

An image is worth a thousand words

Does the rain in Spain stay mainly in the plain?

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Cyclists competing in heavy rain at the Highland Games in Perth, Scotland © Robert Hextall

Vocabulary

Highland Games: a meeting for athletic events, playing of the bagpipes, and dancing, held in the Scottish Highlands or by Scots elsewhere

regardless: without consideration for the circumstances of the moment

accurate: precise; exact; factual

a clue: a fact or idea that serves to reveal something or solve a problem

a shower, a downpour, (to) drizzle, to chuck it down, to spit, to sleet: types of rain

every other day: every two days

Introduction

This week's picture shows a typically British scene, heavy rain in the month of August. Specifically, during a bike race at the Perth Highland Games in Scotland (about an hour's drive north from Edinburgh). A sunny start to the day was ruined by a rainstorm, but the events carried on **regardless**. This image reinforces the typical stereotype about the

weather in Britain, but did you know that there are areas of Spain that are much rainier?
And do you know where the wettest place in Spain is?

There is a famous phrase in English, used to practice Received English pronunciation and made famous by the film *My Fair Lady*. Repeat after me! "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain." The equivalent in Spanish would be "La lluvia en Sevilla es una pura maravilla". Of the two phrases, the second is perhaps the most **accurate**. And it also serves as a **clue** as to where Spain's rainiest territory lies.

Most people presume that it's the mountainous north of the country (rather than the drier, continental climate of the central plains) that receives the most rainfall and in general terms that is of course correct. I lived in San Sebastián for a year and it seemed to me that never a day passed without a **shower**, a **downpour** or some degree of **drizzle**. If it wasn't **chucking it down**, it was **spitting** or the sea mist rolled in and made umbrellas useless. One day it even began to **sleet** and when that turned into snow my colleagues and I made a snowman on the beach in a break between classes.

Unsurprisingly (at least for me), San Sebastián tops the list of Spain's rainiest cities with an average of 185 days of rain a year. That's **every other day!** However, if you want total annual rainfall then the winner is Vigo, in Galicia, with nearly 1,800 millimetres per square metre.

But where does it rain the most in Spain? Well, amazingly, it's down south. In the province of Cádiz, more specifically in the mountain range of Sierra de Grazalema, the average rainfall is over 2,000 millimetres per square metre a year (in some years it can reach up to 4,000 millimetres). That makes this part of southern Spain wetter than the east coast of Scotland.

So, the rain in Spain in fact stays mainly in the mountains and along the northern coast. Don't forget, it rains more than twice as much in San Sebastián as it does in Perth, Edinburgh and my home town of Wolverhampton. Having said that though, during the summer months, I know where I'd prefer to wear short sleeves and ride my bicycle.

Let's chat!

1. Describe the picture in as much detail as possible.
2. Describe the weather where you live. Talk about the different seasons.
3. Have your holidays ever been ruined by the weather?
4. Do you think the weather in your area is changing? If so, give examples.
5. Where do you prefer to spend your time in the summer? What do you enjoy doing?

Activity

Make a list of the different types of clothes and accessories you need for the different seasons of the year and describe what they are like. Which ones do you wear all year round?

