



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

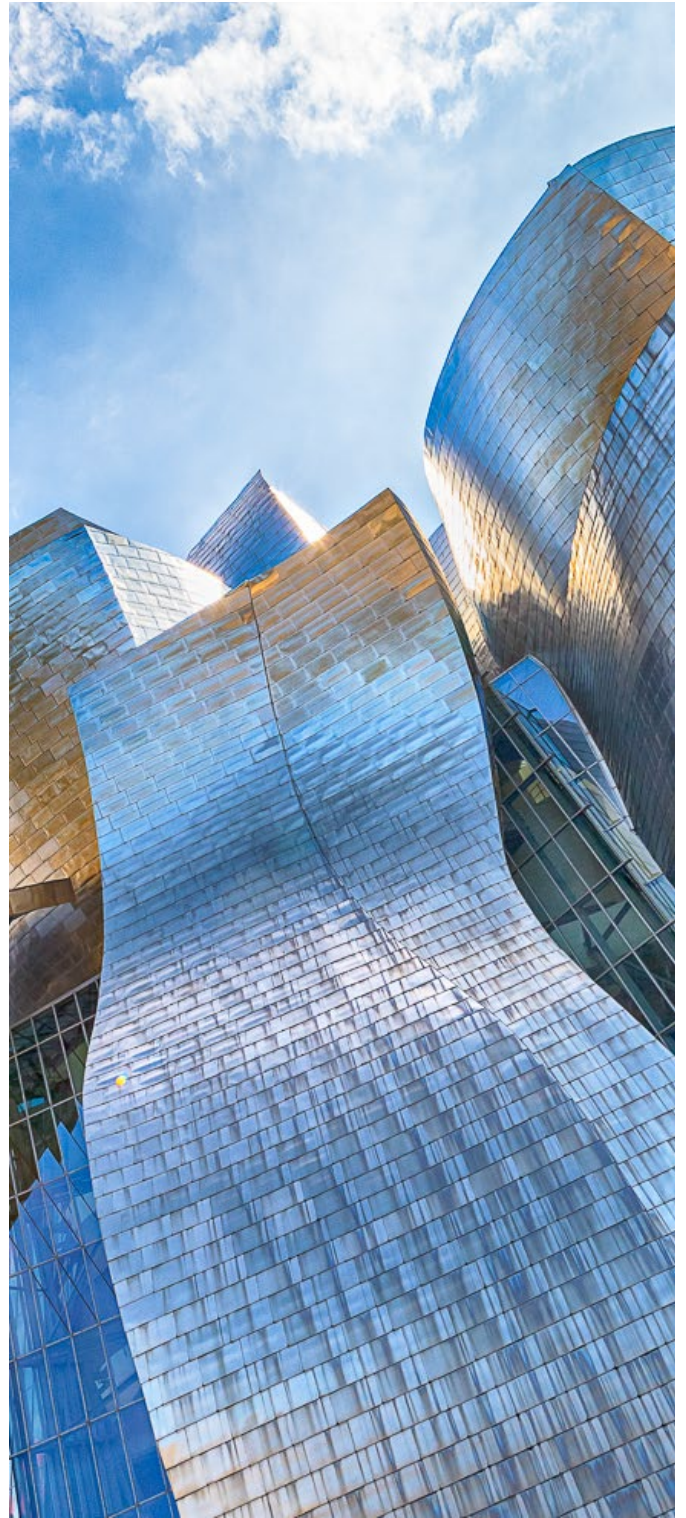
## Spain: Policy, Law, and Regional Autonomy in Europe

Spring 2023



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# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Spain is a colorful and beautiful country built on a generous foundation of art, culture, history, and politics. Bilbao, the program base, is the largest city in northern Spain and is home to roughly 400 thousand people in the metropolitan area. Bilbao is also the main urban area in what is defined as the Greater Basque region.



During the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, Bilbao was the second most industrialized region of Spain, after Barcelona. The city relied on iron, steel, and shipbuilding as major exports. As the industrialized economy declined in the early twentieth century, Bilbao is now transforming into a service city known for its art, food, culture, and architecture. This revitalization process was started by the building of the iconic and admired Bilbao Guggenheim Museum on the Nervión River in 1997.

The Basque country, officially the Basque Autonomous Community, was granted nationality status within Spain in 1978. Spain is a diverse country integrated by different contrasting regions that show varying economic and social structures, as well as different languages, and historical, political, and cultural traditions. According to the Spanish constitution, the Spanish nation is the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards, which is composed of nationalities and regions to which the constitution recognizes and guarantees the right to self-government. These autonomous

regions have a strong historically constituted sense of identity and language and exercise their right to self-government within the limits set forth in the constitution and their autonomous statutes.

## CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Bilbao is located in what is known as “España Verde”, Green Spain, and is a lush region in Northern Spain that stretches along the Atlantic coast from the boarder with Portugal to boarder of France.

