



80 tips
A pocket guide
to enjoying
your stay

UAB

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Servei de Llengües

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80 tips

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INTRODUCTION

The 80 tips in this guide are to help people studying in Catalonia adjust to some of the habits and customs of Catalan society. They tell you, for example, how to greet people you have just met, when it is best to use the more formal **vostè** form of address and the informal **tu** and how you are expected to behave when someone invites you to dinner, etc. These are just a few of questions covered

in this booklet, and it is just as important to understand these aspects of the culture as it is to know the language itself, to make sure that your dealings with people here are smooth and satisfying.

We hope that this guide will be useful to you and we would like to take this opportunity to wish you a pleasant stay.

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PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS



THE CATALAN TARANNÀ

Expressive and welcoming?

One of the stereotypes that tends to be attributed to Spanish culture is that the people are extremely expressive, open and welcoming. That may be true in some cases, but in Catalonia the people might generally appear somewhat more distant and reserved when it comes to social relationships. Some people would even go as far as to say we are dull. But like anywhere else, as you know, it is best to keep an open mind and avoid making generalisations. In fact, there is no need to worry, because what the Catalans call 'tarannà', which may seem aloof at first, becomes much warmer and more solid as a relationship progresses.

Direct and informal

In informal situations, the way Catalans speak may seem highly direct and lacking in manners. It is a far cry from the ceremonious language that is so common of many parts of Asia and South America, with so many flowery expressions of courtesy. There is far less of that here, so don't be offended if somebody asks for something without adding the corresponding **si us plau** (please). Nevertheless, you should still expect to be treated politely and respectfully, and you generally will be.

VERBAL AND BODY LANGUAGE

Com va tot?

When somebody answers **molt bé!** (very well) to the question **com va tot?** (how's it going?) we should not assume that things simply could not be better in that person's life, and neither should we interpret this to mean that they are being invited to strike up a conversation. It is simply an expression, a formality (a linguistic convention) that plays an important role in communication between people: that of establishing a civilised relationship between two people. The literal meaning of these set phrases is not as important as the context in which they are used. **Bon profit!** (enjoy your meal), **com anem?** (how are we doing?), **què fem?** (what's up?), **anar fent** (getting by), **records!** (my love to...), and **com estàs?** (how are you?) are further examples of this.

Several conversations at once

Sharing a table with a group of Catalan friends, whether it's to drink a coffee or to have supper, can be an alarming experience. That's especially true if you are from a Central European country and haven't been here for long or mastered much of the language, and most importantly, if you are used to a more formal and controlled way of making conversation. Here, it is not only common for people to speak, or even shout, at the same time, but for the conversation to cover several topics at the same time, and switch, practically without warning, from politics to football and then on to the latest TV shows.

Speaking in the imperative

In many languages (English, Catalan, Spanish, etc) the imperative is the verb form used to express an order (**vine!** – come!). But although these languages may have this feature in common, where they differ is in the situations where the imperative should be used. For example, is it socially correct to say **posa't a la cua!** (get in the queue!) to somebody you don't know at all and wants to get in front of you in the line at the baker's? No. Generally speaking, you could say that the imperative is only used between people that know each other well (between friends, workmates, with your partner, etc) and especially, among the family (parents and brothers and sisters) and in informal contexts involving young people (when they are having a drink, when they are playing, when they are out on the town, etc). There are some languages, like German, where the use of the imperative is much more restricted and can sound rude in contexts where here it would go unnoticed. What's more, in some countries where there is a preference for using extremely courteous expressions (especially Latin American ones) it is rarely used.

They touch me when I speak

In comparison with other people around the world, but in common with other Mediterranean countries, in Catalonia we tend to make much more expressive gestures and body movements as we speak. And as well as using our bodies more, we also touch each other more. A hand on the shoulder, a pat on the back, and so on.

Before coming to the wrong conclusion (or even building up false hopes), you should realise that such tactile ways are common among young students (with a few exceptions), and rather than being a form of communication, it is something you shouldn't read too much into. Well, sometimes, but that's another story. The fact is that so much touching can often come as a shock to people from other countries that are used to keeping more physical distance when relating to others.

Eye contact

When walking down the street, travelling on the metro, or sat in a bar, you may find somebody of either sex is staring at you directly in the eye. Don't be alarmed. In some cultures, especially Asian ones, direct eye contact between a man and a woman can mean more than mere curiosity. But here, there is nothing particularly unusual about people staring at each other and even acknowledging each other with a small gesture, in some cases.

I think that...

When you travel to a foreign country, the locals will often ask you to say what you think of the place, and talk about the things you do and don't like. Everyone is free to say whatever they like when they are away from home, just make sure you tone down what you are saying and make it clear that you are just expressing an opinion, especially when it is negative. The formula **trobo que...** (*I think that...*, *ich glaube, daß...*) is one of the most appropriate in situations like this.

Ei, tio! Ei, tia!

The word **tio/tia** (man or mate) is becoming more and more common in informal expressions: **quin tio!** (what a guy!), **de què vas, tia?** (what's up with you, girl?), **què passa, tio?** (what's happening, mate?). Among young people, the expression **ei, tio** (*tia* for a girl) is commonly used as a way of addressing someone.

Foulmouthed?

The informalities of Catalan social relationships can also be seen in the way people speak, and the widespread use of swearwords and bad language. These often form part of informal and common forms of speech but the connotations are not always necessarily negative. For example, such words as **collons** and **hòstia** are used merely to express surprise and used that way are unlikely to cause offence among friends.

Senyora/senyoreta

Senyoreta (miss, or *señorita* in Spanish) is the term that was traditionally used to address a young and normally unmarried lady, although the word is going out of fashion. In Catalonia it is also a word that highlights differences between genders (for you don't say *senyoret*), and therefore might not always be considered politically correct.

Saying thank you

Saying thank you is one of the most worldwide of social conventions (the Asians and South Americans are prime exponents). In Catalan, the most common expression is **gràcies** alone or maybe **moltes gràcies** (*moltes de gràcies* in Balearic speech), rather than any of the more formal sounding alternatives, such as **molt agrait/agraïda**, **moltes mercès** or **molt amable**. In some parts of Catalonia you will also hear people saying **merci**, which is borrowed from French with a slightly altered pronunciation: «mèrsi». Like in other languages, the other speaker is generally expected to respond to a thank you with an acknowledgement along the lines of **de res** (not at all, you're welcome) or **no es mereixen**.

