

Title:

The Spanish region of Catalonia

Word Count:

1350

Summary:

A look at Catalonia or Catalunya, the autonomous region in north east Spain. Including it's four provinces - Girona in the north, Barcelona to the east, in the south Tarragona and landlocked Lleida in the western part of the region.

Keywords:

spain, property, hotels, spanish, catalunya, catalonia, barcelona, sitges, tarragona, llieda, girona, gerona, pyrenees, montserrat

Article Body:

Catalonia shares it's northern border with the countries of Andorra and France in the mountainous Pyrenees. The Mediterranean Sea forms it eastern border with the coast running south west down as far as the region of Valencia. The eastern border is shared with the region of Aragon. Throughout history Catalonia has struggled for greater autonomy in it's relationship with Spain. In attempts to gain full independent it has on more than occasion revolted. Few Catalonians today aspire to have any real expectations of independence but the struggle for greater autonomy within Spain continues.

History - Greeks and Romans established trade along this part of the Mediterranean coast. In the middle ages Catalan art and literature flourished and the now established coastal trade saw merchants become very powerful rivalling those of Venice and Genoa. In 1461 Catalonia rose up in protest at it's alliance with Aragon but the rebellion was crushed. The subsequent union of Aragon with Castile side lined Catalonia. Trade routes were moved, commercial income fell, famines and plagues all contributed to it's decline. But the Catalonian desire for independence continued. It rose against Philip IV during the thirty year war of 1618-48 and followed that by taking the side of Archduke Charles in the War of the Spanish Succession against Philip V. It was a centre for socialist influence at the turn of the 19th Century. 1931 saw the Catalans establish a separate government which went on to win autonomy from the Spanish Cortes in 1932. Two years later a revolution for complete independence failed, but in another 2 years autonomy was restored. In the Spanish civil war of 1936-39, Catalonia once again picked the wrong side and following Franco's victory over the republicans the region suffered badly and the cherished Catalan

language was banned in public life. In 1978 it was restored and is now an official language of the region along with Castilian or Spanish. It elected its first parliament as an autonomous region in 1980. By the mid-1990s Catalan nationalists had become a force in both the region's and the nation's politics.

Catalonia comprises four provinces, Girona, Barcelona, Tarragona and Lleida, all are named after their capitals.

Girona or Gerona in the north sits on the Onyar River. Dating from pre-Roman times, the old town has preserved its medieval aspect. Girona was ruled by the Moors from 714 to 797. During the Peninsular War of 1808-09 the town resisted the Napoleon's French forces. Industries today include chemical production, machinery, paper making and textiles. Outside the city and on the coast the beaches and coves around Begur and Palafrugell and particularly attractive. Or take in a sunrise at the Cap de Crues, Spain's most easterly point. Just to the south is the enchanting whitewashed village of Cadaques built around a rocky bay. The artist Salvador Dali spent the holidays of his youth there and later lived in the nearby village of Port Lligat. The barren shorelines, odd formations of rocks and desolate moonscapes so typical of his paintings can be seen in abundance throughout the locality. The Teatre-Musea Dali is located in the town of Figueres and contains a great deal of the artist's works. The Pyrenees, in the north of the province, offer many opportunities for walking and hiking, the Parc Nacional d'Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici being one of the most attractive areas. There are several ski stations operating throughout the winter months.

There is evidence of some settlement in the area going back to the 15th century BC but Barcelona is reputed to take it's name from the powerful Carthaginian family of Barca who founded the basis for the city as we know it today. Under the Romans and Visigoths the city flourished. In the 8th century it fell to the Moors and in 801 it was taken by Charlemagne, who included it in the Spanish March. The March became independent under the leadership of the powerful counts of Barcelona in the 9th and 10th centuries, They won lands from the Moors to the south and acquired all of Catalonia. In 1137, following the marriage of Count Raymond Berengar IV to the heiress of Aragon the two regions became united. The city of Barcelona became the capital as it was for future kings of Spain. A well ruled Barcelona expanded trade in the Mediterranean. Its cloth industry flourished and it became a powerful centre of banking and commerce. Around 1400 saw the peak in it's fortunes, decline followed along with the rest of Catalonia. The French occupied the city on three occasions in 1640-52, 1715 and 1808-14. Catalan separatism centred on Barcelona and the city was the scene of many insurrections. It revolted against Philip IV of Spain from 1640-52. It also became the Spanish centre of socialism and other radical political doctrines

around 1900. Barcelona was the capital of the region's autonomous government from 1932-39. During the civil war the Spanish Loyalist government sat in Barcelona until it fell to Franco's forces in early 1939. The region saw demonstrations against Franco's dictatorship throughout the 1950's. Today Barcelona is Spain's second largest city and the claims to be cultural centre of the country. It is the capital of the Catalanian region and more than one third of region's population reside there. Barcelona is also Spain's largest port and its chief commercial centre with international banking and finance houses. It is a major industrial centre and production includes aviation, chemicals, electrical equipment, foundries, locomotives, machinery, textiles and vehicles. The city itself is modern, with wide avenues, bustling traffic and striking new architecture. By contrast the well preserved old city, Roman walls can still be seen, is filled with narrow, winding streets and ancient structures, including a cathedral, many churches, the city hall and the Lonja or exchange. Barcelona is the site of a reputed opera house, the Contemporary Art Museum, the Fine Arts Museum of Catalonia and the Picasso Museum. In 1992 it hosted the summer Olympics. The remainder of the province of Barcelona is in the main hilly or mountainous. But it also home to some highly fertile plains where cereals grapes and olives are grown. The province also produces one third of Spain's wine. Much of the area's power is generated by hydroelectric plants built on the Ebro, Cinca and Segre rivers. The coastline, stretching nearly 400 kilometres has many good harbours and marinas, excellent fisheries and an buoyant tourist trade. West of Barcelona you will find the vineyards of the Penedes area. Also the mountain of Montserrat, on a clear day the peak at 1236m above sea level offers views of the Pyrenees to the north and to Mallorca in the Balearic Islands to the south east.

Tarragona sits on the mouth of the river Francola on the Mediterranean. It was formally known as Tarraco and in 218BC was captured by Roman forces. They built up is fortifications against attack by the Carthaginians. The ruins of Roman walls and an aquaduct remain still. It fell to both the Visigoths and the Moors in the 5th and 8th centuries respectively. The Christians recaptured it in the 12th century but when it's trade was captured by either regions Barcelona or Valencia it fell into decline. In 1903 Carthusian monks settled in the city having been expelled from La Grande Chartreuse in France. Their famous liqueur is produced here to this day. Today it is important as both a commercial centre and port. Industries include flour mills, an oil refinery and wine production and export. Some of the countries finest wines are made nearby in the Priorat region.

Lleida lies on the river Segre. Formally known as Llerda, Julius Ceasar defeated the generals of Pompey here in 49 BC. The Moorish invasion from the south saw Lleida fall in 714. It was liberated by Christian forces in 1149. By tradition

a strategic, fortified city, Lleida became a key defence point for Barcelona in the Spanish civil war. It eventually fell to Franco's forces in the April of 1938 having withheld for nine long months. A castle, whose ramparts enclose a Romanesque cathedral, dominates the old section of the city. Lleida is the centre of a fertile farm area and agriculture predominates. There is little in the way of a manufacturing industry.