Its proximity to the Bay of Biscay gives Bilbao a temperate oceanic climate, with precipitation occurring throughout the year. This climate helps green pastures and forests thrive, providing a landscape similar to that of Ireland, Great Britain, and the west cost of France. The rainiest season is between October and April, November being the wettest. Snow is not frequent in Bilbao, although it is possible to see snow in the surrounding mountains, during the winter months.

### Bilbao, Spain: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
56/41	57/41	61/43	63/45	69/51
AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
78/60	76/56	70/52	61/46	57/42

## LOCAL CUSTOMS

Spaniards are in general very welcoming. For a foreigner it will be easy to establish a personal rapport with them by showing interest and being friendly. Off course, despite that, it is necessary to take into consideration local cultural customs that might differ from your own.

In Spain they like keeping the family close and family life is very important, so expect to be invited to some family and friends' events. Whatever time of



the year, Spanish like to go out and have drinks and tapas as a very common and systematic social way of interaction and keeping in touch with their friends. Social life is very important for them.

There are distinct boundaries between the private and the public often expressed in a different sense of personal space; for example, greetings and good byes are expressed, as in other parts of Europe, with two kisses, one each cheek.

Lack of “political correctness” from the US perspective in referring to people with distinct physical characteristics or behavior use to be quite common, but is changing rapidly.

All North Americans and Europeans, for instance, are called “guiris,” however this should not be understood as an insult.

## DIET

### Special Diets:

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible, but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally (including with your host family) from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

The main meal is lunch, breakfast is usually much lighter than in the states. However at mid morning Spanish usually go out to a bar or a café to get a coffee and a tapa. In Spain meals are commonly later than in other countries, lunch being many times way after 2pm and dinner sometimes as late as 9 or 10 pm. In Spain a significant amount of meat is consumed, especially pork and the famous “jamón.”

**Note:** if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform our office prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.



## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

**SIT requires students to be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccine in accordance with the CDC prior to the start of their program. Carefully read the section on vaccinations for the most recent guidelines: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/risk-management/covid-19-risk-management-protocols/>**

Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, accident and illness insurance, and

general program tips, please read the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document and [Student Handbook](#).

Remember that while you are a student in a cultural education program in your host country, you are also an ambassador for your home country, home institution, and SIT Study Abroad. We ask all students to abide by all policies and guidelines in order to help maintain those important relationships as well as their own safety and wellbeing. Failure to abide by established guidelines may result in disciplinary measures.

Bilbao is one of the safest cities in Spain with a very low crime rate, so no major considerations are necessary. Follow the advice of locals (in particular your host family)—e.g. if people do not go jogging in a certain area, and tell you not to, listen to them and don't do it.



## HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally,

please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations.

Each program's homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

On this program, you will be staying in one homestay. You will stay with a family living in Bilbao for almost 12 weeks, the only time you will not be with your host family is during excursions. Homestays are usually located in central Bilbao or in the coastal area of Getxo. The longest possible commute will be around 25 minutes by public transportation. Bilbao is a small and accessible city with very good transportation that services the whole city and surrounding areas.

## OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

During the program students also will be lodging in hotels, or student residences depending on the necessities and availability during the excursions.

## TRANSPORTATION

Bilbao has a very good public transportation. The main means of transportation are city buses called BILBOBUS, the subway, and the tram. While in Bilbao you will be supplied with a “Barik card”, a card that will allow you to use all city buses, the metro, the tram, intercity buses (Bizkaibus), some train lines (Feve and an EuskoTren line) and other means of transportation near Bilbao. To get to the University and SIT office you can use the tram, the bus or there is a metro station about 10 minutes' walk away. (Stop: Deusto, exit: Lehendakari Aguirre).

## COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.



## PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working smart phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked smart phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) work with the staff within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a smart phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. **DO NOT purchase an international plan unless you have a dual SIM phone.** We discourage this for regular smart phones because your homestay family will not be able to communicate with you as they would have to call internationally.

During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their smart phone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire

minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

There are several cell phone companies in Spain. The most popular ones are Movistar, Euskaltel, Vodafone or Orange. They all offer a rechargeable card system that means that students won't need to have a contract. You can find many stores of these companies in Bilbao where you can get information about offers and prices.

The University of Deusto campus offers you free wireless Internet connection. Besides, you can also find multiple Wi-Fi areas both in Bilbao and in Getxo, often for free as well.

## MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged.



For this program, **DHL, FedEx, UPS services are available in country.** Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

You should have mail sent to your homestay address, which you will find out during orientation.

## MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

In Spain and most parts of Europe students can access funds and pay in most stores from their US bank accounts using their VISA or MasterCard debit cards. Any debit card that is linked to the PLUS or CIRRUS networks should also work at ATMs in country, take under consideration though that you will be charged for every withdrawal. Credit cards (VISA, American Express, MasterCard) will also work as well. ATMs are very easily accessible throughout all over Spain and the Basque country. Traveler's checks are not recommended or useful. In case of an emergency it is possible to get cash advances on major credit cards in Spanish banks.



