



Spain

Population: 47 million.

Area: 505,988 square kilometres.

Capital: Madrid.

Currency: Euro (EUR).

Official languages: Spanish, Catalan, Galician, Basque.

Main religion: Christianity (Roman Catholic).

Spain sits in the south-west of Europe. It is the biggest country in a region called the Iberian Peninsular. It has borders with France, Andorra and Portugal and long coastlines along the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Spain also includes two groups of islands: the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean and The Canary Islands, in the Atlantic Ocean, near to the coast of Africa.

Due to its large area, Spain has a wide range of physical features. The centre of the country is a large plateau – a high, arid area with mountain ranges crossing it. It is baking hot in the summer but bitterly cold in the winter. A mountain range called the Pyrenees separates Spain from France in the north-east. The southern region of Spain is called Andalusia (or Andalucia in Spanish). It has high mountains and fertile river valleys stretching to the sea. The southern and eastern coasts are popular with tourists for their beaches and the pleasant weather kept cool by the sea breezes. The north of Spain has milder, wetter weather and is known as Green Spain due to its forests and lush pastures. Spain's islands are different again. The Canary Islands are volcanic and one of the islands, Tenerife, is home to Spain's highest peak called Tiede – an active volcano.

Just as the physical geography of Spain varies across the country, each region also has different culture, traditions and even language. Some of the traditions people think of as Spanish, such as bullfighting or Flamenco dancing, are practised only in the southern regions. Other areas have their own customs such as the impressive human towers (or castells) of Catalonia. Because of these differences,



some people in regions such as Catalonia or the Basque Country would prefer to be independent to Spain. Instead, Spain has been divided into 17 communities and these each have their own parliament and can make decisions for their own area. Spain also has a national parliament and prime minister and it is a monarchy. The current King, Felipe VI, has reigned since 2014. Spain has been a member of the European Union (the E.U.) since 1986 and the Euro replaced the peseta as the national currency in 2002.

Spain's economy relies heavily on tourism. It is the second most visited country in the world behind France. Other important industries are car manufacturing, renewable energy and agriculture. Some important exports are pork, wine, olive oil, citrus fruits and strawberries. Spanish produce can be found widely on supermarket shelves in the UK and across Europe. It also features in many popular Spanish dishes.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What is the capital of Spain?
2. Why is northern Spain called Green Spain?
3. What is Spain's highest mountain called?
4. What is a castell?
5. When did Spain join the European Union?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

E

How does the text make it easier to find the key information?

V

What is a plateau?

V

What does arid mean?

V

What is an 'export'?

S

In what ways is Spain a varied country?