



Important traditions in Spain

Spain

Spain, formally the Kingdom of Spain is a country in Southwestern Europe with some pockets of territory across the Strait of Gibraltar and the Atlantic Ocean.[13] Its continental European territory is situated on the Iberian Peninsula. Its territory also includes two archipelagos: the Canary Islands off the coast of North Africa, and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. The African exclaves of Ceuta, Melilla, and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera[14] make Spain the only European country to have a physical border with an African country (Morocco).[h] Several small islands in the Alboran Sea are also part of Spanish territory. The country's mainland is bordered to the south and east by the Mediterranean Sea; to the north and northeast by France, Andorra, and the Bay of Biscay; and to the west and northwest by Portugal and the Atlantic Ocean respectively. With an area of 505,990 km² (195,360 sq mi), Spain is the largest country in Southern Europe, the second-largest country in Western Europe and the European Union, and the fourth-largest country by area on the European continent. With a population exceeding 47.3 million, Spain is the sixth-most populous country in Europe, and the fourth-most populous country in the European Union. Spain's capital and largest city is Madrid; other major urban areas include Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Zaragoza, Málaga, Murcia, Palma, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Bilbao.



Flamenco in Spain

Flamenco is probably Spain's most famous art form (it's certainly a lot less controversial than that other popular Spanish pastime). There are daily flamenco shows in Madrid, Barcelona and Andalusian cities such as Seville, Granada, and Malaga, although many of them are geared towards tourists and it is difficult to know which ones are the good ones.

As a rule, if a venue has more than one show per night, the latest one will be the one where the most Spaniards go - and so fewer tourists - and the performance will be adjusted accordingly.

Isn't Flamenco Just a Dance?

No! There are four distinct elements to flamenco - the guitar playing, the vocals, Flamenco Dancing and the 'palmas' (hand clapping). Out of the four of them, it is the dancing that is most likely to be dropped, if any of them.

If it is the dancing that you are most keen on seeing, check that there will actually be some dancing at the show.

Normally the performers will be listed on the flyer - 'Baile' is the dancer, 'Cante' is the singer, and 'Guitarra' is the guitarist. 99% of tourist-orientated shows will have all three.

The flowery dresses seen in the tourist brochures are only for very special occasions (and touristy performances); much of the time the dancers are dressed in black.

And I have only ever seen a flamenco dancer use castanets once!

Why is it Called 'Flamenco'?

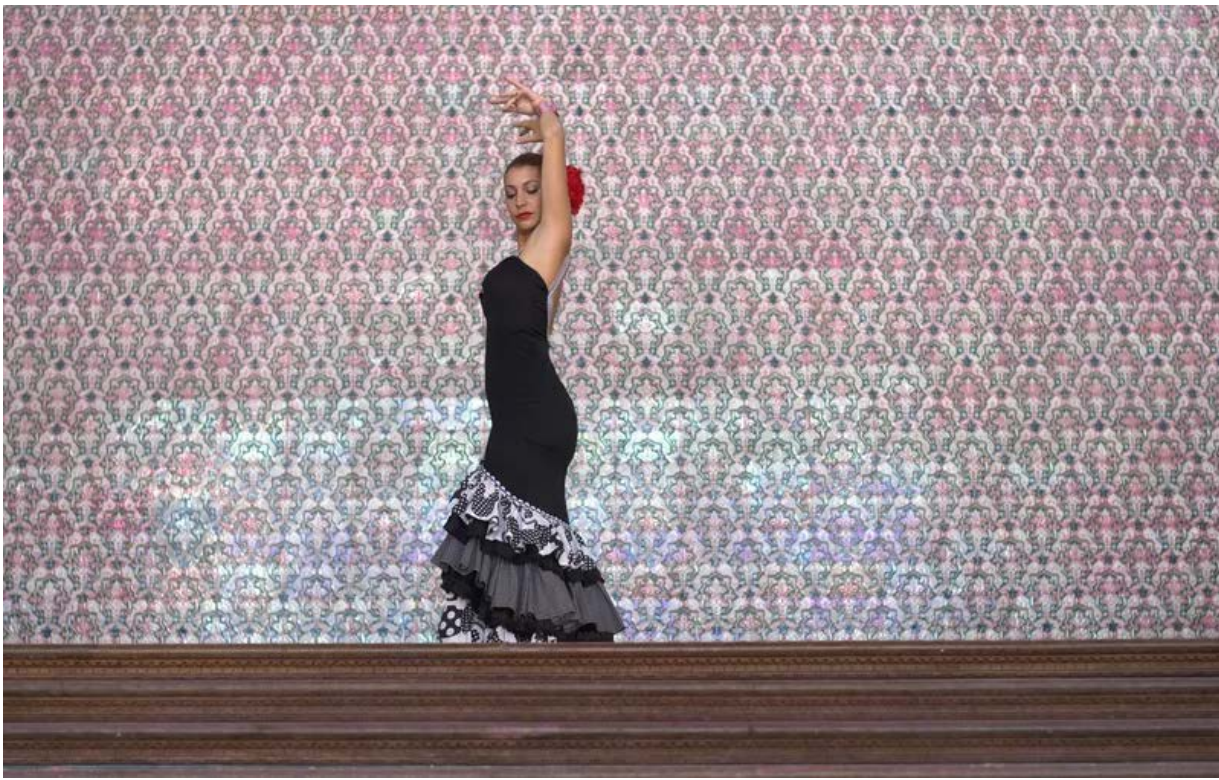
Some have argued that the music was given this name because the dancing resembled the movement of a flamingo, although this is unlikely. The word 'flamenco' also means 'Flemish' (the people of the Dutch-speaking side of Belgium) and it has been said that the music may have some of its roots in that part of Europe. There is a third theory which is popular, which says that it comes from the Arabic 'felag mengu' (sometimes spelt 'fellaah mengu') which means 'peasants without land'. It is quite possible that this was the original form of the word and it was later corrupted to its present form for the reasons explained above.

