



## Spanish Mealtimes – When to Eat in Spain

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# How to Survive Spanish Mealtimes – Just When Should You Eat While In Spain?

### 1 Breakfast from 8am+

It's hard to generalize but in the North the basic breakfast will include a freshly squeezed orange juice, and a coffee with a sweet pastry. And in the South, you'll find the juice and coffee plus a toasted baguette, with olive oil to drizzle and fresh tomato puree as a jam. Countrywide at breakfast buffets you'll find cured meats

such as Jamon Serrano and chorizo plus a selection of cheeses. Egg dishes including the [Spanish tortilla](#) may also be on offer. The larger hotels will serve other egg dishes and cereals such as mueslis.



Pan con tomate or bread with tomato is served for breakfast in the South of Spain.

Photo credit: [topsynette](#) via [photopin cc](#)

## 2 Mid-morning snack from 11am+

Do not miss this mini-meal, if you've had a light breakfast, an early breakfast or know you'll having a late lunch. Bars offer deals that include a coffee with a slice of Spanish tortilla or a savoury sandwich for less than 3 EUR.



Mid-morning snacks at a bar in Spain featuring Spanish tortilla and other savoury snacks

### 3 Aperitivo from 1.30pm+

At weekends, friends and families meet for a pre-lunch drink which often runs into lunch. You'll see platters of squid, prawns, and Jamon being washed back with martinis, local vermouths, sheries, grape juices, white wines and beers. You might want to read our guide to [alcohol-free drinks](#) if you want to experience aperitivo and still be able to sightsee or drive around afterwards.



Tapas make for the perfect snack food and at the weekends you can have one and go on somewhere else for lunch or have three or four and that's your aperitivo and lunch rolled into one! Photo credit: [kasi metcalfe](#) via [photopin cc](#)

#### 4 Lunch from 2pm+

It's a three-course affair whether you eat in or out. Typical starters in Summer include salads, gazpachos and vegetable-based dishes. On the coastline, you'll find more seafood dishes such as [paella](#). In the cooler months you'll find hearty soups with white beans, chick-peas and lentils. Second courses will often be protein-high; usually a meat or fish dish. During the week, most Spaniards skip dessert and opt for a coffee but if you have a sweet-tooth, you'll find plenty cr me-caramels, baked cheesecakes and rice puddings plus many local specialities. And you may be offered a 'chupito' which is usually a local liquer in a shot glass. Look out for the

'[menu del dia](#)' which is a set-price three course meal offered by many restaurants from Monday to Friday for office workers.



When you see these boards outside a restaurant, they are probably open.

### 5 Afternoon Snack from 5pm+

Very important for children and anybody who didn't eat a three course lunch, this is what is known in Spain as the 'merienda'. In the summer months, pick up some fresh fruit from the market or have an ice-cream from an ice-cream vendor and in winter, look out for churros with hot chocolate. If it feels like gluttony, remember you're next meal is at least 3 hours away.



Chocolate and churros are the best wintertime warmer. photo credit: [djwtwo](#) via [photopin cc](#)

6 After Work Drinks & Tapas from 8pm+

As per the lunchtime aperitivo, the tapa trays come out again after dusk and can often replace the evening meal. After two or three tapas, you won't be able to eat much more – especially if you've have a large lunch or a significant 'merienda'. While you are out, try to order different wines by the glass which is a great way to try different winery regions. We recommend sampling at least one wine from [Rioja](#), another from [Ribera del Duero](#), from [Rioja Alavesa](#) also and at least one from the [Rias Baixas](#) too. And remember, it's commonplace to move from one bar to another so don't be too concerned about sitting down. If you don't find a table this time, you find one in the next place – or the one after that...



Tapas are useful if you wish to eat an early and informal evening meal. Photo credit:

[Anvica](#) via [photopin cc](#)

7 Dinner from 9.30pm+

Depending on what you've eaten beforehand, you have many options for your evening meal including shared platters of food called raciones in a bar or tavern. In a more formal restaurant setting, if you aren't very hungry, you can either share a dish or two – or ask for half portions. But if you've had a light lunch, or no lunch at all – explain this clearly as waiting staff will not expect their customers to be ordering large quantities of food at night.



A evening meal with some flair. Photo credit: [Renée S. Suen](#) via [photopin cc](#)

### 8 Copas/Spirits from 11pm+

At roughly this time, Spaniards switch from drinking wines or beers to spirit-based drinks such as a gin & tonic, a mojito, a rum and coke or one of the many local specialities such as a Pacharan in the Basque Country. This often co-incides with a change of location away from the foodie bars to the music bars, Jazz bar or open-air bars. One piece of advice – the measures are very generous!





