

Spain

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| Country name | Spain |
| State title | Kingdom of Spain |
| Name of citizen | Spanish |
| National official language | Spanish (<i>spa</i>) ¹ |
| Country name in national official language | España |
| State title in national official language | Reino de España (<i>spa</i>) |
| Script | Roman script |
| Romanization System | Not required |
| ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3) | ES / ESP |
| Capital | Madrid |
| Area / Population | 506,000km ² / 47.9 million (2025 est.) ² |

Introduction

Spain lies in southwestern Europe, occupying most of the Iberian Peninsula alongside Portugal. It is bordered by France and Andorra to the northeast and Portugal to the west. Spain is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, having a hereditary monarch as head of state and an elected parliament that governs the country. The country's topography is diverse, featuring vast mountain ranges such as the Pyrenees and the Sierra Nevada, expansive plateaus like the Meseta Central, and fertile river valleys. This varied landscape contributes to Spain's rich natural beauty and regional differences in climate and culture.

Geographical names policy and sources

For HMG use, geographical names should be taken from official sources from Spain. The national mapping agency is the *Instituto Geográfico Nacional* (IGN), which makes many maps and digital products reflecting the evolving nature of the linguistic toponymy of Spain: <https://www.ign.es/web/ign/portal/cbg-area-cartografia>.

¹ ISO 639 codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

² UN data

Spain's official [Registro de Entidades Locales](#) (REL) is also a very useful source of the up-to-date name forms for Spain's autonomous communities, provinces and municipalities and their centres. Additionally, the autonomous communities provide very good digital sources (indicated below) for their place names. The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) [Geographic Names Server \(GNS\)](#) can also be used as a source for names.

In the autonomous communities of Galicia, Catalunya (Catalonia) and Illes Balears (Balearic Islands), the respective regional languages are the sole official languages of toponymy. For the autonomous communities of Navarra, Valencia and País Vasco (Basque Country), the regional language place names have co-official status with the Spanish names. See more detail in the *Languages* section below.

Languages

Spain has one official national language, Spanish [*spa*] (also known as Castilian), which is spoken throughout the country and used by the central government. In addition, several autonomous communities in Spain have their own co-official languages that reflect the country's rich linguistic diversity.

The linguistic situation as it relates to toponymy is complex and continues to evolve, as – in the main – the regional languages' status increases. The official names, which as described below can be a combination of language forms, are reflected on official mapping and their evolution has been supported by advances in mapping technology and data management, which facilitate the rapid update and alteration of names.

A brief summary is shown below. For more detail, and more complete lists of the names in any autonomous community, please contact PCGN.

Aragón

Aragonese [*arg*] and Catalan [*cat*] are 'protected languages' but are not official. Therefore, Spanish names continue to be official alone, with the exception of the names of 5 of the 33 *comarcas* (the administrative subdivision below the provinces – ADM3) that on their creation were assigned dual official names.

Asturias

Although the Asturian language [*ast*] is not official, the geographical names of that language can be official; the official names of Asturian municipalities therefore may be Spanish only, Asturian only or dual-language forms presented with a slash, whereby either form may be used, e.g. Gijón/Xixón. The official geoportal is available here: <https://ideas.asturias.es/>

*Catalunya*³

All place names are official in Catalan [*cat*] only. The official geoportal (including Val d'Aran – see below) is available here: <https://www.icgc.cat/ca>

³ As Catalan names are official in the region, the Catalan form of the autonomous community name is also recommended.

Within Catalunya: Val d'Aran

Aranese [*oci*⁴] is an official language in the Val d'Aran valley alongside Spanish and Catalan, and the geographical names in the area are solely official in their Aranese form⁵.

