

Understand Spain

SPAIN TODAY 776

Spain is making a comeback from the darkest days of *la crisis*, but there are still economic and political roadblocks.

HISTORY 778

Spain is one of history's grand epics, from ancient civilisations and not-so-ancient battles to the hard-won freedoms of contemporary Spain.

ART & ARCHITECTURE 797

From Roman ruins and Islamic monuments to Spain's master painters, we show you Spain's creative side.

PEOPLE & CULTURE 806

Flamenco, football and bullfighting – learn everything there is to know about these peculiarly Spanish passions.

Spain Today

Spain has turned a corner. Unemployment may remain stubbornly high, Catalonia still wants to secede and the scars of a long, deep and profoundly damaging economic crisis may still be evident. But there is light at the end of the tunnel – the economy is making baby steps towards recovery, a new kind of politics is emerging and there is a widespread feeling that the worst may finally be over.

Best on Film

Jamón, jamón (1992) Dark comedy that brought Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem to prominence.

Todo sobre mi madre (1999) Classic Pedro Almodóvar romp through sex and death.

Mar adentro (2004) Alejandro Amenabar's study of a Galician quadriplegic.

Volver (2006) Almodóvar's lush and offbeat portrait of a Spanish family in crisis.

Alatriste (2006) War and betrayal pursue a Spanish musketeer in this 17th-century epic.

Best in Print

A Late Dinner: Discovering the Food of Spain (Paul Richardson) Erudite journey through Spain's fascinating culinary culture.

A Handbook for Travellers (Richard Ford) This 1845 classic is witty, informative and downright rude.

The Train in Spain (Christopher Howse) Amusing yet insightful reflections from a veteran Spain-watcher.

The New Spaniards (John Hooper) A journey through three decades (until 2006) of democratic Spain.

Don Quijote (Miguel de Cervantes) Spain's best-known novel remains a classic journey through inland Spain.

Economic Crisis

Spain's economy went into free fall in late 2008. Unemployment, which had dropped as low as 6% as Spain enjoyed 16 consecutive years of growth, rose above 26%, which equated to six million people, with catastrophic youth unemployment rates nudging 60%. Suicide rates were on the rise, Spain's young professionals fled the country in unprecedented numbers and Oxfam recently predicted that a staggering 18 million Spaniards – 40% of the population – were at risk of social marginalisation. Finally, in 2014, the tide began to turn. That was the first year in seven in which the country enjoyed the first full year of positive economic growth, and unemployment dipped below 25%. That this growth was largely fuelled by private consumption – by the increased spending of Spaniards – led many to hope that things were very much improving for ordinary Spaniards. Spain remains a country in dire economic straits, and many Spaniards are still doing it tough. But these days it's difficult to find anyone in Spain who doesn't think that the next decade will be better than the last.

A New Politics

Spain's political spoils have, for decades, been divided up between the left (the Socialist Workers Party, or PSOE) and the right (the conservative Popular Party, or PP). Not any more. A radical shift in the way that Spain does politics began in Madrid on 15 May 2011, when the *indignados* (those who are indignant) took over the iconic Plaza de la Puerta del Sol in the city centre with a peaceful sit-in protest. Maintaining popularity through social-media networks, they stayed for months in what was the forerunner to numerous similar movements around the world, including Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots. These community-based