in Spain for more than a year. You won't need a work permit or visa to volunteer in Spain.



More questions?

Want to find out more about studying abroad in Spain? Get advice from the TopUniversities team and international students in our [international student forums](#).