Comunidad Foral de Navarra

Municipality and centre names are given in a mix of Spanish only and dual Spanish/Basque [*eus*] form (presented with a slash). The official geoportal is available here: <https://administracionelectronica.navarra.es/toponomia/>

Comunitat Valenciana

'Valencian' (Catalan as spoken in Valencia, mostly considered a Catalan dialect and sharing the *cat* language code, but referred to here as Valencian for facility) has co-official status alongside Spanish, but is less widely spoken than Catalan in Catalunya. Municipalities and their centre names are official in either Spanish, Valencian or dual-language forms, with an increasing shift towards Valencian. The official geoportal is available here: <https://geontv.gva.es/?locale=ca>

Galicia

All place names are official in Galician [*glg*] only. The official gazetteer is available here: <https://www.xunta.gal/nomenclator/busca-directa>

Illes Balears

All place names are official in Catalan [*cat*] only. The official geoportal is available here: <https://ideib.caib.es/visor/>

País Vasco/Euskadi

Names can be official in Spanish only, Basque [*eus*] only, dual-language options (which are presented with a slash, e.g. Peñacerrada/Urizaharra and – uniquely – a combined form of both language forms joined by a hyphen e.g. Vitoria-Gasteiz, whereby both forms are to be used as a single name. The official geoportal is available here: <https://www.eustat.eus/dgsServicesWar/MainId?gsservice=apps&gsrequest=getApplication&idap=p=EUSTAT>

In the autonomous communities of Andalucía; Cantabria; Castilla y León; Castilla-La Mancha; Canarias; Extremadura; Murcia; Madrid; La Rioja, as well as the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish is the sole language used for place names.

⁴ This is the code for the Occitan language as a whole. There is no specific code for its Aranese variant.

⁵ Law 35/2010's article 11 is specifically on toponymy, and reads: *Los topónimos de Arán tienen como única forma oficial la aranese.*

Inventory of Characters (and their Unicode encodings)⁶

Spanish contains the following letter-diacritic combinations and special letters in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

| Upper-case character | Unicode encoding | Lower-case character | Unicode encoding |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Á | 00C1 | á | 00E1 |
| É | 00C9 | é | 00E9 |
| Í | 00CD | í | 00ED |
| Ñ | 00D1 | ñ | 00F1 |
| Ó | 00D3 | ó | 00F3 |
| Ú | 00DA | ú | 00FA |
| Ü | 00DC | ü | 00FC |

Spanish uses five digraphs: ch, ll, rr, gu, and qu (the first two of which were considered single letters of the alphabet until 2010). Linguistic and orthographic rules in Spanish within Spain are governed by the [Real Academia Española](#).

The other regional languages of Spain having official toponyms (i.e. **Aranese**, **Asturian**, **Basque**, **Catalan** and **Galician**) contain a few further letter-diacritic combinations and special letters in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script:

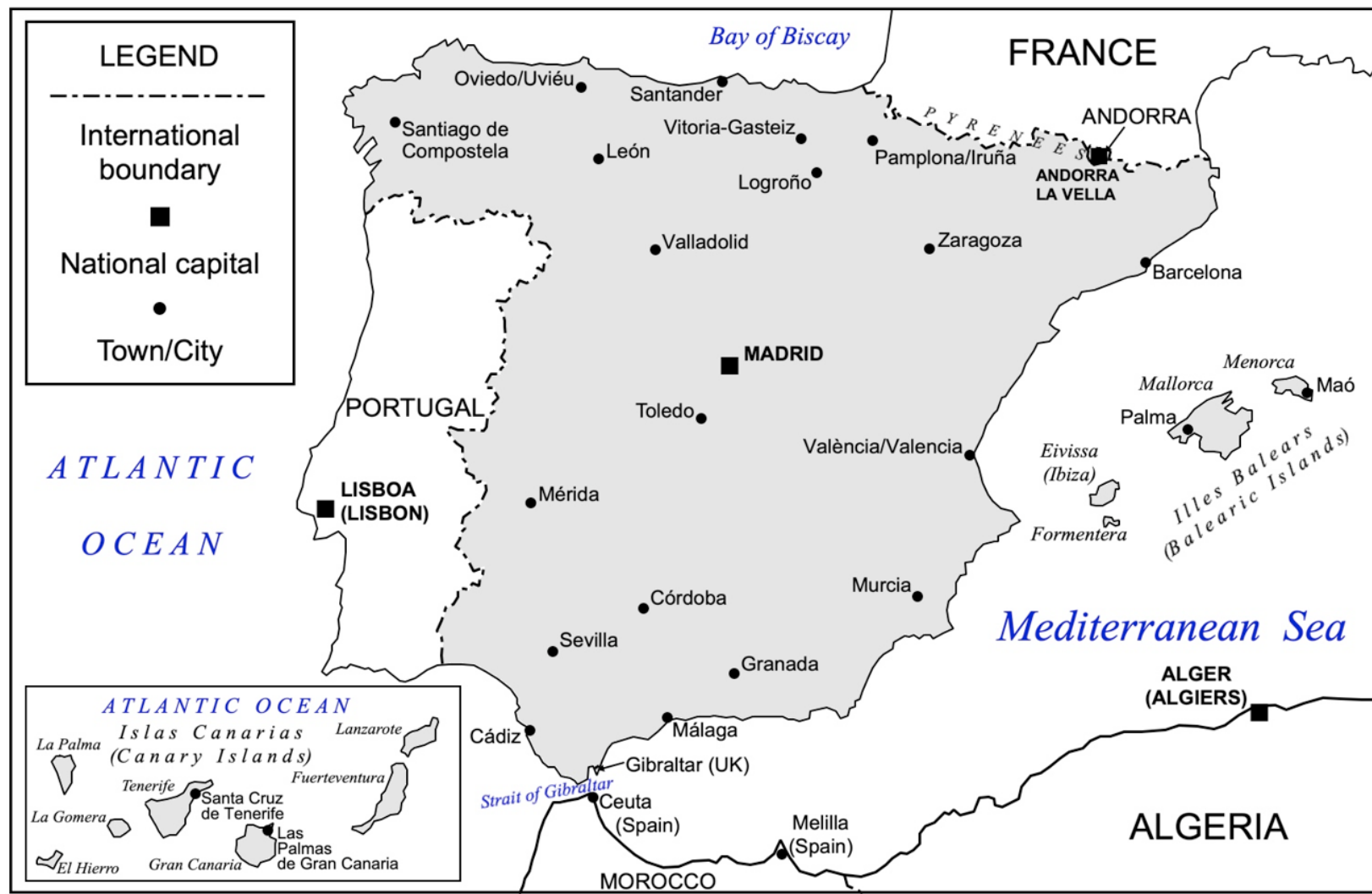
| Upper-case character | Unicode encoding | Lower-case character | Unicode encoding | Language using the character |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| À | 00C0 | à | 00E0 | <i>oci, cat</i> |
| Ç | 00C7 | ç | 00E7 | <i>oci, cat, eus</i> |
| È | 00C8 | è | 00E8 | <i>oci, cat</i> |
| Ĥ | 1E24 | ĥ | 1E25 | <i>ast</i> |
| Ï | 00CF | ï | 00EF | <i>oci, cat, glg</i> |
| Ł | 1E36 | ł ⁷ | 1E37 | <i>ast</i> |
| Ò | 00D2 | ò | 00F2 | <i>oci, cat</i> |

These languages also include a number of digraphs, the only further one of which (in addition to that noted in footnote 7) containing a special character is /l·l/ used in Catalan representing a geminate /l/ (whereby each /l/ is pronounced separately).

⁶ See www.unicode.org

⁷ Used in Asturian as a digraph only – ie. ll - sometimes presented l·l

Map of Spain



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

Administrative structure

Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities, and 2 autonomous cities (the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the sovereignty of which are disputed by Morocco) each with varying degrees of self-government. The full forms including generic terms are shown in the table below, with the short form shown in bold. Regional language place names having official status either alongside Spanish or as the sole official form are shown, as described in full in the *Languages* section above.

The 50 provinces in existence prior to the constitution of the autonomous communities continue to have significance and are often used for cultural and geographical reference purposes.

