

Title:

Spanish Galicia

Word Count:

915

Summary:

Galicia is one of the 19 autonomous regions of Spain. It lies on the Atlantic Ocean, north of Portugal and south of the Bay of Biscay in the northwest of the country. It is made up of the four provinces; A Coruna, Lugo, Ourense, and Pontevedra

Keywords:

spain, galicia, A Coruna, Lugo, Ourense, Pontevedra, Vigo, Santiago de Compostela

Article Body:

The region elected its first parliament in 1981 following autonomy from Madrid. The Galego or Galician is the official language of the region, it is closely related to Portuguese and while most inhabitants understand it, only about half use it primarily.

In the 5th and 6th centuries Galicia was the centre of the kingdom of the German Suevi. Moorish rule followed but the king of Asturias liberated it during the 9th century. Its people's strong spirit of independence was shown during the Middle Ages when the feudal lords often rebelled against the crown and again in the early 19th century by the general resistance to occupation by Napoleonic forces Later in that same century Galicia was the scene of a somewhat surprising cultural and literary revival.

Galicia is a mountainous region, with several fast flowing rivers tumbling towards the Atlantic Ocean, of which the Mino is the most important. The area relies heavily on agriculture with extensive cattle and pig farming, food processing and fishing are also important. There is a large petroleum refinery at A Coruna and a strategic naval base at El Ferrol. Wind farms produce much of the region's electricity.

A Coruna, formerly known as La Coruna is the capital of province of the same name.

A Coruna reached its height as a port and a textile centre in the late Middle

Ages. The Armada sailed from its harbour in 1588 intent on collecting the Spanish army from Holland and the subsequent invasion of England. Bad weather and the English fleet, led by Sir Francis Drake, combined to thwart the attempt. 10 years later Drake himself paid Coruna a visit and sacked the city. In 1809 during the Peninsular War it was the scene of the in which Sir John Moore was killed. The city was a focus of antimonarchist sentiment during the 19th century.

Today it is a busy Atlantic port and the distribution centre for the surrounding agricultural area. It has shipyards, metal works, an oil refinery, glass and ceramic plants and an important fishing industry. The summer months see a significant tourist trade.

Chief landmarks are the Roman Torre de Hercules, which is now a lighthouse and a 13th century church. Miradores, glazed window balconies, are characteristic of A Coruna. It is the site of an arsenal and army garrison. The city is also spelled Corunna.

Santiago de Compostela is in A Coruna province and sits on the Sar River. The city is one of the chief shrines of Christendom. There in the early 9th century a reputed miracle led to the discovery of the supposed tomb of the apostle St. James the Greater. A sanctuary was built by Alfonso II of Asturias. During the Middle Ages the city grew around the shrine and became, after Jerusalem and Rome, the most famous Christian place of pilgrimage. It still thrives today as a pilgrimage site and has inevitably become a tourist centre. It is an archiepiscopal see and has a university that was founded 1501. The economy is based on agriculture, the manufacture of linen and paper and tourism. Its most remarkable building is the cathedral, which replaced the earlier sanctuary after its destruction by the Moors in the 10th century. Its construction started in the 11th century and was completed during 13th. Constructed in Romanesque style, the cathedral has had baroque and plateresque additions and restorations. Other historic buildings include the Royal Hospital from the early 16th century that was built by Ferdinand and Isabella to accommodate poor pilgrims.

Lugo is capital of Lugo province, it lies on the Minot River. The city is the processing and economic centre for the surrounding fertile farm area. One of the largest slaughterhouses in Spain is in Lugo. It has a cathedral dating from the 12th century and well-preserved Roman walls from the 3rd century.

The city of Ourense is the capital of province of the same name. It lies at the centre of an agricultural region with extensive vineyards. There is some light industry. Formally a Roman settlement, it reached its greatest importance as the capital of the kings of the Suevi during the 5th and 6th centuries. It has a

fine 12th century bridge and a restored Gothic cathedral. There are hot sulphur springs, known since Roman times.

Pontevedra is the capital of Pontevedra province. It lies at the mouth of the Lerez River on the Atlantic Ocean. It is a major fishing port. Clothing, leather goods, and fertilizers are made, and farm products are traded. Among its many old structures are a Roman bridge, the Gothic Church of Santa Maria and the picturesque ruins of a 14th century convent. The city is reputed to have been the birthplace of Christopher Columbus's certainly the Santa Maria, his ship, was built there.

Vigo is a large city in the province of Pontevedra built on an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. It is home to an important naval base and one of Spain's busiest ports. The country's most important fishing fleet sails from here. It also has shipyards, canneries, petroleum and sugar refineries and various light industries. In 1702 a Franco-Spanish fleet, escorting galleons loaded with gold, silver and precious stones from the Spanish colonies in the Americas, was attacked and largely destroyed in the Bay of Vigo by a combined force of British and Dutch vessels. Several galleons were sunk and it is believed that much of the treasure is still at the bottom of the bay. In 1719 the port was captured by the British.