Saying sorry

The most common expressions for excusing yourself are **perdó**, **perdona'm** and **em sap greu** or **em sap molt de greu**, and the best ways of responding and telling somebody not to worry are **no passa res, és igual**, **no t'amoïnis** or **tant és**. Small words that help to make the world a better place.

MEETING SOMEONE

The two kisses

If you are introduced to somebody and they give you a kiss on each cheek, it's nothing odd, and you shouldn't get the wrong idea. Here, it is a natural and positive cultural expression, just like similar variants in other countries. The two kisses are more normal when two ladies meet, or when a male and female meet, but when two men meet they usually just shake each others hand or hug each other. In France, for example, three kisses are the norm (one more than us!) and the order of the first kiss also changes. In Africa, South America and Asia, for example, in such situations it is much more normal just to share hands or embrace. In many places, physical contact is considered unusual outside of close family or personal situations. In the north of Europe or the United States, for example, a short embrace is usually quite enough. In Russia, kisses are an intimate thing, even though we often see television pictures of politicians kissing each other when they meet. In Germany, and most of Central Europe, embraces or similar affectionate gestures of welcome are reserved for relationships between very close friends, and in working and other formal situations, anything other than a handshake would be most untoward.

Tu or vostè?

When you meet somebody for the first time it is often hard to know whether you should use the informal form of 'you', **tu**, or the more formal **vostè**. In fact, **vostè** has lost considerable ground to **tu**, and you will hear more and more people using **tu** when they speak to each other without it being considered in the least bit disrespectful. But that's more the case among young people, and at University just about everybody uses the **tu** form, and even some strangers in formal situations will use it, although it is still considered polite to use **vostè** when speaking to people that are much older than you or in particularly formal situations.

Vostè and its respective forms in other languages are much stronger in other parts of the world, such as the French *vous*. In some Spanish speaking parts of South America, in Asia (Japan and China) and in Russia, the formal forms of you are still the more common forms, as they are a way of expressing respect for somebody else. It should also be remembered that in some languages, like English, there is no equivalent distinction made between **vostè** and **tu**.

Names and surnames

There are seemingly as many different ways of forming surnames as there are cultures in the world. In many countries (Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, etc) women adopt their husband's surname as soon as they are married, but not here. Often people only have one surname, that of their father, but here we keep both the mother's and the father's surname. Some people like to put an **i** (and) in between the two. Once the father's name always went first, but this was recently changed, and people can now choose the order, although this was mainly introduced for symbolic reasons, as very few people chose to break from the traditional form.

Most Catalan mothers and fathers tend to give their children names based on the Christian religion, which is why most Catalan names are not enormously unlike their Italian, French or Spanish equivalents, although the pronunciation may make them sound almost completely different. The upshot of all this is that you will not find such a wide variety of names in Catalonia as you would in countries that rely less on religious saints for their names. In China, for example, people name their children after the kind of lives they expect them to have, and as a result there are thousands of different names. In Sub-Saharan Africa, names can be associated to religion (Animism, Islam, Christianity), but it is also common to link the name to that of a relative or the circumstances that led to the baby being born. For example, in the Ivory Coast a lot of boys and girls are called Kuadio, which means 'first-born'.

I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT

Punctuality

Being punctual is relative, it all depends on the way you tend to see things. For the British and Asians, arriving on time is something valued very highly. The British are famous for their punctuality, while arriving late is one of the worst things an Asian teacher could do. On the other hand, Latin Americans and most of all Africans don't consider punctuality to be so big an issue, and have no qualms about arriving late for an engagement. In Catalonia, people are generally on time for any formal appointments (when attending a public event, such as the theatre, cinema, lessons, a presentation, a wedding, etc) but that is anything but the case when it comes to informal gatherings, where you can rest assured that somebody is always going to get there late. These habits have changed a bit since mobile phones came along. People can now change the meeting time and place at the last moment and you even get people, once everybody is together, who suddenly decide they fancy going somewhere else or simply choose to stay at home, and can tell the others by casually sending them an SMS.

A quarts de...

Languages reflect the way of the life of the people that speak them, and it can be extraordinary to observe just how far speakers will adapt language to their needs. One of these is the Catalan expression **a quarts de...** (in Catalan people tell the time in quarters of an hour), which we often use to say the exact time we expect to arrive at an appointment. It is actually a way of saying that we will arrive at a certain time-ish.

I HAVE A PARTNER

Partners and relationships

Like anywhere else, you'll find a bit of everything in Catalonia. Catalan society is culturally monogamous and what normally and traditionally occurs (Catholic morality still affects the Catalan way of behaving) are stable relationships between two partners: hence we say **tenir parella** (have a partner) or **tenir nòvio/nòvia** (have a boyfriend/girlfriend) or **sortir** (go out) with somebody. Although relationships between younger people are generally more sporadic, they tend to use the same vocabulary. You will also hear people describing somebody as **un/a amic/amiga** or **un rotllo** when saying that it is nothing more than a short fling, and generally more sexual than anything else. The ideas of

prometatge or **estar compromès** (being engaged) and requesting matrimony in the traditional fashion are in decadence. Of course, it all depends on the couple, but marriage is often seen more as a game and a romantic gesture than a necessary stage of life. Sporadic sexual relations outside of wedlock or a stable relationship are considered perfectly natural among young people, both male and female, even though their parents and grandparents are unlikely to see things in quite the same way. This is an altogether different situation to that which might be found in some Asian and Muslim countries where public shows of affection are frowned upon and even forbidden by law. The way Catalan society is much more open about these things is particularly evident in large cities, such as Barcelona and its metropolitan region, where sex shops and the likes are now commonplace and unlikely to raise an eyebrow.

As for homosexuality, it is increasingly more socially accepted in urban areas and in all walks of society. Remember that in 2006 Spain passed a law to allow civil weddings between people of the same sex. Catalonia also legalised adoption by homosexuals.

As for other cultures, the polygamy that exists in some other countries is socially unaccepted here, even though there are people that, whether or not their partners approve, do have relationships with other people. But that is not a road we need to go down here!

