

Spanish hours since World War Two

Please find the following information using the line numbers and explain what they mean.

(1) In 1940 (2) until 10:30pm (3) 2pm (4) 70 years (5) two-hour (6) 60 minutes

Glance at a map and you'll realise that Spain – sitting, as it does, along the same longitude as the UK, Portugal and Morocco – should be in Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). But Spain goes by Central European Time (CET), putting it in sync with the Serbian capital Belgrade, more than 2,500km east of Madrid.

“Spaniards are living in the wrong time zone, and have been for more than 70 years.”
So why are Spaniards living behind their geographic time zone?

In 1940, General Francisco Franco changed Spain's time zone, moving the clocks one hour forward in solidarity with Nazi Germany.

For Spaniards, who at the time were utterly devastated by the Spanish Civil War, complaining about the change did not even cross their minds. They continued to eat at the same time, but because the clocks had changed, their 1pm lunches became 2pm lunches, and they were suddenly eating their 8pm dinners at 9pm.

After World War II ended, the clocks were never changed back. However, in 2016, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced that the government was working on a plan to implement a new workday schedule ending at 6pm as opposed to 8pm. One important element of the plan was evaluating the possibility of changing Spain's time zone from CET to GMT – something that has sparked a heated discussion throughout the country.

Being 60 minutes behind the correct time zone means the sun rises later and sets later, bestowing Spain with gloriously long summer evenings and 10pm sunsets. Those who run Spain's tourist resorts believe that more sunlight is a large draw for visitors. The regional government of the Balearic Islands – which include Mallorca, Menorca and Ibiza – is strongly against returning to GMT and has even campaigned to maintain year-round summer time (CET+1) to allow visitors to take full advantage of the region's mild winter climate.

But for many Spaniards, living in the wrong time zone has resulted in sleep deprivation and decreased productivity. The typical Spanish work day begins at 9am; after a two-hour lunch break between 2 and 4pm, employees return to work, ending their day around 8pm. The later working hours force Spaniards to save their social lives for the late hours. Prime-time television doesn't start until 10:30pm.

Meanwhile, in the northwestern region of Galicia, the sun doesn't rise until after 9am in winter, meaning that residents are starting their day in the dark.