

# FOCUS ON...

**TOURISM** Spain has a population of 47 million, a number nearly matched each year by its intake of tourists from all over the globe (43 million in 2010). The biggest visitors to Spain are Brits; 13.6 million of whom went to Spain last year.<sup>1</sup> With average temperatures of 25°C, and sunshine nearly all year round, it is no surprise that Spain is a highly popular British holiday destination.



People are returning year after year, with online travel experts UlookUbook.com stating that 83% of people who visited Spain last year had been at least once before. Moreover, not only are Brits returning the most to Spain but they are also one of the largest ex-patriot communities with considerable populations on the south coast.

British people are playing a large role in Spain's continuing tourism success story, with Spain's industry minister, Miguel Sebastián, saying that tourist intake will

increase by 6.5% in 2011, making it the fourth best year for the Spanish tourism sector in its history.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these promising facts, Spanish Tourism still has the potential to grow and also offer a more rounded and rewarding experience for its visitors, especially those coming in from the UK.

Recently, the **UNWTO** and Spain have come together to organise the first international conference on ethics and tourism, addressing some important issues facing the tourism

## TOURISM

---

sector. Sessions will address responsible tourism, tourism and justice, poverty reduction, equality, exploitation and the corporate social responsibility of the big package holiday companies.

The future for Spanish tourism is not necessarily a move away from the packaged holiday but instead a new emphasis on the cultural exploration of Spain that would be rewarding and enlightening to those visiting, whilst also beneficial to the local communities and their people. Currently, the majority of tourists visit the cheap resorts of the South, rather than the historic areas. This cheap, very commercial image of the country, rather than the real cultural one, is all that these tourists see. The reason that this has been damaging is because this low-end opinion is then transferred onto all other Spanish brands, products and produce.

### ROMAN HISTORY IN SPAIN

As well as having beautiful beaches, luxurious hotels, and great food, Spain has the second most world heritage sites designated by **UNESCO**; with 42 sites it is second only to Italy.

It is largely unknown that Spain boasts one of the largest collections of Roman ruins in Europe. Spain was occupied for nearly 700 years by the Ancient Roman rule of Hispania, which provided 3 Emperors for the Republic. Spain's current language, religion and general culture are still largely reminiscent of their Roman past, and this can be seen in the various ruins that scatter its landscape.

The Roman city of **Italica** – birthplace of Emperor Hadrian – hosts one of the largest amphitheatres in Europe. With an impressive collection of mosaics, the site

is so large that the true extent of it may never be explored. During the Roman occupation, Spain played an important role in linking the Roman Empire in Africa. The fishing town of Baelo Claudia was an immensely important trading point between Europe and Africa and stands to this day.

**Merida**, a hugely important UNESCO Roman heritage site, boasts Moorish traces as well. Making it a part of living history, the amphitheatre is still used today to hold several concerts and productions a year. Similarly, the Roman capital of Spain, Toledo, still stands, as does its Alcantara fortress and bridge which still provides an important crossing over the Targus River.



### MOORISH HISTORY

It is not only Roman history that impresses the Spanish countryside and its cities; there are the Islamic influences from the Moorish rule that spanned several centuries. One of the most impressive sites is the Alhambra in **Granada**. This is a Nasrid Palace and fortress, and one of the most visited historical sites in Spain. Granada does not only boast the Alhambra but also a beautiful Cathedral, charming city centre, and world-renowned University.



*Cathedral and Almudaina Palace, Majorca*

### SPAIN'S CITIES

The Spanish capital, **Madrid**, home of the UNWTO, has launched a campaign to bring in a few more tourists to the Spanish capital. Hoping to enhance awareness of what the capital has to offer, the city has signed a deal with Real Madrid C.F. for its players to be 'brand ambassadors' – the tourism ministry believe they could reach as many as 300 million people.<sup>3</sup> Being the financial, political and touristic heart of Spain, Madrid should easily be able to attract more Brits with its concerted efforts to encourage tourists to visit.

On the coast, where most Brits spend their holidays in Spain, there are several cities that offer a lot more than sun and alcohol. For example, **Barcelona** and **Valencia** on the east coast are two of the most interesting and vibrant places in Spain and are also near to some of the best beaches and sunspots the country has to offer. Similarly the city of **Palma** in

**Mallorca** has a wealth of historical sites and cultural experiences, with the largest amount of art galleries per square mile in Europe – all this within striking distance of the nearest beach resorts.

### FESTIVALS

**Tenerife** has much to offer. Although it is synonymous in Britain with sun and sand, for many in Spain it is the home of the carnival, second only in size to its world-renowned namesake in Rio. Hosted in Tenerife's capital, Santa Cruz, it is the highlight of the year for all the locals and lasts for a mammoth 14 days.

Another festival probably more well acquainted to Brits is the Festival of San Fermín – better known in this country as Pamplona. Famous for the running of the bull, it is a festival deeply rooted in local culture and held between the 6th and 14th of July. It is internationally recognised and has over a million visitors a year.

### RELIGION

Like the festival of **San Fermín**, religious festivals and occasions are celebrated widely in Spain with many visitors coming from abroad to join in the celebrations. Seville, Malaga, Zamora and Leon hold elaborate processions for holy week, traditions dating all the way back to medieval times. The **Semana Santa en Sevilla** is known for its procession of wooden and plaster sculptures that depict scenes between the arrest of Jesus and his burial. The festival is a very emotive and awe-inspiring event that brings in people from all over the world.

Probably the most famous religious event in Spain takes place in **Santiago de Compostela**. The city's cathedral is the destination for a pilgrimage dating back to the 9th century. The route is named 'The Way of St. James' and celebrates the legend that St James found his way to Spain and began to preach there the word of Christ. It is one of the most important missionary activities concerning the final resting place of Saint James. The city's old town is a designated UNESCO world heritage site.

Going to a beach resort and spending the days sunbathing by the pool and the nights in a club is all well and good, but unfortunately there is a perception in Britain that Spain has little else other to offer than this. Such a perception couldn't be further from the truth. When exploring its cultural and historical sights, partaking in its festivals, Spain can offer an experience of much greater depth to the traveller. Ultimately, such experiences put a trip to Spain on a par to a trip to the cultural heart of Italy or Greece.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.travellikeabrit.co.uk/2011/04/brits-seak-sun-in-spain/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tumbit.com/news/articles/3351-spain-sees-year-on-year-british-tourist-increase.html>

<sup>3</sup> Giles Tremlett, How Spain is fighting the recession, 8th March 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/08/spain-europe-news>