

**The Anglican Chaplaincy of Saint George, Malaga**

**A FACTS SHEET ON FUNERALS IN SPAIN**

**INTRODUCTION**

These notes provide information about funeral services in southern Spain for the family or

friends of the deceased. In the event of a death in the family you should:

* **Call the ambulance service Tel: 061**. The doctor that accompanies the ambulance can decide if the death is of natural causes or not, and whether the local Police need to be informed.
* The ambulance doctor will certify the cause of death and issue a provisional certificate of death
* In the event of death by natural causes a funeral company should be contacted, after ascertaining approximate costs. The company will remove the body to a funeral parlour (*tanatorio*). Identification must accompany the body in order for it to be moved. Identification of the relative or friend who is contracting the service will also be necessary.
* When the doctor is unable to determine the cause of death and cannot certify the death it is described as judicial death. Deaths by accident, suicide, murder or sudden death are examples. See below for what happens in such a case.
* Register the death within 24 hours at the Civil Registry (***Registro Civil***) in the local Town Hall. Most funeral directors will do this as part of the service.
* In most regions of Spain you can expect a body to be buried or cremated within 24 to 48 hours of death, unless you ask for a delay (and pay extra).

If the death occurs in a hospital, the hospital will request that the family or responsible person call a funeral company to handle all the removal and disposal details unless death is of a suspicious nature in which case the judicial process will take effect.

**BURIAL OR CREMATION**

Each municipality has a cemetery, e.g. PARCEMASA near the university in Málaga. Spanish cemeteries have a system where a coffin is inserted in a recess, or niche (*nicho*) rather than buried in the ground. A niche can be rented for a pre-determined number of years. The remains are interred in the niche and once the period expires the body is moved to a common burial ground. Each cemetery has different procedures, periods available and prices. Most municipalities have communal burial facilities.

The alternative is cremation. Cremation was not widely practised in Spain in the past but is on the increase, and is more often used for expatriates. Not all areas have crematoria, and the ones that exist are widely scattered. Prices vary depending on location. If the deceased or next of kin have requested a cremation this must be made known to the doctor in charge of certifying the death, or funeral director, as it will be noted on the certificate.

**LEGAL ISSUES**

In the event of a death, the last doctor to treat the deceased, or the one who confirms death and identification of the body, issues a certificate of death. This is not a legal death certificate. Within 24 hours of a death, the certificate of death must be taken to the Civil Registry to formally register the death. The registration includes the date, time and location of the death. The Death Certificate (***Certificado de Defunción***) will be issued by the Civil Registry office. Normally for expatriates there are two copies in Spanish and two international ones, but more can be requested if necessary.

When the death registration has been completed a **burial or cremation licence** is issued and a formal funeral can take place.  
  
In the case of judicial death the court takes responsibility for the body and instructions for its transfer to the Forensic Anatomical Institute to determine the cause of death.

Since early 2012, the Administration of Justice has contracted a legal collection service with one of the funeral homes in each province. In Málaga Province this is Grupo ASV Servicios Funerarios. There is no charge for this service. Grupo ASV may propose the use of its local subsidiary ‘La Nacional’ for the funeral but the family of the deceased is not obliged to use it. Always ask for costs in advance.

**THE RELIGIOUS SERVICE**

The Chaplaincy of St George can provide a religious service if you ask. The funeral director will arrange the venue and may suggest a minister who can conduct a service. The service may be at a church or at the crematorium. In Malaga Province there are crematoria at Málaga, Velez- Málaga, Antequera (Santa Ana), Alora and Almuñecar. In the south of Córdoba cremations are held at Santa Ana also.

The funeral director normally liaises with the family and minister so that information can be provided for any tributes and pastoral support provided. If music is required, a sound system can be provided.

**REPATRIATION**

If the deceased or their next of kin requests that the body be repatriated to the country of origin this must also be communicated to the attending doctor when the death certificate is being completed. When a person dies their passport is no longer valid. The passport is taken to the consulate of the country of origin and a special mortuary passport/certificate is issued. There is usually a charge for this service.

A body can be cremated in Spain and the ashes flown to the home country. Ashes must be accompanied by a certificate. Some countries charge for permission to enter. Embassies and consulates can provide advice but not financial assistance.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We are grateful to ***Angels Rest Funeral Assistance Services*** (638 339 691) for assistance with the preparation of this note and for exemplifying best practice.

**CONTACTS**

For more information contact the following initially:

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