| Administrative division | ISO 3166-2 code | Administrative centre | Centre location | Official language of toponymy ⁸ |
|---|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía | ES-AN | Sevilla | 37°22'58"N 05°58'23"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Aragón | ES-AR | Zaragoza | 41°38'43"N 00°53'05"W | Spanish |
| Principado de Asturias | ES-AS | Oviedo/Uviéu [<i>spa/ast</i> – Asturian can be included after Spanish] | 43°21'48"N 05°51'11"W | Spanish & Asturian |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Cantabria | ES-CB | Santander | 43°27'46" N 03°48'18"W | Spanish |
| Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta | ES-CE | Ceuta | 35°53'18"N 05°18'56"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla y León | ES-CL | Valladolid | 41°39'19"N 04°43'25"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Castilla-La Mancha | ES-CM | Toledo | 39°52'02"N 04°01'47"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Canarias | ES-CN | Las Palmas de Gran Canaria <i>and</i> Santa Cruz de Tenerife (<i>shared</i>) | 28°05'59"N 15°24'48"W 28°27'37"N 16°16'50"W | Spanish |
| Comunitat Autònoma de Catalunya [<i>cat</i>] Comunautat Autònoma de Catalonha [<i>oci</i>] | ES-CT | Barcelona [<i>cat & oci</i>] | 41°23'54"N 02°10'27"E | Catalan (& Aranese in Val d'Aran) |
| Comunidad Autónoma de Extremadura | ES-EX | Mérida | 38°54'58"N 06°20'37"W | Spanish |
| Comunidade Autónoma de Galicia [<i>glg</i>] | ES-GA | Santiago de Compostela [<i>glg</i>] | 42°52'40" N 08°32'40"W | Galician |

⁸ Fuller detail in *Languages* above.

| Administrative division | ISO 3166-2 code | Administrative centre | Centre location | Official language of toponymy ⁸ |
|---|-----------------|---|------------------------|--|
| Comunitat Autònoma de les Illes Balears [cat] | ES-IB | Palma ⁹ [cat] | 39°34'28"N 02°39'19"E | Catalan |
| Región de Murcia ¹⁰ | ES-MC | Murcia | 37°59'13"N 01°07'48"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad de Madrid | ES-MD | Madrid | 40°25'01" N 03°42'12"W | Spanish |
| Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla | ES-ML | Melilla | 35°17'32"N 02°56'27"W | Spanish |
| Comunidad Foral de Navarra [spa] Nafarroako Foru Komunitatea (Nafarroa) [eus] | ES-NC | Pamplona/Iruña [spa/eus – either or both can be used] | 42°48'51"N 01°38'28"W | Spanish & Basque |
| Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco [spa] Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoa (Euskadi) [eus] | ES-PV | Vitoria-Gasteiz [spa-eus, both must be used in this form] | 42°51'00"N 02°40'00"W | Spanish & Basque |
| Comunidad Autónoma de La Rioja | ES-RI | Logroño | 42°28'00"N 02°27'00"W | Spanish |
| Comunitat Valenciana (València) [cat] Comunidad Valenciana (Valencia) [spa] | ES-VC | València/Valencia [cat/spa – either or both can be used] | 39°28'00"N 00°22'00"W | Spanish & Catalan |

⁹ Also referred to as Palma de Mallorca, though since 2016 this is no longer the official name:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210308233154/http://www.caib.es/eboibfront/ca/2016/10587/588528/llei-15-2016-de-2-de-deseembre-de-modificacio-de-la>

¹⁰ One of the 6 'uniprovincial' autonomous communities (communities having only one province, the others being Principado de Asturias, Cantabria, Comunidad Foral de Navarra, La Rioja and Comunidad de Madrid), Murcia selected to use 'Región de Murcia' as its official nomenclature.

Other Significant Locations

| PCGN Recommended Name ¹¹ | Variant Names/Spellings | Location | Feature Type |
|---|---|-----------------------|---|
| Douro | Río Duero [<i>spa</i>] (if map label in Spain); Douro [<i>por</i>] (if map label in Portugal) | 41°08'36"N 08°40'10"W | River |
| Guadalquivir ¹² | Baetis (Roman name) | 36°47'22"N 06°22'03"W | River |
| Illes Balears | Balearic Islands | 39°30'00"N 3°00'00"E | Archipelago |
| Islas Canarias | Canary Islands | 28°00'00"N 15°45'00"W | Archipelago |
| Islas Chafarinas ¹³ | Îles Jaâfarines/Zaffarines/Chaffarines (al-jouzour al Jaâfariya) (Morocco) | 35°10'52"N 02°25'47"W | Archipelago |
| Isla de Perejil ¹³ | Parsley Island; Îlot Thoura/Leïla (Morocco) | 35°54'50"N 05°25'08"W | Island |
| Meseta Central | | 41°00'00"N 04°00'00"W | Plateau |
| Peñón de Alhucemas ¹³ | Al Hoceïma (Morocco) | 35°12'48"N 03°53'22"W | Island |
| Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera ¹³ | Le Rocher de Badis (Hajar Bādīs) (Morocco) | 35°10'19"N 04°17'59"W | Island |
| Pico de Mulhacén | | 37°03'23"N 03°18'48"W | Peak in the Sierra Nevada [<i>tallest mountain in mainland Spain and the Iberian Peninsula (3479m)</i>] |
| Pico de Teide | | 28°16'23"N 16°38'22"W | Mountain [<i>Spain's high point, located on Tenerife, 3,718 m</i>] |

