

Spanish Citizenship for Americans: Residence, Descent and Your Passport

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Free guide to Spanish citizenship for Americans: the 10-year residence route, shorter routes through marriage or birth, citizenship by descent, the DELE A2 and CCSE exams, dual nationality and getting your Spanish passport.

Read the live guide: <https://www.ourmixedpov.com/guides/spanish-citizenship-americans>

IMPORTANT**Important: this is not professional advice**

This guide is what worked for us and the people we've helped - it is **not immigration or legal advice**, and we are not immigration or legal professionals. Rules change, every situation is different, and the cost of getting it wrong (denied visas, double taxation, fines, missed deadlines) is real.

Before you act on anything here, speak with a qualified immigration or legal professional - an immigration lawyer (abogado de extranjería), a cross-border tax accountant, or a licensed gestor - who can review your specific facts. Use this guide to know what questions to ask, not as a substitute for paid advice.

6 SECTIONS

The guide

SECTION 1

Start here: the four ways Americans become Spanish

- 1. By residence** - you live in Spain legally and continuously for the required number of years, then apply. This is the route most Americans use.
- 2. By descent (de origen)** - you were born to a parent who was Spanish when you were born. You may already be Spanish and only need to register your birth.
- 3. By option or special laws** - certain children and grandchildren of Spaniards can claim citizenship through windows the law opens and closes.
- 4. By naturalisation letter (carta de naturaleza)** - granted at the government's discretion in exceptional cases. Rare, and not something you can plan around.

The rules come from the Spanish Civil Code (articles 17-26). Official information is on the [Ministry of Justice nationality page](#).

SECTION 2

By residence: how many years you need

10 years is the standard rule, and it applies to US citizens. The years must be **legal, continuous and immediately before** you apply. Time as a tourist does not count.

1 year applies in some cases, for example if you have been **married to a Spaniard for a year and live together**, were **born in Spain**, or are a widow or widower of a Spaniard. Your legal residence still has to reach one year.

2 years applies to nationals of Ibero-American countries, Andorra, the Philippines, Equatorial Guinea and Portugal, and to people of Sephardic origin. This matters if you hold a second nationality such as Mexican or Colombian alongside your American one.

Does student time count? Time on a student stay has been treated differently from residence over the years; check with a lawyer before counting student years toward your total. Residence permits

such as the [Non-Lucrative Visa](#), the [Digital Nomad Visa](#) or a [work visa](#) count.

Long trips abroad can break 'continuous' residence. Keep trips short and keep proof such as boarding passes and your [padrón](#) history.

SECTION 3

Exams, documents and the application

Two exams from the Instituto Cervantes: the **DELE A2** Spanish language exam (or higher) and the **CCSE**, a multiple-choice test on the Spanish constitution, culture and society. You can book both on the [Instituto Cervantes exams site](#). People from Spanish-speaking countries skip the DELE.

Main documents: passport, your residence card (TIE), a US birth certificate with an **apostille** and an official Spanish translation, an **FBI background check** with apostille and translation, a Spanish criminal record certificate (the ministry usually checks this itself), your padrón certificate, and proof of income and integration.

Fee: pay the nationality fee using **Modelo 790 code 026** (around ?104 - confirm the current amount).

Apply online on the Ministry of Justice electronic office using a [digital certificate](#), or ask a lawyer or gestor to file for you. Waits of one to three years are common.

SECTION 4

By descent: if your parent or grandparent was Spanish

A Spanish parent when you were born? You are likely Spanish from birth. You don't apply for citizenship; you **register your birth** at the Spanish consulate that covers your US state, using your parent's Spanish documents and your apostilled birth certificate.

Spanish grandparents? The Democratic Memory Law (Ley 20/2022) opened a temporary route for some grandchildren of Spaniards. That window has now closed to new applications. People who filed in time still have their files processed.

The 'option' route (Civil Code article 20) lets some people claim citizenship if a parent was originally Spanish and born in Spain, or if they were under a Spanish parent's legal custody. There are age limits, so check early.

Gather your family's Spanish birth and marriage records from the civil registry (Registro Civil). Old records can take months to locate.

SECTION 5

Dual nationality: will you lose your US passport?

Spain does not have a dual nationality treaty with the US. People who become Spanish **by residence** must formally declare that they give up their previous nationality when they swear the oath.

In practice, the **United States does not treat that declaration as giving up US citizenship**. US citizenship can only be lost through a formal process in front of a US official. Many Americans keep

both passports, but get legal advice if keeping your US citizenship matters to you.

People who are Spanish **by descent** do not have to give up their US citizenship.

Remember: US citizens are taxed by the US wherever they live. Becoming Spanish does not end US tax filing - see [Spain Tax Residency](#).

SECTION 6

After approval: oath, DNI and passport

Once approved, you have **180 days** to swear the oath of allegiance (jura) at the civil registry and register as Spanish. Miss it and the approval lapses.

Next, book a police appointment to get your **DNI** (national ID card) and then your **Spanish passport** on the [DNI and passport appointment site](#).

Update your bank, employer, [Social Security](#) and health card with your new DNI number, and get a new [digital certificate](#). Our [services checklist](#) walks through each one.

A Spanish passport is an EU passport: you can live and work anywhere in the European Union.

0 ENTRIES

Latest updates

No live updates recorded for this guide yet.

0 CLAIMS REVIEWED

Fact check

No validations recorded.

3 REFERENCES

Verified sources

Ministry of Justice - Nationality

<https://www.mjusticia.gob.es/es/ciudadania/nacionalidad>

Instituto Cervantes - DELE and CCSE

<https://exámenes.cervantes.es/>

DNI and passport appointments

<https://www.citapreviadnie.es/>

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

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