

Introduction

Known for a fiery culture and passionate approach to life, Spain exudes exotic charm that attracts thousands each year to its sun-seared hills, plains and beaches. The transformation of Spain has been considerable – moving from the depression and persecution of dictatorship to the vibrant, but predominantly secular, prosperity of modern European democracy.



History

From the Romans in 2BC to the Muslims in the eighth century, Spain's unique culture has benefited from contact and interchange between diverse groups and traditions. Spain's dynamic culture and strong sense of regional and national identity aided in the forging of the Spanish Empire throughout the 16th century, which was the vehicle for Spanish military and cultural expansion throughout Latin America.

By the last years of the 19th century, Spain had relinquished or lost much of its dominions, and a series of disastrous attempts to rekindle its imperial ambitions in Africa left it vulnerable to instability. From 1931 to 1936, the country endured dictatorship, with only a brief respite under the Second Spanish Republic before the nation slid into civil war – prefiguring the conflict that would engulf the world in World War II. General Franco and his nationalists proved strong enough to exert their rule over Spain by 1939, although conflict ensued throughout the war. Franco's right-wing policies proved to be compatible with the Axis powers, often resulting in sympathy for Nazi expansion despite Spain officially being neutral. With the fall of Hitler and the ascendancy of Communism, Franco's strong anti-Communist

policies gradually moved Spain from its political isolation to being included in the United Nations in 1955.

The 1960s saw a period of economic growth as industrialisation and the development of Spain's now-thriving tourist trade occurred. The growth continued well into the 1970s, transforming Spain from a largely rural and agricultural nation to an urban and increasingly prosperous one. After Franco's death in 1975, and the advent of democracy in 1978, Spain's movement towards integration with Europe continued with its inclusion in the EU and later the decision to adopt the euro. Unlike many other EU members, though, Spain has adopted a greater level of decentralisation, partly as the result of strong regionalism in areas such as Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia and Andalusia.

As in the past, modern Spain has considerable ethnic diversity, intensified by its proximity to Africa, and its reputation as a popular tourist destination. Large communities of Moroccans, Ecuadorians, Colombians and Romanians exist in some areas of Spain, with significant immigrant communities from China and Africa. In 2005 alone, the immigrant population increased by 700,000 people. Tension and conflict between these groups has mercifully not been rampant, but more recently on 11 March 2004, the country suffered a devastating terrorist attack in Madrid, killing 191 people and wounding 1,460 more. In addition, the Basque separatist group ETA still operates a long-term campaign of violence.

Current challenges

- ▶ Drug abuse is at record levels in Spain, with some 300,000 addicted to heroin and cocaine. This has only exacerbated the Aids pandemic: Spain currently has more sufferers than anywhere else in Europe, as a result of immigration from Aids-saturated regions of Africa, and needle sharing. Addiction of other kinds is also a serious problem in Spain, with over 11 per cent of all private spending taken through gambling.
- ▶ Rural to urban migration in Spain over the last 20 years has seen huge increases in city populations, with large industrial and urban expansions, especially in tourist regions. This has often brought more prosperity, but has also caused high rates of pollution: carbon dioxide

emissions rose by 45 per cent in the last 15 years, and energy consumption doubled in the last 20.

BMS involvement in Spain

BMS has a long-term couple working for Malaga Media Centre (MMC), which produces TV, video, radio and web programmes primarily geared to enable the gospel to be heard in the Middle East and North Africa. MMC makes programmes for Christian satellite TV station SAT-7, which is a BMS partner.

Background information

The land

Spain is a land of rugged mountains and plateaus, with extensive coastlines on both the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Narrow plains, often used as farmland, lie along the periphery of the mountain regions, whilst the upper reaches – where accessible – are used for limited pastoral agriculture. Spain has a warm and relatively dry climate, with coastal regions enjoying a more maritime climate. On the Mediterranean coast, the temperature is often similar to sub-tropical regions, bringing hot summers and very mild winters, which helps to explain why so many British citizens are choosing to retire there!

Religion

Spain has traditionally been a Roman Catholic nation, and with the exception of Islamic rule of southern Spain during the ninth and tenth centuries, it has been a country that has been religiously homogenous. Today, around 80 per cent of Spaniards recognise themselves as Roman Catholic, often by virtue of having been baptised as children. However, recent polls suggest that only 40 per cent believe in God, and less than half of that number regularly attend Mass. Whilst around a third of the population are church-goers, Spain is increasingly secular – especially amongst the under 30 year-olds. In addition to rising secularism, the number of Muslims, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses is rising, often faster than the growth of the Evangelical churches. Amongst the Roma people, however, the Evangelical Filadelfia movement has seen significant growth in the last few years, with outreach groups incorporating traditional music into worship.

The Union Evangelica Bautista Espanola has around 9,600 members across 90 congregations.

Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the Church in Spain, that it would be able to reach the un-churched, especially children and students. There are still only 500 known evangelical students in universities in Spain, and many campuses have no witnesses at all. Pray that Christians might have renewed vigour and faith to meet with the 13 million who live in rural areas with no evangelical church.
- ▶ Pray that the threat of terrorism and violence in Spain would be brought to an end. Pray for reconciliation between the Basque separatist movement and the Spanish authorities, and that progress would be made by diplomacy rather than bombs. Pray also for peace and tolerance between the large ethnic communities throughout Spain.
- ▶ Pray for the Aids pandemic, and for the drugs situation that is so closely related. Pray that those involved in helping people with heroin and cocaine addictions might be able to offer strength and compassion.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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