¹¹ PCGN usually recommends conventional English names for international features, unless national variants are specifically required, or the relevant countries share an official language.

¹² The name is a hispanisation of the Arabic al Wādī al Kabīr, meaning 'the big river'. Many river names in Spain start with 'Guad', from the Arabic 'wādī', meaning river/valley.

¹³ Sovereignty disputed by Morocco; Isla de Perejil was the subject of an armed incident in 2002. (Variant names include Morocco's names, which themselves are subject to significant variation, in their French style and in a French-style romanized Arabic form for reference purposes).

| PCGN Recommended Name ¹¹ | Variant Names/Spellings | Location | Feature Type |
|--|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pyrenees | Pirineos [<i>spa</i>]; Pyrénées [<i>fra</i>]; Pireneus [<i>cat</i>]; Pirenèus [<i>oci</i>]; Pirinioak [<i>eus</i>] | 42°40'00"N 01°00'00"E | Mountain range |
| Río Ebro | Ebre [<i>cat</i>] | 40°43'49"N 00°52'11"E | River |
| Sierra Nevada | | 37°05'21"N 02°47'04"W | Mountain range |
| Strait of Gibraltar | Estrecho de Gibraltar [<i>spa</i>] | 35°57'00"N 05°30'00"W | Strait |
| Tagus river (English conventional name, if referring to the whole river) | Tajo [<i>spa</i>] (if map label in Spain); Tejo [<i>por</i>] (if map label in Portugal) | 40°19'15"N 01°41'49"W | River [<i>Spain; Portugal</i>] |

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile (no longer updated): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17941641>
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/spain/>
- Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
- FCDO Geographical Names Index (GNI): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geographical-names-and-information>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/en/#iso:code:3166:ES>
- Omniglot: www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
- PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
- Spain's Instituto Geográfico Nacional: <https://www.ign.es/web/ign/portal/cbg-area-cartografia>
- Spain's Registro de Entidades Locales (REL): <https://registroentidadeslocales.mpt.es/>
- Spain's Ministerio de Política Territorial y Memoria Democrática place names information: <https://mpt.gob.es/politica-territorial/autonomica/Lenguas-cooficiales/Toponimia.html> - and official gazetteers and geoportals in the autonomous communities
 - Aragón: though the *Comisión Asesora de Toponimia de Aragón* is no longer functioning, a list of proposed names is available here: <https://idearagon.aragon.es/toponimia/cata.html>
 - Asturias official geoportal: <https://ideas.asturias.es/>
 - Catalunya official geoportal (including Val d'Aran): <https://www.icgc.cat/ca>
 - Comunidad Foral de Navarra official geoportal: <https://administracionelectronica.navarra.es/toponimia/>

- *Comunitat Valenciana* official geoportal: <https://geontv.gva.es/?locale=ca>
- *Galicia* official gazetteer: <https://www.xunta.gal/nomenclator/busca-directa>
- *Illes Balears* official geoportal: <https://ideib.caib.es/visor/>
- *País Vasco/Euskadi* official geoportal:
<https://www.eustat.eus/dgsServicesWar/MainId?gsservice=apps&gsrequest=getApplication&idapp=EUSTAT>
- Unicode: www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: [GNS Search & Download WebApp \(nga.mil\)](http://GNS.Search.Download.WebApp.nga.mil)

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