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Family ties

Here, like in all good Mediterranean cultures, ties to the family and friends are important. It is common for several generations of the same family, from grandparents down to grandchildren, to live in the same town or city, or at least not far away from each other. It is still traditional for the family to get together for a meal each week, usually on Sunday, and everybody (parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents) will be expected to attend and eat a massive dinner around a long table. You will often hear Catalan friends say they can't meet you on Sunday because they have to go for **dinar a casa dels pares** (dinner at their parent's house). This also happens at Christmas and other major festivals, but don't worry, there is always room for a few guests. This way of life might seem a bit strange to those who come from countries like the United States or the North of Europe, where greater mobility and a more individualistic way of making friends imply that relationships are not quite so closely-knit. But there are other cultures, such as Asia and Latin America, where the family plays an even more central role in social affairs, and here they would find it extraordinary, for instance, that some families do not take direct care for the elderly, and send them off to live in old people's homes instead.





Friends, *la colla* or the group

Your special group of friends, known as ***la colla***, is very important to young Catalans. Most people have a group of extremely close friends of the same or different sex with whom they build a highly trusting relationship. These people become veritable confidants, and social partners, that will often go through life together in much the same way, although things differ from case to case, as the members of a family do. When you first arrive in Catalonia you might find it harder to make friends than you had hoped, but when you finally do form friendships, you may well find that they last forever.



I'M HUNGRY

Parts of the day

Here we divide the day into six parts, which correspond approximately to the following times: ***matinada*** (5am-7am), ***matí*** (8am-12pm), ***migdia*** (12pm-2pm), ***tarda*** (3pm-6pm), ***vespre*** (7pm-9pm) and ***nit*** (10pm-4am). Lunch tends to be at around 2pm, an hour or two later than in most countries of Europe, and also Asia and the United States, while supper tends to be between 9 and 10pm, again considerably later than most of Europe, Asia and Africa.

Eating and relationships

We have three or four meals a day: ***l'esmorzar***, in the morning; ***el dinar***, at midday; ***el berenar*** (for some people, especially young children), in the late afternoon, and ***el sopar***, at night. Of these meals, ***dinar*** and ***sopar*** are the main ones. This is unlike other cultures, such as that of Britain, where breakfast is much more important and lunch is often just a snack. Some people do have a little something to eat before they leave home in the morning, especially if that's before 8am, and they may have something else to eat around 10am, which is often a sandwich or a cake (croissant, ensaimada, etc).

Like any good Mediterranean country, friends and family often involve meals in their social occasions. It is a common practice to meet for lunch or supper to share experiences, celebrate occasions or simply enjoy getting together to enjoy some good food, either at somebody's house or in a restaurant. And that is not just between the family or among friends. At work, employees often organise meals together; sometimes on a semi-informal basis and it is normal practice to close business deals by going out for a meal.

Typical dishes

Catalonia has plenty of culinary delights to offer. In urban areas, especially in and around Barcelona, there are increasingly more ethnic restaurants and cuisine from other countries, normally from the communities that have arrived in numbers in our country, such as Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Mexicans and Tibetans.

But you will also find food from the different communities of the peninsula, such as Basque *pinchos* and *tapas*, which might form an important part of the local cuisine, but were actually imported here by the immigrants from the south of Spain that settled here in the 1950s and 1960s.

So, it is getting harder to find proper Catalan cuisine in the cities at an affordable price. What you should look out for are the small bars and restaurants offering homemade midday menus at reasonable prices (between 8 and 12 euros, and often including dessert and coffee), and where you will find all the things that typical Catalan families like to eat: ***arròs a la cassola*** (or paella), ***macarrons amb tomàquet*** (macaroni with tomato sauce), ***escudella i carn d'olla*** (Catalan casserole), ***botifarra amb seques*** (sausage with beans) or ***escalivada*** (grilled vegetables).

These are just a few of the most typical dishes, but to really discover Catalan cuisine, you need to get out into the provinces: take a train and visit some of the towns on the Maresme coast (north of Barcelona), or try the gastronomic delights of Girona, or head down south to Tarragona and the Terres de l'Ebre. Here you will find all kinds of ways of serving rice, meat and baked fish, and some surprising combinations of sweet and savoury in Catalan desserts. A whole culinary universe awaits you, which goes much further than the ubiquitous ***paella***, ***truita*** (omelette) and ***pa amb tomàquet*** (bread and tomato).

Drinking alcohol

Drinking alcohol is a tradition among adults that you find accompanies most meals and celebrations involving family and friends: and wine and cava are the most widespread drinks of all. In other parts of Europe, alcohol also forms part of a nation's social base. In some places, such as Great Britain and Scandinavia, drinking is an almost essential element of social life, and for some people conversation just isn't the same without it. In Russia, the home of vodka, drinking is all part of a ritual that there is no getting out of, it is assumed that everybody should drink. It is so ingrained in the national psyche that a foreigner may unknowingly insult a local by refusing to accept a drink. Alcohol is also an important element of other cultures, too, such as China, where it is a regular feature in the business environment: without drink, there is no deal.

I'm vegetarian

Although there are far fewer vegetarians in Catalonia than in many other parts of Europe (such as Germany, where vegetarianism is especially widespread) or India (mainly for religious reasons), more and more people here are taking that option, either for moral or health reasons. In Catalonia you will find a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, and rice and all the other ingredients required to form the basis for a healthy vegetarian lifestyle. In Barcelona, and in other cities too, it is increasingly common for vegetarian options to be included in the menu. It is also easier to find special foodstuffs, such as soya-based products (tofu, seitan...) in specialised shops and even in the bigger supermarkets. It can get a bit trickier when you move inland to the mountain areas where meat features prominently in the local diet. You'll need to be on the lookout all the time. Although a sandwich is described on the menu as vegetal, the chances are it will contain tinned tuna fish, and you should not be surprised to find that what is advertised as *arròs amb verdures* (rice with vegetables) actually contains little pieces of ham or chicken.

Ecological food

Concern for the environment and also for our own health has increased the demand for ecological food products. It will still be some time before we have the range of options you would find in a country like Germany, where some large supermarkets have only been stocking such products for decades, but in most cities and some towns in Catalonia you will find small specialist establishments that offer a large selection of environment-friendly products. In Catalonia, such products (and not just food but cleaning and personal hygiene products too) carry the distinction awarded by the *Consell Català de Producció Agrària Ecològica*, an organisation associated to the *Generalitat de Catalunya* and which certifies all ecological products.