Gin & tonics are very popular after 11pm at night. photo credit: [alberto rincon garcia](#) via [photopin cc](#)

**9 Pro-Tip if you find yourself peckish in between mealtimes...**

- Find a bar with Spanish tortilla – you’ll usually see it behind the counter under a protective glass so you won’t even need to ask. If you can’t find anywhere with tortilla, ask for a ‘bocadillo’ which is a baguette usually filled with a cured meat and/or cheese.
- All-day tapas restaurants, which you’ll find in the larger cities, will take the edge off your hunger. Patatas bravas or croquetas will usually do the trick.
- Ask your hotel about early or late dining. Hotel restaurants can offer dining from as early as 8pm. And if you need late dining – that’s even easier. Many restaurants will accept reservations up until or after midnight.

- Most towns and cities will have great delis either as a standalone store, inside a supermarket or at a stall in a food market. Pick up a half baguette (ask for media barra) or some breadsticks (palitos), ask for a few slices of cured meats (or buy them pre-packed), grab some [cheese](#) and olives – and bring it all back to your apartment or head to the park for a gourmet picnic.

- Get online. We searched The Fork (known here as [ElTenedor.es](#)) for restaurant reservations in Barcelona for 7pm and many restaurants were available. For more details on this online reservation system, see our [post](#).



Pick up some olives, cured meats and cheese at a deli or food market to keep the hunger at bay if you miss a meal.

# Mealtimes in Spain: When Should You Eat?



By [Tessa Anaya](#) - 25 September 2018 1 Comments

## When are the Mealtimes in Spain?

The daily rhythm in Spain is quite unique and it relies on the **mealtimes in Spain**. You may think you're all settled in after you [get your NIE](#) but getting on time with Spanish mealtimes is vital. Spanish people are known for being laid-back but they keep their meals on a tight schedule. If you want to get used to Spanish life, eating at the right times is the first step. Missing the mealtimes in Spain means you'll be stuck eating overpriced tourist food because all the other restaurants are closed. Keep reading to find out what [Spanish food](#) to eat at which time.

### Desayuno: 7:00-9:00

*Desayuno* means breakfast in Spanish, although some Spaniards never need to say it. **Breakfast in Spain** is a short and often sweet snack that may be grabbed on the way out the door (or not at all). Many Spaniards skip the meal and save their hunger for the next meal, the *almuerzo*. It is typical to stop at a cafe for something starchy, like a croissant, toasted baguette or churros. Wash down your breakfast with *cafe con leche* or fresh orange juice (commonly from the [Valencia orange](#)).



These pinchos are most often served at dinnertime but they make a good snack as well.

## Almuerzo: 10:30-12:00

*Almuerzo* has a special meaning in Spain: the mid-morning snack. In other [Spanish-speaking countries](#), it means lunch. However, *almuerzo* in Spain is taken to tide people over until their late lunch. This **snacktime in Spain** usually consists of a sandwich or *bocadillo*, especially one filled with a slice of [tortilla de patatas](#).

## Comida: 14:00-16:00

*La Comida* or lunch in English is the most important of all the **mealtimes in Spain**. Many restaurants and cafeterias don't open until two in the afternoon but you might find a few open from 13:30. Lunch in Spain is

often made up of a few courses such as an appetizer, main course and dessert all for one price under the *menu del dia*. Remember that it's perfectly acceptable to take a [siesta](#) after the biggest meal of the day.

## Merienda: 17:30-19:00

*La Merienda* is another **Spanish meal** that is designed to tide you over until the next meal. This is the late-afternoon snack that gives Spaniards a chance to take a break, take a bite and get some energy. Sweets and pastries are most commonly eaten during the *merienda* but small sandwiches with cured meats are also available.

## Cena: 20:30-22:30

*La Cena* means **dinnertime in Spain**. It also means [tapas time](#)! Contrary to dinner in other countries, Spanish dinner is light. As is the custom when eating tapas, a few plates are ordered and shared amongst friends or family. This is another one of the mealtimes in Spain that can start and last quite late. On weekends, dinner isn't typically taken before ten in the evening! Relax, eat your meals a bit later and get on the Spanish rhythm!



Although many people assume it's a dinner food, paella more often eaten for lunch in Spain!

Many unaware first-time visitors to Spain find themselves hungry and ready for dinner around 6:00 in the afternoon only to end up frustrated to find that Spanish restaurants don't open up for business for at least another couple of hours! Spain's eating habits include loosely defined meal times that take place two to three hours after meal times elsewhere. While it may seem strange, simply throw out your conceptions of proper meal times for the duration of your trip and eat when the Spaniards eat- trust us, you'll be glad you did!

#### **El desayuno (Breakfast)**



-Before 10am.

-Breakfast in Spain, if eaten at all, is often a lone cup of coffee. For those wanting to start off the day with a little something in their stomach, toast, croissants, or "pan tomaca"- a piece of toast with an oil and tomato

spread- are typical picks.

