



THE FREE GUIDE

10 Spanish Phrases *Only Locals* Actually Use

Your textbook never taught you these. Drop one in conversation and watch a native speaker do a double take.

Textbook Spanish is correct. It is also a dead giveaway.

You can conjugate perfectly and still sound like a tourist. Real Spanish lives in the slang. It is the stuff people actually say at the bar, in the group chat, and on the bus. Nobody puts it in chapter one.

This guide hands you ten phrases that locals use every single day. Each one comes with how to say it, what it really means, where it works, and a culture note so you sound natural instead of rehearsed. We gloss every Spanish word in plain English.

No guessing.

One warning. Spanish is not one language, it is twenty countries arguing about the same words. A phrase that is friendly in Buenos Aires can be rude in Bogotá. We flag the spicy ones so you do not embarrass yourself.

How to use this guide

- 📌 Learn two or three phrases properly before you reach for the rest.
- 📌 Say them out loud using the pronunciation guide. Spanish rewards confidence.
- 📌 Match the region to the person. Mind the rude flags.
- 📌 Use them with people who will enjoy it. Slang is a wink, not a test.

Ten ways to sound like a local

01

¿Qué onda?

 keh ON-dah

MEXICO

CASUAL

What it really means: What's up? How's it going? A relaxed, friendly hello between people who know each other.

LITERALLY: "What wave?" The "onda" is the vibe or energy someone is giving off.

WHEN TO USE IT: Greeting friends, opening a message, or a quick "you alright?" in the street.

¡Qué onda, güey! (*What's up, dude!*)

¿Qué onda con la fiesta? (*What's the deal with the party?*)

WHY IT EXISTS: Mexicans treat "onda" as a whole worldview. Someone can be "buena onda" (good vibes) or "mala onda" (bad vibes). The greeting is really asking what energy you are carrying today.

02

No manches

 noh MAHN-chess

MEXICO

CASUAL

What it really means: No way! You're kidding! Used for shock, disbelief, or a friendly "stop messing about".

LITERALLY: "Don't stain." It is the polite swap for a much ruder phrase that sounds similar.

WHEN TO USE IT: Reacting to gossip or surprising news. Safe in almost any company.

¿Te ganaste la lotería? ¡No manches! (*You won the lottery? No way!*)

No manches, otra vez llegó tarde. (*Come on, he's late again.*)

GOOD TO KNOW: This is the clean version. The harsher original starts the same way but is best left to people who already swear in Spanish. "No manches" keeps you safe.



Órale

 OH-rah-leh

MEXICO

CASUAL

What it really means: A do-everything word. It can mean "okay", "wow", "let's go", "hurry up", or "right on", all depending on tone.

LITERALLY: It grew out of "ahora" (now), then took on a life of its own.

WHEN TO USE IT: Agreeing, cheering someone on, or showing surprise. Tone does all the work.

Órale, vámonos. (*Alright, let's go.*)

¡Órale! No sabía que cantabas. (*Wow! I didn't know you could sing.*)

WHY IT EXISTS: Mexican Spanish loves a word that flexes. "Órale" is the Swiss army knife of the conversation. Say it with energy and you instantly sound less like a textbook.



Vale

 BAH-leh

SPAIN

EVERYDAY

What it really means: Okay. Got it. Sounds good. The single most-used word of agreement in Spain.

LITERALLY: From the verb "valer" (to be worth). So roughly "it's worth it", which became "fine by me".

WHEN TO USE IT: Constantly. Confirming plans, ending a call, agreeing to anything.

Nos vemos a las ocho. ¿Vale? (*See you at eight. Okay?*)

Vale, vale, ya voy. (*Okay, okay, I'm coming.*)

WHY IT EXISTS: Spaniards say "vale" the way Brits say "right" or "cheers". Use it once and people assume you have spent real time in Spain. It is the fastest shortcut to sounding local.



Guay

gwai (rhymes with "why")

SPAIN

CASUAL

What it really means: Cool. Great. Awesome. The classic Spanish word for anything you like.

LITERALLY: No clean translation. It is slang through and through, with no everyday literal meaning.

WHEN TO USE IT: Reacting to good news or describing something you rate. Works for things, plans, and people.

