SPAIN CULTURAL NOTES

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GREETINGS AND ADDRESSES

- When you first meet someone, shaking hands with them is usually what you should expect, although women may go straight to the “besito”, or little kiss.
- Once you know a person, women will greet everyone with a besito. The besito in Spain is usually touching your right cheek, then left cheek with that of the other person, while making a kissing sound.
- Men do not usually give other men besitos. They may do a double handshake with the left hand on the forearm.
- Spanish people are very friendly once you get to know them, but first you have to get to know them. In the midwestern U.S., it is common to smile at strangers on the street. This is not the custom in Spain.

CONCEPT OF TIME

Being on time for social occasions—or even a few minutes early—is common in the U.S. This is not the case in Spain, where it is acceptable to be 5-10 minutes late.

What you are doing at the present is important, particularly if you are spending time with a person. For example, meals with your host family are not just about eating. The expectation is that people will hang out at the table and chat for a while after dinner.

The more relaxed time concept does not apply in academic or business situations, such as class or a meeting with a professor, or arriving for an internship. In these situations, and other more formal business settings, punctuality is expected.
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DAILY SCHEDULE

- The daily schedule is one of the biggest adjustments students report having to make in Spain. Everything is later than most people are used to: lunch is usually begins at 2:30pm or later; dinner at 9:30 or 10pm.
- During the afternoon siesta (~2-5pm), most stores are closed, and people just hang out at home.

MEALS & TABLE ETIQUETTE

Breakfast: a quick, small, informal meal. It usually includes coffee or hot chocolate, bread or toast or a little muffin with jam, digestive cookies (kind of like Graham crackers), yogurt, and/or a piece of fruit. Depending on your host family’s schedule, you might eat breakfast while they are still sleeping or at work.

Lunch: (la comida, NOT el almuerzo): if you are at home for lunch, it will be the biggest meal of the day. It often starts with a salad, stew, soup, or vegetable puree, followed by some type of meat or fish with rice, potatoes, or garbanzo beans. “Dessert” is typically fruit and sometimes yogurt. On special days you might get a pastry, flan, or ice cream.

Dinner: a small meal usually served between 8pm and 10pm. Salad, tortilla or a fried egg, croquetas, and slices of cheese and meat are typical. Fruit or yogurt is often served after dinner.

In general, Spaniards have good table manners. Watch how your host family eats. Bread is usually the only food that is acceptable to eat with your fingers. A fork AND knife are generally used throughout the entire meal. If there is something unfamiliar on your plate (e.g. a whole shrimp), and you have no idea how you are supposed to eat it, just ask!

CLOTHING

Appearance is important and dress is more formal than in the U.S. For example, wearing yoga pants or sweats to class is not common.
## Web Resources: Spain

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