What Kind of Show Do You Want to See?

One question is whether you want to see flamenco in Seville at its 'best' or at its most 'authentic'. What's the difference? Well, imagine seeing BB King at a huge sports stadium. It may well be the best blues concert you ever see, but is it 'authentic'? On the other hand, a smokey blues bar in the backstreets of New Orleans is likely to have more authentic blues, but it may not be up to the standard of BB King's stadium gig.

You will get some dismissive snobbery from so-called flamenco fans who say that the big venues like El Arenal in Seville are 'for tourists'. The truth is, real flamenco fans would go to such venues every night if they could afford it because this is where the best artists perform: because tourists bring in money. If Jay-Z and Beyonce can complain about dwindling artist revenue in music, imagine what it's like for flamenco artists? It's no wonder the best artists perform at such shows.

'Tablaos' are generally speaking where you'll find a very formal and excellent performance, whereas the flamenco bars will normally be a bit more informal and more 'authentic'.



Madrid is not the traditional home of flamenco, but as the capital city it, of course, attracts the best performers as this is where the money is.

As Madrid is less famous for flamenco, its flamenco venues are not marketed so strongly towards tourists. Any bar called 'tablao de something' is likely to be a flamenco venue.

A flamenco festival is the best place to see flamenco in Spain. While some of the best stars tend to work at the tourist-focussed tablaos, the real superstars are touring the world and are only able to perform in Spain at the biggest festivals.



Bullfighting in Spain

Bullfighting, the most controversial of Spanish traditions, is a mixed blessing for Spain. Many tourists are very curious to see it and view it as a fascinating insight into Spanish culture, but it is also a stain on the country's reputation for others. Bullfighting is nowhere near as popular as it used to be, but it still features prominently in the country's self-image. In 2017, the tradition got a tourism boost because of the release of 20th Century Fox's movie "Ferdinand," which features a bull who no longer wants to fight the matador as the main character. While you can still experience these traditional bullfights in many cities across Spain, the sport is dwindling.



Bullfighting has existed for thousands of years and it has been popular in Spain for nearly a millennium, though some say it has existed in Spain since the time of Emperor Claudius two thousand years ago.

With the rise of the animal rights movement, an ever increasing number of people have been critical of bullfighting, both within Spain and in the rest of the world. The number of websites in opposition to the activity far exceeds the number in favor.

The State of Bullfighting in Spain Today

In 2010, the government in Barcelona banned bullfighting in Catalonia, but Madrid and Andalusia continue to host bullfighting events throughout the summer. The stadiums are usually full, both with curious tourists and die-hard fans.

Case Against

Animal rights activists argue that the practice is barbaric and that the animal suffers extensively during the ritual. They also differentiate between killing for meat — considered to be a necessity, and killing for fun.

Response to Criticisms

For a start, proponents of bullfighting point out that the animal is eaten afterward, so the animal's death is not in vain. They also claim that the animal does not suffer greatly during the event — a good bullfighter will kill the bull efficiently. But the strength of this argument is questionable — while the final kill is quick, the abuse the bull sustains during the fight is prolonged. The idea that abattoirs always kill in the most painless and efficient way is said to be a myth. With the number of bulls that die each year in bullfighting tiny compared to the number that dies in the meat trade, the campaign against bullfighting is seen to be a waste of resources when there are far more animals dying in unfit slaughterhouses than in the bullring.

Of course, the barbarity of abattoirs does not excuse cruelty of a bullfight. But it does suggest that a disproportionate amount of time is being spent on protesting against bullfighting when there are bigger animal cruelty battles to fight. There is also an argument against the idea that we eat meat out of necessity and bullfighting is for 'fun'. The truth is that vegetarianism is a viable alternative to meat-eating and that all meat-eaters do it 'for fun'. Whether your fun comes in the form of a 20-minute visual spectacle or a juicy hamburger, some might argue the result is the same.

Where the Issue of Bullfighting Stands Today

The European Union shows no sign of stepping in to ban bullfighting. It even actively promotes an event in Coria where a bull is taunted in the streets.

Such activities are deemed to be "traditions, customs, and a centuries-old culture".

It is difficult to gauge how many people in the audience of a bullfight are tourists and how many are local aficionados. But there is definitely a strong argument that if international public opinion continues to worsen and tourists stop attending, the number of bullfights may dwindle as organizers find the events to be no longer viable.

