

Learning Spanish – Getting Started!



Read Marijke's story. She is a Dutch national who is married to Hilary, a British citizen. They moved to Andalucia in 2019. This is her story about how she overcame the fear of speaking Spanish.

My husband, Hilary, and I have often joked about the need for taking a 'brave pill' - those times when you are really scared of doing something, but you know you have to do it ... And since moving to Spain, we've taken lots of brave pills for all the big challenges that come with moving house and country.

Taking a brave pill is about acknowledging to ourselves that we feel fearful and need to be brave. Especially here in Spain, where the language and the culture means we need to find our way around lots of different and unfamiliar situations – and in Spanish! There have been times when I chickened out, and I didn't have the courage to do something. When I was looking for my brave pills, but they were not available. Those moments when you feel a failure, but you just didn't quite have the guts ...

I found that here in Spain, brave pills are almost all about the language, and particularly about speaking it. My Spanish isn't bad, but brave pills are still very much required for meetings with Spanish officials, and especially for speaking on the phone in Spanish really makes me feel scared. Speaking it is ok, because you can rehearse it. But understanding the response can be extremely challenging. They speak so fast, these Spanish! My most common telephone phrase is: 'puedes hablar más lento, por favor' (can you speak more slowly please).

I learnt Spanish in a somewhat unstructured way, with courses and lessons some years, and other years just ticking over with a language app. Duolingo was my 'go-to' app, and it is fabulous for learning the basics of a language. It's free, it's fun and highly competitive – My husband Hilary and I vied for top position in maintaining our streak. Unfortunately, I lost - but this was solely due to a wifi problem on the train that caused me to lose my 346-day streak. The repetition of doing Duolingo every day results in real learning. I still remember some of the words that I learnt courtesy of Duolingo - el cepillo (the brush) and el sartén (the frying pan) will stick with me for the rest of my life! So with all that Spanish input, brave pills surely are no longer needed, but not true ...



I'd love to become really fluent in Spanish, being able to understand and speak to my neighbours about more than simply the weather. I want to understand the jokes they make, and feel I am part of the community and I can interact with our Spanish friends and neighbours. I'd love for my Spanish to be understood, and not experience that moment of 'blank faces' of incomprehension, when I know I just made no sense at all.



Looking back over the past few years, I have made a lot of progress. I've watched TV, listened to the radio, attended classes, and practiced with my Spanish friends who are keen to improve their English. And I've just started intercambio, where I go on Zoom with a Spanish speaker, 30 minutes in English and 30 minutes in Spanish. I've realised that mastery of Spanish takes time, and patience.

And lots of brave pills!