I'VE BEEN INVITED TO SUPPER

The importance of the invitation

The significance of being invited to supper varies between cultures so it is also useful to make a note of the differences because sometimes a lack of understanding of the simplest of issues can lead to major misunderstandings. Did you know, for example, that in such Asian countries as Japan and China you need to keep saying thank you for everything when you are invited to eat at somebody's home? Generally speaking, you could say that Catalans are especially fond of inviting people to dinner, and meals involving family and friends are commonplace, and it surely won't be long before somebody is inviting you to eat at their place. But, please be aware that here it really isn't quite such a socially important occasion as it might be in other countries, like in China, where the offer of food is considered a profound act of affection and friendship. For us, it is just a simple, informal event, with little or no ceremony. It is common to invite your hosts back for a meal at your own home in the future, and it is a nice touch, but by no means an obligation, to take a gift for the hosts (maybe a bottle of wine, or dessert).

And what are you going to take?

Don't be surprised if you are invited to supper one day and asked to bring a dish. Such 'pot-luck' meals are a common practice among young people, especially when there is a firm bond between the *colla* and people have little time or money. An omelette, a salad, a cake, a drink, anything you take will be gratefully received and you can pretty much take what you like, just don't go spending all day fretting in the kitchen! Once at the table, it is all about sharing, and everybody is expected to try a bit of what everybody else has brought.

And what if I'm not invited?

If you have decided to go to visit a friend or acquaintance, you should always make sure that you won't cause any problems by doing so, and should give plenty of notice. Among young, informal friends it is unlikely to bother anyone if you turn up at suppertime without warning, you can always just phone for a pizza! But not everybody is so welcoming of unexpected visits. Nobody will close the door in your face, but it might be a bit of an uncomfortable situation. This situation would be unthinkable somewhere like China or Vietnam, where hospitality is an almost sacred value among family and friends, and where it is quite normal to drop by unannounced at a relative's house, and simply pull up a chair and join them for dinner.

I'M GOING TO A RESTAURANT

The prices

Going out to restaurants does not have to burn a hole in your pocket. You can eat out in all manner of ways. You can pick and choose from some of the best food in the world (everybody has heard of Ferran Adrià and the eccentricities of *El Bulli* restaurant!); while at the other extreme you have international fast food and more local options, such as sandwiches, tapas, and cheap food from all corners of the globe. You just need to know where to go and keep an eye on the prices. At midday, most low-price bars and restaurants offer a set menu, ranging from 6 euros in a Chinese to 8 to 12 at most others. You can choose from a list of first and second courses, and drinks and desserts are usually included too, but not always coffee or tea. On the university campus and the faculties the bars and refectories offer even lower prices. And also at the university and at most workplaces you will find people bringing their own packed lunches, which they will often heat up in a microwave oven. At suppertime and at the weekends, set menus are rarely available, and when they are, they are usually a bit more expensive.

Do I pay?

When we go out here, unlike in most central European countries and even some parts of the Iberian Peninsula, like the Basque Country, people pay for what they eat or drink themselves, rather than paying in rounds. There are always exceptions to this rule (when celebrating a birthday or saint's day, or when returning a favour, for instance) but it is good to know that, in general, people pay their own way. This is especially common among university students, who tend to need to be careful with their spending.

The English use the expression *to go Dutch*, meaning that everybody pays for their own orders. In Russia, and in some cases in Catalonia, and in many other countries where there is still a division of roles between the sexes, only the men pay. In China it is considered rude not to let somebody pay when they offer to do so. It is handy to know that here, if somebody says ***anem a fer un cafè*** (let's go for a coffee), they are not necessarily suggesting that one or other of you should pay for it. However, in some Asian countries, for example, this would be interpreted as a formal invitation.

I'm leaving a tip

Unlike some countries, like the United States, people are never expected to leave a tip in Catalan bars or restaurants, although some people still do it, especially when the bill is a big one or the service has been particularly good. For a simple coffee, you wouldn't be expected to leave anything, although a large group going out for supper probably should. The amount depends on the total cost of the bill, but would generally be around 5 to 10 per cent of the total amount.

I'm taking away what I didn't eat

In Catalonia people still find it a bit tacky to take uneaten food or undrunk wine away with you after eating in a medium to high cost restaurant. But don't let that bother you! Times are changing, and in a lot of restaurants the staff are now used to the idea of customers asking for a 'doggy-bag' to take away the slice of pizza they couldn't manage or the rest of the wine that never got drunk.



Can I smoke?

Having a coffee or beer in a public place with a cigarette in your hand isn't quite as cool or cinematographic as it used to be, and from the more hard line policies in the United States to the blanket bans on smoking in public places in Ireland and Italy, the habit is now often prohibited, or at least likely to cause ill-feeling. Current Spanish law protects non-smokers by placing certain restrictions on smoking in public spaces, but the owners of small bars are still allowed to decide for themselves whether or not to allow smoking on their premises. Smoking is forbidden in all universities, and tobacco products cannot be sold on the premises. Smoking is also forbidden in the workplace and on public transport, in cinemas, in theatres and in convention centres or public buildings. In bars and nightclubs, however, you will find it very hard to find anywhere where you can get away from tobacco smoke. If you are a smoker, keep a lookout for the signs that are on display in all public buildings, which state whether a place is an ***espai lliure de fum*** (smoke free space) or whether ***aquí es permet fumar*** (you can smoke here).

GETTING ABOUT: MEANS OF TRANSPORT, DRIVING...



I TAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Train, metro, bus...

The Catalan transport network is a good one, though not without its shortcomings, and you will find Barcelona and its environs surprisingly cheap compared with such other European capitals as London. The following are a series of tips for making the best out of public transport, especially in the metropolitan area of Barcelona: a) traffic jams are commonplace and unpredictable, especially during rush hour. If you have an important appointment and can't afford to arrive late, avoid problems and, if possible, take the metro (if in Barcelona or its surroundings); b) if you are going to use public transport, buy the *bitllets integrats* (integrated tickets) which, in Barcelona and its surroundings, can be used to travel by metro, bus and train for the price of a single ticket. Check for special offers: there are currently all kinds of multiple tickets and combinations (integrated tickets, monthly passes, special rates for young people and students, etc); c) on the bus, pay with coins (they won't accept large bills!); d) unfortunately, not everybody is so thoughtful as to leave the left hand side of the metro escalators free, so don't get too frustrated when people block your path; e) in many places there are night buses; in the Barcelona area, for example, there is what are known as the *Nitbús*, a great way of saving on taxi fares, and it has to be said, they can often provide quite an experience!; f) on all public transport there are seats reserved for the elderly, disabled and pregnant women. When there are a lot of people, do the decent thing and give up your seat for such people and g) to finish, some advice you should never forget, whenever it rains hard, nothing seems to run quite as smoothly as it should and the chances are, you're going to be late.

