The country and its people

Spain is located in southwestern Europe, on the Iberian Peninsula. It occupies, together with Portugal and Andorra, the westernmost of all three southern peninsular zones of Mediterranean Europe. Thanks to its privileged geographical position, the Iberian Peninsula has, all through its history, been a vital gateway between the European Continent, Northern Africa, and America. As a result, there have been many migrations of various people into Spain: in addition to its original people, the Celts, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Visigoths, and the Arabs and other Muslims, as well as people from other parts of Europe and from all over the world, who, in the contemporary period, have helped make up a diverse society.

Spain’s mainland is bordered to the north by the Cantabrian Sea, France, and Andorra; to the east and south by the Mediterranean Sea; to the south by Morocco; and to the northwest and west by the Atlantic Ocean and Portugal. With an area of 504,000 square kilometers, Spain has a total population of 45 million inhabitants, which accounts for a population density of 89 people per square kilometer (a population denser than that of Latin American nations, but within an average range in continental Europe). However, the distribution of the population across the country is very unequal. The most populated areas lie in the conurbation around the capital city, Madrid, as well as along the coast; the hinterland is more depopulated.

Due to Spain’s historical vicissitudes, various languages co-exist within different cultural spaces. This situation has helped increase the country’s
cultural and linguistic resources: Castilian, Galician, Basque, and Catalan-Valencian. In 1978 Spain established a parliamentary monarchy, to conform to its historical tradition. From an administrative point of view, in 1833, Spain was divided into 50 provinces and two cities in the North of Africa (Ceuta and Melilla). Ever since the Constitution of 1978, the country has been divided into 17 autonomous communities (equivalent to the different regions) and two autonomous cities, a status which conforms to the cultural and historical affinities of the different provinces, regions, towns, and villages that make them up.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 establishes the division of the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers of government into separate, independent bodies. The legislative body is elected every four years through universal suffrage to appoint the executive body. This executive body is made up of the President of the Government (Prime Minister) and the Ministers of State, who are nominated by the former. The legislative body is made up of two chambers: the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. The Congress is made up of 350 deputies, elected by proportional representation on popular votes in closed lists; the Senate is made up of 225 senators, with territorial representation. The judiciary, on the other hand, has independent governmental bodies: the General Council of the Judiciary Power of Spain, whose main institutions are the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the High Courts of Justice (i.e., the highest judiciary body of each autonomous community), and the Provincial Courts. The National Court has its seat in Madrid, with jurisdiction over the whole of Spain. Through its criminal chamber, for instance, it tries cases involving organized crime, terrorism, and drug trafficking in order to achieve maximum efficiency in the fight against such crimes.

The services sector in Spain is the country's main economic activity, followed by the industrial, building, and agricultural sectors respectively. Within the services sector, tourism, along with financial services and distribution are the country's major economic activities.

**Historical outline**

The history of the Iberian Peninsula began with the settlement of Greek and Phoenician colonies and with the outbreak of the Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome, prior to the conquest of the peninsula by the Roman Empire (beginning in 217 BC). This conquest experienced periods of strong resistance, because of the bellicose nature of its inhabitants, and its climate and geography. Thus, the conquest