-On weekends or on holidays, churros- slightly crispy fried dough- dunked in a mug of thick hot chocolate or topped with sugar is a Spanish specialty. Don't know where to find them? There's sure to be a "churrería" nearby- simply head outside in the morning and follow the mouth-watering scent!

### Café (Coffee)



-Between 10:30am and noon.

-Spain, as you'll quickly see, embraces its love of caffeine- practically to the point of celebration. Combine this with the contagiously social nature of Spaniards and you've got a country where coffee breaks are an integrated part of the workday. After a couple of grueling hours of work, it's quite common for coworkers to hit up the nearest café for a few minutes of caffeinated downtime. Don't know what to order? Here are the most common coffee choices:

- Café solo- A simple shot of espresso.
- Café cortado- A shot of espresso with just a splash of milk.
- Café con leche- A shot of espresso and an equal amount of milk.
- Café americano- A shot of espresso and lots of water- perfect for Americans who think Spanish coffee is too strong!

### La comida (Lunch)



-Between 2:00pm and 4:00pm.

-While dinner is the main meal in most cultures, "la comida" typically holds the title in Spain.

-No, it's not a cultural myth- Spain's infamous siesta time does exist! While siesta doesn't necessarily mean putting on your pajamas and hopping into bed for the entire afternoon, stores and businesses do close down and many people go home to eat the mid-day meal with their families.

-Many restaurants offer their "menús" during the comida. From a set menu, you can choose one appetizer and one main course. These menú deals, which range anywhere between €5.00 and €12.00, almost always also include bread, a drink and dessert- not a bad deal!

### La merienda (Late afternoon snack)



-Once you've finished your lunch, your next meal could be as late as

11:00 at night- quite the time gap, no? Many people have a light snack, also known as a "tentempié," during the afternoon to hold them over until dinner.  
-Common merienda choices include a small sandwich, a piece of fruit, or even a nice hot beverage (more coffee, perhaps?).

### La cena (Dinner)



-Dinner time in Spain typically doesn't start until between 9:00 and 10:30 in the evening.  
-Dining establishments don't even think of opening their doors and firing up their ovens until at least 8:00 in the evening. -During the summer months and on weekends, dinner time is pushed even later- in fact, don't be surprised if you see people sitting down for la cena as late as midnight!  
-Dinner is traditionally quite a bit lighter than its mid-day counterpart, often consisting of something as light as a salad or sandwich.  
-The evening hours are the ideal time to barhop your way around Valencia's [tapas](#) scene, testing out the local rice and seafood dishes.

### Tapas



There are few things more "typically Spanish" than spending a night bar-hopping your way around any Spanish city's tapas scene. Today, it's perhaps one of the only gastronomic phenomenons of international fame that doesn't involve fancy dress and a heavily depleted bank account.

Essentially the perfected art of snacking, this Spanish tradition got its start as simply a practical way to keep pesky flies out of bar patrons' drinks. Bartenders took to covering the beverages with a lid (or "tapa") fashioned out of a small plate or a piece of bread. Soon, a piece of ham or cheese was added to the tapa, an addition that certainly pleased the customers. Taking note of the possibilities, bartenders began to get more creative with the tapas until they evolved into the major national - and now international - experience that it is today.



In Valencia, instead of sitting down night-after-night for a fancy meal check out the local tapas scene; as Spain's third largest city, you can imagine the quantity and quality of its



tapas establishments! As a city that has long thrived on fresh produce, rice dishes and seafood straight from the sea, you're likely to see various combinations of these local products in Valencia's [food](#) dishes- tapas included. Every [restaurant](#) and tapas bar has its own unique atmosphere, therefore you can find a wide range of regional, national, traditional and creative tapas options.

If you don't know how to tell if a tapas bar is worth a stop or not, just glance inside; if it's full of people and with a floor littered with napkins, take that as a thumbs up!

### **Typical Valencia Tapas**

- Aceitunas: Marinated olives, often stuffed with peppers.
- Boquerones: Anchovies marinated in an olive oil and red wine vinegar dressing.
- Calamares: Squid served either deep-fried or in a tomato and onion red wine sauce.
- Caracoles picantes: Snails sautéed with smoked chilli and laurel leaves.
- Chorizo: Spiced sausage.
- Ensaladilla: Mixture of potatoes, eggs, vegetables and mayonnaise.
- Patatas bravas: Roasted potatoes with a spicy sauce as well as alioli sauce.
- Jamón: Cured Spanish ham.
- Mejillones: Mussels that often come with a tomato-based sauce.
- Sepia: Grilled cuttlefish usually served with alioli.
- Tortilla española: Traditional Spanish potato omelette.
- Tellinas: Tiny sweet clams steamed with butter and lemon.