I GO BY BIKE

Urban cycling

The boom in the use of bikes as a form of urban transport is still quite new in Barcelona and the surrounding area, but is catching on fast. The city is still a far cry from some Central European cities, where not only are bikes respected by car drivers and other road users, but are also one of the most typical forms of student transport. In cities like Heidelberg (Germany), Copenhagen (Denmark), Uppsala (Sweden) and Oxford (England), it is common to see hundreds of young university students getting about the city on two wheels. You can get hold of a simple second hand bicycle

fairly cheaply, as well as the very latest racing, mountain and fold-up bikes. Barcelona has increasingly more bicycle lanes, although the process is slow as they seek their place alongside scooters, cars and buses. If you have to leave your bike anywhere, make sure you lock it securely. The administration is doing its best to limit the effects of bicycle theft and some private car parks have special places for leaving bikes. You can also combine the use of bikes with public transport. Barcelona is also currently experimenting with a system that has already proven successful in such cities as Berlin, a-la-carte bicycle hire, known here as *Bicing*.



I'M THUMBING A LIFT

Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is not a very common practice in Catalonia. Only in some rural areas will you find anybody resorting to this method to get from one town to another. If you try to thumb a lift in metropolitan Barcelona, the chances are you won't get much more than car fumes up your nose, but you never know, you might get lucky. In less urban areas, however, you have a much better chance of getting somebody to stop.

I DRIVE

Travel by car

The Catalans are extremely fond of travelling in private vehicles. Even though the distances between the different towns and counties are never that big, outside of Barcelona and its surroundings the public transport system is rarely good enough to get from place to place in comfort. First thing in the morning and last thing in the evening there can be, as in any big city, massive traffic jams as people try to get in and out of Barcelona. You will find very few families of three or four members that don't have their own car, and the chances are they have more than one, despite the high maintenance costs, the price of petrol, the cost of insurance, etc. It is nothing like in the countries of the north of Europe, where high taxes make car ownership something of a luxury.

Young Catalans often get their driving licences as soon as age permits, which here is 18 years, like in most European countries (in the USA, for example, the age is 16). However, it isn't easy to pass your test, and it isn't cheap either. A lot of young people learn to drive in order to go to university. Some campuses are a long way from the city centre and in some cases the public transport networks fail to provide the connections some students need. In 2006, a points system was introduced for driving licences (for any kind of motor vehicle): each offence is penalised with a certain number of points, and you eventually lose your licence.

Apart from some top of the range models, most cars in Catalonia are manual. And as most people already know, the steering wheel is on the left and people drive on the right.

Renting or sharing a car

If you live in Barcelona, have a licence, and fancy getting away for a while to the Costa Brava or the small Pyrenean villages, a good way is to hire a car from one of the low-cost companies. In recent years, a number of these have appeared, and the rates can be extraordinarily good, especially if there are a few of you to share the cost. Another option, which is often used in universities away from the city centre, is to share a car. You simply have to reach an agreement and agree to a price to share the petrol costs, and you have your own cheap and sustainable transport!

Zero tolerance

The numbers of deaths on the Catalan roads has reached alarming rates in recent years. The typical victims are young men that have been drinking. That is why, since 2005, anybody found driving with any alcohol in their body has been severely punished by the authorities. The 0 Tolerance campaign, like that used in France, involves extremely high fines, the withdrawal of licences and, in serious cases, prison. Think more than twice before drinking and driving.



GOING HOME

Cheap flights

In Catalonia you will find all kinds of cheap flight options for travelling around the Peninsula or elsewhere in Europe. Although the range of options is not quite as good as it might be somewhere like London, you will find budget airlines flying out of El Prat in Barcelona, and from the nearby airports of Girona and Reus. As you know, the best offers can be found on Internet.

You also have the option of travelling by ferry, especially to the Balearic Islands, where from Barcelona you can sail to Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera.



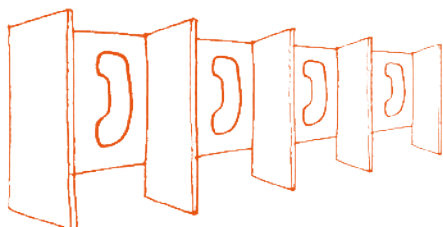
TELEPHONE, MAIL AND INTERNET



I'M ON THE PHONE

How should I answer?

Answering the telephone is one of those everyday practices that has a tendency to lead to some of the funniest and most unimaginable misunderstandings. Here, when phoning somebody's home, we usually ask for the person we want to speak to by saying **que hi és...?** (is ... there?) or **que podria parlar amb...?** (could I speak to...?) There isn't really a standard way of replying to that question. You would generally answer by saying something like **de part de qui?** or **amb qui parlo, si us plau?** (who's speaking, please?). The same goes for the person on the other end of the line: the person who answers the phone rarely gives their name and usually says something like: **digui'm** (literally tell me in English) or simply says **sí?** And if you would like to sound a little more polite, you could say **hola, bona tarda**. Can you imagine how many different ways of answering the telephone there must be around the world? In some countries, the person who answers the phone gives their name or even answers with their telephone number: **Sí, hola** and **digui** are just three of the expressions we Catalans use. As we tend to go to bed late around here, you can phone somebody as late as 11 o'clock without needing to feel concerned, although it is always best to find out what the norms are in each household.



Public telephones and locutoris

If you don't have a mobile phone or access to a telephone where you are living, you can still find a few payphones that operate with coins or cards. Designed for immigrant people, there are also loads of what are known as locutoris which offer a series of individual cabins with special rates for long distance calls. Check the prices and make sure the systems work properly.

Landlines and mobiles

In Catalonia, as in other Mediterranean countries like Italy, mobile telephones are extremely common. Don't be surprised to see people of all ages speaking on their phones at all hours of the day, on the bus or in restaurants. You cannot use mobile phones in class, or in the cinema, theatre or in any kind of public event that requires silence.

I'M SENDING A PACKAGE

Mail and messenger services

If you have to send a parcel home, you can use the official postal system, Correus, at a reasonable cost as long as it is not urgent. At Correus you can choose between standard rates and other special air fares and certified services. Find out before you send anything. You will find branches in all the major Catalan towns and cities. You can also use the services of the major messenger services, which tend to have franchises all over the country.