Check current exchange rates:

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**

A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US\$1,800 to \$2,200**, remember that you don't need this in cash. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned ISP or a specific personal expense.

Please budget approximately:

<b>Personal spending (from past student suggestions):</b>	\$1,400 – 1,600
<b>Books, printing, supplies:</b>	\$50
<b>Up-front medical costs</b> (you will get reimbursed for these expenses)	\$50 Per visit
<b>Potential ISP travel expenses:</b>	\$50 - 200
<b>Visa:</b>	\$190
<b>COVID-19 Entry Test(s)</b> (may be required for entry; subject to change and costs may vary)	\$100-250
<b>Typical Internet café usage:</b>	Varies by student
<b>Estimated total:</b>	\$1,800 – 2,200

counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

Given the current global health situation, SIT advises against independent travel. If a student wishes to travel independently, they must submit a request that will be reviewed by the Academic Director and the Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing Regional Manager. SIT reserves the right to deny independent travel requests. Further details regarding the current independent travel protocols can be found here: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/health-safety-and-well-being/risk-management/covid-19-risk-management-protocols/>.

## VISITORS AND FREE TIME

**SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term**, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions



# PACKING GUIDELINES

## LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

## CLOTHING GUIDELINES

While informal dress is acceptable and common in most settings, it is essential to keep a neat, clean appearance. Jeans with holes, sloppy T-shirts and tank tops are discouraged. It is not necessary to be fashionable, just neat and clean. It is very important to have at least one set of clothes for semi-formal occasions and one set of clothes that can get dirty during excursions. You will experience a seasonal change during this semester, however Bilbao has rain almost all through-out the year. So be sure to pack accordingly. It is advisable to bring clothes that can be used for both seasons. All homes and at the university in Bilbao there is central heating so layers are recommended especially during the winter.

During the excursions to Catalonia, the weather will be very similar to Bilbao so clothing also may be similar.



## COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is **strongly recommended**, that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. SIT **does not provide** personal property insurance and it is recommended that you insure your computer or other valuables for full coverage. For details on SIT’s insurance, please see the full Description of Coverage on our [Student Insurance](#). SIT is not responsible for any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country, theft, or loss.

A laptop will be very useful both during the period in Bilbao and excursions, as well as during the ISP period. Remember to bring any necessary adapters. It is not necessary to bring a printer.

The University of Deusto campus offers you free wireless Internet connection. Besides, you can also find multiple Wi-Fi areas both in Bilbao and in Getxo, often for free as well.

Some WiFi areas in Bilbao: Plaza Nueva (Casco Viejo), Jardines de Albia (Abando), Plaza de Indautxu, Plaza Botica Vieja (Deusto), Plaza Levante (San Inazio), Centro Comercial Zubiarte, Biblioteca Bidebarrieta (Casco Viejo), etc

There are also many coffee shops where one can have wifi access.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to rent a laptop locally

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. <https://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/> .

## GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

## WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Many imported (North American) brands of toiletries, medicines, vitamins, etc., can be bought in Spain although local or European made brands can be a more affordable as a substitute. For women, there are local as well as American brand tampons and cups available.

## ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or [Contact a Former Student](#).

Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.





# PACKING LIST

## GENERAL

- 1 nice outfit suitable for a social event
- Lightweight clothes including pants, long-sleeved shirts, light T-shirts, opt. medium length skirt)
- Underwear and socks (10-day supply)
- Warm pajamas or nightgown
- Slippers or flip flops (for use inside house and on excursions)
- 1 pair comfortable sneakers
- 1 pair sandals
- 1 pair nice shoes
- Rain gear (waterproof jacket, poncho, or umbrella)
- 2–4 pairs pants or jeans
- 1 medium-length skirt and/or dress
- 5–6 mixed long and short-sleeved t-shirts
- 2–3 blouses or button-down shirts
- Sweater
- Jacket or fleece
- Bathing suit
- Optional – workout clothes

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa (if applicable)
- 2 passport photos
- Proof of COVID-19 Vaccine

## HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly
- Small first aid kit (most supplies can be bought here)
- Extra eye glasses and/or contact lenses
- Sunscreen (at least SPF 30 )
- Sunglasses

- Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap (for sun protection)

**To prevent the contraction and spread of COVID-19 students should come prepared with:**

- At least 3 reusable masks\* for personal protection (disposable masks will also be available)
- Hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for use when soap and water is not readily available
- Anti-bacterial wipes or solution to wipe down high-touch surfaces, especially while traveling from the US

\*Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others. Masks help reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 both by close contact and by airborne transmission. Masks must have two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric. Do not wear face shields alone (evaluation of the effectiveness of face shields is ongoing but is unknown at this time).



## OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Medium-sized day pack (to pack clothes for 3–4 days for excursions)
- Small, quick-drying towel
- Spanish/English dictionary
- Reusable water bottle
- Small luggage lock
- Laptop computer (*please insure it*)

## OPTIONAL

- Travel guide (particularly if you plan to do post-program travel)
- Small camera and film/batteries (*please insure valuable cameras*)