¡Qué guay tu chaqueta! (*Your jacket is so cool!*)

Nos vamos a la playa. ¡Guay! (*We're off to the beach. Awesome!*)

WHY IT EXISTS: "Guay" has been Spain's go-to word for "cool" for decades. It never really went out of style. Teenagers and grandparents both use it, which is rare for slang.



Me mola

meh MOH-lah

SPAIN

CASUAL

What it really means: I love it. I'm into it. A more playful, street version of "me gusta" (I like it).

LITERALLY: The verb "molar" is slang for "to be cool" or "to appeal". "Me mola" works just like "me gusta".

WHEN TO USE IT: Saying you are into a song, a plan, a place, or a person. Friendly and low key.

Me mola esta canción. (*I love this song.*)

¿Vamos al concierto? Me mola la idea. (*Shall we go to the concert? I'm into that idea.*)

WHY IT EXISTS: Young Spaniards wanted a fresher way to say "me gusta". "Molar" gives the same meaning with more attitude. Use it and you sound like you have Spanish friends, not a Spanish workbook.



Tío / Tía

TEE-oh / TEE-ah

SPAIN

CASUAL

What it really means: Mate. Dude. Guy or girl. A friendly way to address or refer to someone your own age.

LITERALLY: "Uncle" and "aunt". In slang it just means "bloke" or "woman", with no family attached.

WHEN TO USE IT: Talking to or about friends. Drop it at the start or end of a sentence like "mate".

¡Tío, no te lo vas a creer! *(Mate, you won't believe it!)*

Esa tía es mi vecina. *(That woman is my neighbour.)*

WHY IT EXISTS: Family words often soften into friendly slang. In Spain "tío" and "tía" became the everyday "mate". Keep it for friends, not your boss.



Flipar

flee-PAR

SPAIN

CASUAL

What it really means: To be amazed, blown away, or to lose your mind over something. Good or bad.

LITERALLY: Borrowed from the English "to flip". It means your reaction flips into overdrive.

WHEN TO USE IT: Reacting to something wild. "Flipo" means "I'm stunned". "Es flipante" means "it's mind-blowing".

Flipo con los precios aquí. *(I can't believe the prices here.)*

El concierto fue flipante. *(The concert was mind-blowing.)*

WHY IT EXISTS: Spanish loves to borrow English roots and bend them into proper Spanish verbs. "Flipar" is the perfect example. It feels modern and instantly marks you as fluent in the casual register.



Chévere

 CHEH-veh-reh

COLOMBIA · VENEZUELA

CARIBBEAN

What it really means: Cool. Great. Nice. The South American and Caribbean answer to "guay".

LITERALLY: No literal meaning. It is pure slang, hugely popular in Colombia, Venezuela, and across the Caribbean.

WHEN TO USE IT: Saying something is great, or that you are doing fine. Works as a one-word reply.

La pasamos chévere. (*We had a great time.*)

¿Cómo estás? Todo chévere. (*How are you? All good.*)

WHY IT EXISTS: Every Spanish-speaking region wants its own word for "cool". "Chévere" is the one that travels best across northern South America and the Caribbean. Say it in Bogotá and you blend right in.



Che · Boludo

 cheh · boh-LOO-doh

ARGENTINA

! TONE MATTERS

What it really means: "Che" is "hey" or "mate", used to grab attention. "Boludo" is "dude" between friends, but it can also be a real insult ("idiot"). Tone decides everything.

LITERALLY: "Che" is a filler call. "Boludo" comes from a crude root, so it stays informal.

WHEN TO USE IT: "Che" is safe anywhere in Argentina. Only use "boludo" with close friends who will take it as affection.

Che, ¿vamos a tomar algo? (*Hey, shall we grab a drink?*)

¿Todo bien, boludo? (*All good, dude?*)

MIND YOUR TONE: Among friends "boludo" is warm. Aimed at a stranger or said sharply, it means "idiot" and can start a fight. Start with "che", earn the friendship, then maybe a "boludo".

ONE MORE THING

Ten phrases down. *A whole language* to go.

You now have ten phrases real locals use across Spain, Mexico, and South America. Practise them, drop them in conversation, and watch how fast people warm up to you.

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