I'M SENDING AN E-MAIL

Internet cafés

You will have no problems accessing the Internet. You can do so for free at the university and in some public facilities, such as libraries. You will also find plenty of possibilities for paying to use Internet, especially in Barcelona and other big cities, where you will find cybercafés open round the clock. Ask about the rates before using the services and check the different options in the area. If you plan to stay for a long time and want to contract a service, make sure of the conditions offered by each of the companies and the different long-term commitments they demand.



Wi-Fi Network

Check the Internet to see if there is any chance of connecting to some kind of public network in the town or district. In some cities, like Barcelona, local councils are promoting accessible networks in some areas to encourage the use of new technologies by the population. At the same time, some collectives are working to set up shared networks.





I STUDY

Paying for your studies

In Catalonia, you have to pay a matrícula (enrolment fee) to study at university. The prices vary depending on the type of studies and, most importantly, whether it is a public or a private university. There is a grant system, but these subsidies do not tend to reach very high amounts. However, in our country there is not much of a tradition of loans or salary-based grants that are repaid once students embark on a professional career. This situation varies enormously from country to country. In some countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, university studies are free and students receive a state grant to pay for the expenses related to their studies: accommodation, materials, travel, etc.

Self-responsibility

Here, it is the students themselves who have to take responsibility for managing their academic affairs when they start their studies: enrolling, selecting itineraries, etc. This is unlike many Asian and Latin American countries, where the students' paths are set from the start, and they do not have to choose itineraries, as they are pre-established. If you are from one of these countries, you may find at first that you miss getting such personalised support and the way we operate might come as a bit of a surprise. However, there is no need to worry, as you will soon get used to our system and discover its advantages. For example, you will be able to make up your own curriculum based on your own interests.

Dealing with teaching staff

Should you use the tu form to speak to lecturers? Relationships between lecturers and students always depend on the character, accessibility and interest in social relations of both sides. But it is worth knowing that in certain cultures, such as the British or Asian, student-staff relationships are somewhat more distant. In China, for example, universities are considered academic institutions where the professors should be treated with the utmost reverence, while in other countries, relationships are closer and more informal, though always within the bounds of mutual respect and there are always exceptions (in Italy you always use the more formal form of 'you' to speak to lecturers). At Catalan universities, relationships are generally more relaxed, and there is usually nothing wrong with using the tu form to address a professor; and it is not all that unusual to see students and lecturers enjoying a coffee together.

El quart d'hora academic

This expression refers to the fact that lectures do not generally start on time, but between five and fifteen minutes late. This short period is used for students and staff to get from one place to another and have a little time to rest, the *quart d'hora academic* (the academic quarter of an hour). Although a lot of universities use this break, there are others that do not, as is the case, for example, in Chinese universities, where, as we said earlier, punctuality is of major social and cultural importance. In Colombia they call the same thing the *ley del cuarto*.

University dining halls

The university dining halls and bars are an unavoidable meeting point. And they are also great places to enjoy a sandwich, get a quick bite to eat, or have a mid-morning coffee. Some European universities, such as German ones, have a long-standing tradition of selling meal cards that enable people to eat at lower cost.

Skipping classes

Not attending lectures, but doing something else instead (like going to the bar, working, or maybe staying at home in bed) is something we have all done once or twice in our lives. In Catalonia, this practice, which some are more prone to than others, is called **fer campana** or **fer pila**, among other expressions. In Colombia they call it *mamar clase*, while French speaking countries have the expression *école buissonnière*. It is not usually a major issue but in some university systems, such as the Chinese one, repeated absenteeism can be punished severely.

Studying abroad

Although as the generations go by, people are taking a greater interest in studying abroad, especially in order to learn languages, such students are still in the minority. Young Catalans do not traditionally move about very much, and receive very few grants and subsidies to help them. There is Erasmus, and some private grants with a series of requisites that are only offered to the most promising students.

I WORK

Do you work or study?

Some students concentrate entirely on their studies, while others combine the activity with some kind of part-time job (often babysitting, giving private classes, bartending, etc). There are also mature students who, as well as their usual careers, study for a university degree or take postgraduate or masters courses.

When do I start?

Here, people usually start their professional careers (with a bit of luck) as soon as they have finished higher education. Some others prefer to continue their studies by taking some kind of specialised postgraduate course that is more vocationally oriented than their general degree. In other countries, however, such as those in Northern Europe, Germany the United States and Australia people often like to take a year off at the end of their degree course, or maybe even between school and university, often in order to travel and see something of the world.

I'm looking for job

If you are foreign, you will need to comply with two main requirements in order to work in this country: first, you will need a residence permit, and second, you will need a work permit. In order to work as a Civil Servant, you will need Spanish nationality or that of one of the other member states of the European Union.

I'M BECOMING INDEPENDENT

Leaving home

In Catalonia, most university students depend financially on their parents. Also, on average, young people don't move out of their parents' house until they reach 25. This is especially true of the young people in the Barcelona region, where most people in Catalonia are concentrated, and who live with their parents until they finish higher education. Nowadays, some towns offer special low-cost housing for young people, at the best prices on the market, although there are still very few of these. The financial dependence of young people, and especially students, on their parents is very different to other European countries, where people tend to leave home much earlier.

It is because their children stay with them until such a mature age that family relations are so important here. The situation seems very odd to the people of north and central Europe, who tend to leave home as soon as they can and probably don't see much of their families during the year. Asians and Africans might find it surprising too, but for different reasons, because in Catalonia they might find the family relationships less intense and respectful as they are in their countries of origin, where the family plays a central role and family ties are so strong that the relationship between parents and their children remains just as close all the way through life.

I'm looking for a flat

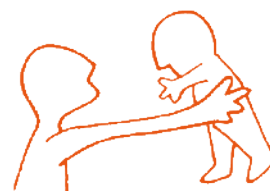
Residence

For citizens of the European Union, getting a residence permit is a mere formality, all they have to do is request one, and they get one. People of other nationalities will need to make an application, which may or may not be accepted.

Accommodation

The prices of both buying and renting flats have gone up considerably in recent years, especially in the Barcelona metropolitan area. However, for young people there are special accommodation services that offer more accessible flats and conditions, and also offer the option of purchasing your flat along with three other people (mostly students, but also older people) and thus reduce the expenses.

University students often share flats here. This is a great chance for local students and those from other countries to establish intercultural relations.



I HAVE GOT CHILDREN

After several decades in which the birth rate was very low in Catalonia, it is often said that we are currently going through a second baby boom: those people that were born between the late sixties and early seventies are starting to fill the kindergartens again. Although both the Spanish and Catalan government have in recent years been starting to promote measures to support families with children, the policies still fall far short of the kind of benefits offered in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. Maternity leave is currently 16 weeks, while a 15 day paternity leave has also just been introduced.

