

20 Spanish celebrations you wouldn't want to miss

When most people think Spain and *fiestas* they most likely imagine being covered with mashed tomato during La Tomatina en Buñol or watching a few brave souls run the streets of Pamplona chased by bulls during the Fiestas of San Fermín. But Spain's seventeen autonomous communities offer a wide variety of fascinating celebrations, each infused with the history and culture of that particular region. Here are a few for your next visit to Spain.

[The Three Kings Parade, Alcoy, Valencia](#)

(January 5)

Spain celebrates the arrival of the three wise men often with more enthusiasm than Christmas. Parades are organized throughout the country, but Alcoy's is the oldest. Held since 1885, it starts with children dressed as shepherds and continues with Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar arriving on camelback carrying gifts. As they ride through the streets, the royal pages use wooden ladders along the parade route to climb up to balconies to distribute presents.

[The Holiday of the Cuadrillas in Barranda, Caravaca de la Cruz, Murcia](#)

(last weekend of January)

Bands known as cuadrillas dance, sing, and compete with each other on the streets during this festival that celebrates traditional music from all over Spain.

[The Weddings of Isabel de Segura, Teruel, Aragon](#)

(mid-February)

Part of the Europe in Love network of cities, Teruel celebrates the 13th century legend of an unfortunate love triangle by returning to the medieval times. Street theater recreates scenes from the story and battle reenactments, sword fights, falconry displays, and traditional concerts take place throughout the city.

[Carnival in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands](#)

(February)

Dubbed the 'most Brazilian' of all Spanish carnival celebrations, the Santa Cruz de Tenerife Carnival is two weeks of color, music, and glitz. Parades and performances take over the streets. Celebrations end when a sardine that symbolizes the spirit of the carnival is burned in a ceremonial burial.

[Las Fallas Festival, Valencia, Valencia](#)

(March 15-19)

Elaborate statues of *niñots*, or figurines, with satirical undertones, noisy petard explosions, traditional music and dancing, medieval parades, and paella cookouts

are just a few experiences that characterize one of Valencia's most important celebrations. The culmination is close to 800 fireworks and fires all in one night – an experience and sight not to be missed.

Easter Week, Lorca, Murcia

(March-April)

Spain's devotion to Easter festivities is evident throughout the peninsula – almost every town celebrates it with processions of religious statues and somber music. But Lorca puts on a spectacle you wouldn't want to miss. Their processions include Egyptian Gods, Roman Emperors, Cleopatra, and the Antichrist and they even host chariot races.

April Fair, Seville, Andalusia

(April)

Seville's largest fiesta began in the 19th century as a cattle fair and today it's a week when city residents abandon their houses for *casetas*, tents installed on fairgrounds. Most celebrations take place inside those casetas – there is food, drink, conversation, and *sevillana*, a local version of flamenco. The vast majority of casetas are private, meant to welcome family and friends, but there are also public ones for tourists. Make sure to wear the traditional Andalusian dress and rent a carriage with a driver so you can take part in a horse and carriage parade.

Lamprey Celebrations, Arbo, Galicia

(last weekend of April)

Believed to be the oldest gastronomic celebration of Galicia, this festival honors lamprey, a fish that has been part of Galician cooking for centuries. To the sound of bagpipes and other traditional band music, visitors taste lamprey dishes, enjoy Galician wines that accompany them, and learn about the importance of this jawless fish to the region.

Festival of Courtyards, Córdoba, Andalusia

(first two weeks of May)

Peeking through closed gates at flower-filled courtyards is every tourist's favorite pastime while strolling the whitewashed streets of Cordoba. But during this festival no peeking is required. Residents open their patios to the public and compete for the title of the best display in an almost 100-year old competition. The sounds of street flamenco shows and the taste of local tapas accompany the celebration.

San Isidro Fair, Madrid

(May)

If you want to picture what San Isidro celebrations look like, you only have to see Goya's painting 'The San Isidro Meadow'. Of course the background has changed and most people don't carry parasols, but Madrid is still one large picnic during this fiesta. There are also parades of giants and *cabezudos* (large heads), street concerts, and evening performances of Zarzuela, the Spanish operetta.

[Pyrenees summer solstice fire festivals](#), villages in Sobarbe and Ribagorza regions of Aragón and Alta Ribagorza, Berguedá, Pallars Jussá, Pallars Sobirà and Val d'Aran villages of Cataluña
(last week of June)

Known as *Las Fallas del Pirineo*, these celebrations go back generations and vary depending on the village. In some, residents descend from the highest point carrying torches, in others they organize races and dances with fire, and, in yet others, festivities culminate with a large bonfire in the center.

[San Fermín Fiestas](#), Pamplona, Navarra
(July)

Although the running of the bulls is the main attraction of San Fermín, the festival also offers concerts, open-air celebrations, and, of course, parades and dances of 'giants and big heads' – 13-foot-tall statues of kings, queens, and their entourage.

[International Festival of the Celtic World](#), Ortigueira, Galicia
(July)

Although this open-air festival's focus is Celtic music, other kinds of traditional folk tunes are played on the festival's many stages. There are also photography exhibitions, craft fairs, dance workshops, and marching band performances.

[La Tomatina](#), Buñol, Valencia
(last Wednesday of August)

Start with a breakfast provided by the Town Hall and follow it by throwing tomatoes at everyone around you. By the end of the day, the city resembles a large pot of tomato sauce, your clothes are soaked with probably just as much tomato pulp as you've eaten in your lifetime, and the hosing offered by the organizers feels like the best shower ever.

[Battle of the Flowers](#), Laredo, Cantabria
(last Friday of August)

Neighbors work together to create elaborate floral floats, some more than twenty feet high, from close to 2 million flowers (most grown by town residents themselves). Traditional music and dancing accompany the floats in the parade and fireworks complete the festivities. But, perhaps, the most interesting part is the

night before the parade when visitors are invited to watch the assembly of the floats and witness how people work together to complete almost a year-long dream.

Rioja Wine Harvest Festival, Logroño, La Rioja

(September)

If you ever wanted to crush grapes by foot to make wine like in the olden days, this is your festival. The batch you'll make will be offered to the Virgin of Valvanera, the saint of La Rioja, and you can continue to enjoy the celebrations with street performances and wine tastings.

Nuestra Señora de la Merced Fiesta, Barcelona, Catalonia

(September)

Barcelona hosts several hundred activities during this fiesta, the city's largest street party. You can watch *castells* (human towers) being built, you can enjoy street performances of traditional dance and song, you can watch the parade of giants (large effigies of royalty and nobles), and you can even participate in a fire run. For the latter you may want to don protective clothing in case a fire-breathing dragon actually gets you.

Week of the Zarzuela, La Solana, Castile La Mancha

(October)

A week-long festival dedicated to Zarzuela, the Spanish operetta, welcomes both professional and amateur groups to perform various zarzuelas in the Teatro-Auditorio Tomás Barrera.

Orujo Festival, Potes, Cantabria

(November)

Held in the town, located in the heart of the Picos de Europa, the mountain range in Northern Spain, this celebration of Orujo, a pomace brandy, invites visitors to witness the traditional distillation process. Sampling of this liquor on the streets of the town is a must as is indulging in the traditional gastronomy of the region.

Song of Sybil, Majorca, Balearic Islands

(December 24)

A medieval Christmas tradition that came to Majorca from Catalonia this Gregorian chant is performed on Christmas Eve a cappella by a child in many churches of the island. UNESCO inscribed it on the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2010.