TRADITION, CULTURE AND FESTIVALS



I'M GOING OUT TO PARTYING

Late night schedules

One thing you will have to get used to are the late nights. If you get to a club too early, you will find yourself dancing alone with the DJ. Here, most people start going out around midnight, where they meet in pubs and bars to chat and drink. The clubs don't start filling up until around two o'clock, and the best atmosphere kicks in between three and five, when there are usually the most people and it is easier to make friends. Most places will close around five or six, maybe later. If by that time you still feel the urge to move your body, in the places that are still open after that will offer you your last opportunity of the night. A lot of young people, as they make their way home, stop off to eat something along the way.

Drinking in the street

Barcelona is keen to maintain order in public spaces and is implementing a series of laws that prohibit, among other things, the drinking of alcohol in the street, drawing graffiti (even though there is a thriving street art scene in the city), covering walls and facades with advertisements, gambling in the street or exercising prostitution. Some of these measures have caused controversy. Some feel that they were necessary moves to promote coexistence in the city, while others feel that they are an attempt to hide the city's problems and shortcomings from visitors.

Local festivals and folklore

Local festivals and celebrations are firmly rooted in Catalan tradition. There are several different types in the different towns and cities of the country. Some are related to religious events and celebrations, others are not. The most famous of these include the Patum in Berga, carnival in Vilanova and Sitges, the Sant Narcís festival in Girona, the Festa de la Llum in Manresa, and the Festes de Segar i Batre in several towns...



The less ancient but nevertheless equally popular festivals include the Diada de Sant Jordi on April 23 (like a Catalan version of Valentine's Day), when towns and cities are full of stands selling books and roses. The idea has caught on in such far-flung cities as Tokyo, Japan. Another hugely popular festival is La Mercè in late September (only in Barcelona) and Sant Joan on June 23, the celebration of the summer solstice when (organised and controlled) bonfires and firework shows can be seen in the streets. It is a great night for going out with friends, having supper together, and enjoying coca (a pastry topped with dried fruit, pine seeds or sometimes cream) and cava, and ending the night by falling asleep on the beach (if you have one nearby, of course). Sant Joan night shares a lot in common with the celebrations in such other countries as Ireland, where couples jump over fire as a way of ensuring they will have children.

With hundreds of years of history behind it, Catalonia has plenty of folklore covering a wide range of fields and activities, from *castells* (human towers) to *pastorets*, (a kind of 'alternative' nativity play), the *sardana* (a local dance), the *correfoc* (parade of fire-breathing beasts) and *havaneres* (sailor's songs). If you go and see these things, you will feel a lot more comfortable if you first find out what to wear. Wear summer clothing to see the *castells*, and a cap or hat to protect you from the sun; and wear (old) cotton clothing to cover your body when watching the *correfoc* (along with the obligatory hat and neckerchief), etc.

Cultural agenda

If you are only in Catalonia for a while, you will never have enough time to see all the cultural events that occur throughout the territory all year around, though especially in summer. Barcelona is seeking to challenge such cultural strongholds as London, and is home to most of the big music and stage festivals (such as the Grec Festival, Primavera Sound and Sónar), but other towns and cities also have plenty to offer of interest. As ever, Internet is the solution, and it is also here that you will find out about special discounts, and especially those for students.

I'M ON HOLIDAY

Holidays

In Catalonia, students usually have between eighty and a hundred days holiday a year. Working people usually get around twenty working days off a year (some thirty in total, if we also include weekends during the holiday period). Student holidays are in the summer months (July, August and part of September), Christmas (about a fortnight) and Easter (ten days in March or April).

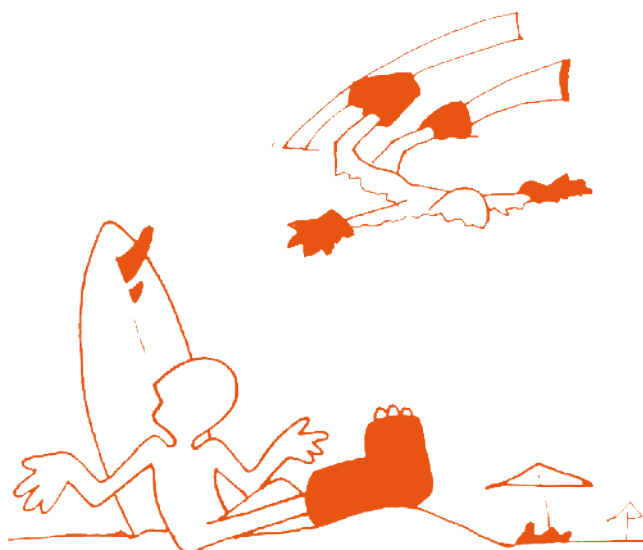
Fer pont - the long weekend

Pont means 'bridge' and it is a workday that falls in between two public holidays (or a Sunday). This situation leads to several people getting a mini-holiday. Not everybody is so fortunate, and they have to work, but the lucky ones are able to **fer pont** (make a bridge).

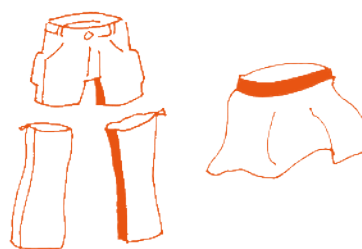
I PLAY SPORT

Summer and winter sport

Catalonia loves its sports, and you will not find many young people who don't do some kind of regular physical activity (although, be warned, there are some that don't!). Football and basketball are the most popular sports, but there are also plenty of good Catalan swimmers and tennis players. In winter, those who can afford it go off to ski in the Pyrenees. In summer, adventure sports are gaining popularity. With so much sport going on, it is no surprise that so many Catalan sportspeople and teams, such as Pau Gasol, Barça and Joventut are so famous beyond our borders.



FASHION AND APPEARANCE



Clothes and climate

The Catalan climate is predominantly Mediterranean, similar to what you would find in nearby countries like Greece and Italy, with its characteristically dry summers, rainy winters and autumns, and cold, but not freezing, winters. But up in the Pyrenees you will find a more Alpine climate, where it gets extremely cold in winter. So what does all that mean in practice? What clothes should we wear? Generally you will need to cover up from October to February, when people generally opt for winter clothing (thick sweaters and coats, etc) especially in the colder parts of the country. From March to April and October to November you will be able to dress more lightly (but be careful because the temperatures typically go up and down at these times of year). From May to September the weather is at its hottest and you should wear summer clothing: short skirts and shorts, T shirts, sandals, etc.

I'M GETTING DRESSED

What shall I wear?

What shall I wear tonight? This is a question everybody has asked a million times and yet the answer is still hard to find. In general, the style of clothing we wear depends, among other things, on how formal our appointment is. We could give you some advice on the best way to dress around here, but at the end of the day, everybody is free to do as they please. In some kinds of jobs (managerial roles, or in relations involving a certain protocol) and at formal events (like a wedding, official reception, or at the opera) people tend to dress up very smartly indeed, but for other occasions, like going out with friends, going clubbing, or visiting friends, it entirely depends on individual tastes and preferences.



PARTICIPATION



WANT TO TAKE PART

Voting from the age of 18

To vote for the Catalan Parliament and Spanish Senate, you must have Spanish nationality, and to vote in Catalonia, you must also be a registered resident. European Union citizens can vote in and stand for municipal and European elections without needing to be nationals.

Associations and societies

In Catalonia, associationism (forming and joining societies) is a social phenomenon. There is a wide network of associations, which offer the chance to connect with other people to do all kinds of activities. This is especially true of the university scene, especially in terms of volunteering, offering plenty of opportunities for charity work.



I SPEAK LANGUAGES

Learning languages

Not only will you need to learn Catalan and Spanish to become integrated in the country, but they are also very useful for finding work. Knowledge of English and other languages, like French and German, is also highly valued and always a strong point in your favour.

Do you speak English?

In Barcelona, more and more people that deal with the general public can speak languages, generally English, or at least know enough to deal with basic situations. But not everybody can. Outside of the touristy areas and especially among older people, you will find very few people who speak English. That is when you will find it particularly hard to make yourself understood without some knowledge of Catalan or Spanish.

AND WHAT ABOUT CATALAN?

What languages are spoken in Catalonia?

The main languages used in communication in Catalonia are Catalan and Spanish. Catalan is the country's native language and was historically the hegemonic tongue, and the language used in most general communication. However, due to the political repression exerted upon the Catalan language throughout long periods of modern history, and also due to economic development and the fact that so many immigrants from elsewhere in the world have settled in Catalonia, the language now exists alongside Spanish, as well as such other languages as English, French, German, Arabic, Berber, Tagalog, etc.

74.5% of the population of Catalonia speaks Catalan, and 94.5% understands it. Almost everybody speaks Spanish, and a lot of people, especially young people, can express themselves in English.

One of the languages

Catalan is one of the ten most widely spoken and written languages in the European Union. More people speak it than Finnish or Danish. In the European Union there are millions of people that commonly speak a different language to the official state language of the country they live in, and of these, Catalan is the most widely spoken. As well as in Catalonia, Catalan is also spoken in the Community of Valencia, the Balearic Islands, the eastern part of Aragon, the French administered part of Catalonia, in the Sardinian city of Alguer (Italy) and in Andorra, where it is the official language. Altogether, that makes ten million people.

An integrating linguistic model

Catalan society has opted for an integrating linguistic model, in which multilingualism is compatible with the promotion of the use of the Catalan language, on the understanding that Catalan is a minority language in a global context and in awareness of the shortcomings derived from so many years of repression. The measures implanted to promote the use of Catalan help preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world, which is the heritage of all humanity.

Catalan is currently the language used in public administration (the Catalan Government, called the **Generalitat**; local councils; universities), by the publicly owned media in Catalonia (radio and television) and by a large number of privately owned media (newspapers, magazines, radios and some television programmes). Several cultural activities use the Catalan language: plays, conferences, seminars, etc, although there is also plenty on offer in other languages. Catalan is also widely present in the country's socio-economic activity: in advertising, in the signs outside many establishments and in bank documents, to name but a few. Finally, Catalan is the language used in education: at primary and secondary school, most subjects are taught in the Catalan language.

What does the law say?

The **Llei de política lingüística** (Linguistic Policy Law) passed by the Catalan parliament in January 1998, defines the regulations for the use of Catalan and Spanish in Catalonia. The Law states that Catalan is the native language of Catalonia, which requires Catalan institutions to use it in a generalised fashion and encourage its public usage. It also states that Catalan and Spanish are both official languages in Catalonia, which guarantees citizens the right to freely use either language in all of their public and private activities.

On 11 December 1990, the European Parliament passed a Resolution in relation to the situation of the languages in the Community and the use of Catalan. That resolution recognises the validity of the use of the Catalan language in the context of the European Union and proposed that it should be included in certain actions made by European institutions. Since then, different agreements have been made by official EU bodies to normalise the use of the language within those institutions. On 7 November 2005, for example, an administrative agreement was signed by the Spanish Government and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of

the EU to authorise the official use within that institution of the languages other than Spanish that have an official language statute as determined by the Spanish constitution. In December 2005, the European Commission passed an agreement by which any person or legal entity that resides or has its head offices in the Spanish State has the right to write to the European Commission in Catalan and receive a written reply in the same language.

At university

At Catalan universities, Catalan has the status of being the native and official language, although it shares the official role with Spanish. As the native language, Catalan is used in institutional announcements, and is also the language used in personal relations between many members of the university community.

The desire for Catalan universities to be international in outlook, which has led to an increasing number of exchanges with other universities around the world, and in the general context of the globalisation of modern society, means that Catalan universities are becoming increasingly multilingual. In awareness of this, the linguistic policy of Catalan universities is now aimed at guaranteeing

the growth of Catalan as a language in social contexts, while also promoting knowledge of other languages and their use in certain environments.

Catalan universities provide anybody who might need them with a wide range of resources for learning Catalan. Given the central position of Catalan among Romance languages, if people already know any of these (Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, etc) then they will not take long to learn to follow a lecture given in Catalan. This is even more the case when dealing with the kind of scientific and technical language used in education, in which there are far fewer differences between the different languages than in less formal speech. At Catalan universities, both staff and students can choose to communicate in whichever of the two official languages they like. Approximately sixty per cent of lectures are given in Catalan, although the use of one or other language can vary enormously between universities and courses. Students, before enrolling, can request information from their programme coordinator about the languages that lectures are given in, and exams and projects can be done either in Catalan or Spanish, regardless of the language used by the teaching staff.



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