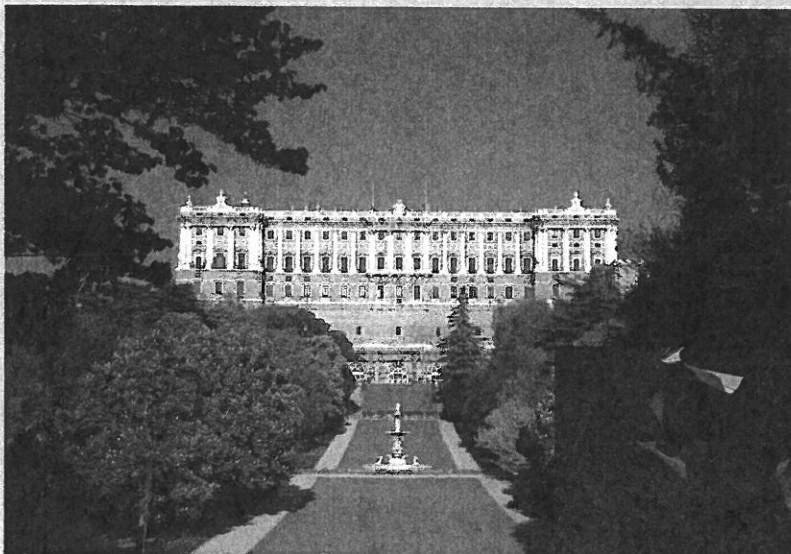


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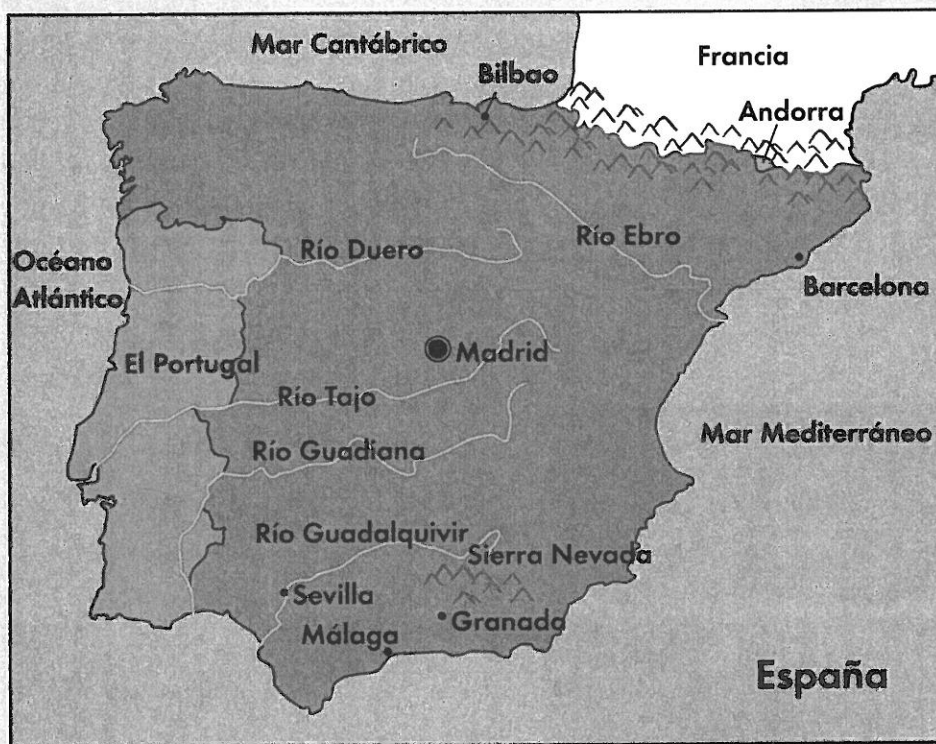
4

La geografía

Geography



Spain (España)



Important cities

Madrid, the capital of Spain, has a population of more than forty million people. It is the cultural, commercial, and administrative center of the country. Its monuments, museums, and public buildings reflect a long history. The *Palacio Real* (Royal Palace) has served as the residence of kings and queens since the

18th century. Today it is used only for royal functions. King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia live just outside the city. The *Museo del Prado* (Prado Museum), one of the world's best art museums, contains a collection of Spanish art from the 12th to the 19th centuries. It includes works by El Greco, Velázquez, and Goya. Another museum, the *Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas*, shows how people furnished and decorated their homes in years past. The city also has several theaters for dance performances, plays, and musical productions. The *parque de atracciones*, an amusement park, and several water parks provide lots of fun in the summertime! One of the many landmarks of the city is the *Fuente de Neptuno*, (Fountain of Neptune), which shows the Roman god Neptune being driven in his chariot by two horses.

Barcelona is Spain's largest seaport and second largest city. It is also the capital of the province of Catalonia. The residents have their own language (Catalan) and a history different from that of most other Spaniards. The architecture in this city, called *modernista*, is also unique. The most impressive building in Barcelona is the church of the *Sagrada Familia* (Sacred Family). Built in the 19th century, it is a modern version of a medieval Gothic cathedral. The city hosted the Summer Olympics of 1992 and has the largest soccer stadium in Europe.

Sevilla (Seville) is the nation's third largest city and largest inland port. Situated on the Guadalquivir River, it has an excellent location for transoceanic shipping and commerce. The city's Moorish or Arabic-North African heritage is reflected in much of its

architecture. The city's best landmark is the tower of *La Giralda*. This was formerly an Islamic religious tower but now it is the bell tower for Seville's cathedral. The royal palaces reflect the Arabic style as well.

Málaga is a major seaport on the southern coast. What started as a simple Phoenician port is now Spain's third largest city. It is also the capital of the region called Andalucía. Its warm climate and nice beaches have attracted international visitors for years. Málaga's important industry is now tourism.

Granada, a small city in northern Andalucía, is known world-wide as the site of the *Alhambra*. This is the palace of the ruler of the Moorish-Islamic empire, built in the 12th to 13th centuries. The city also has a Gothic cathedral; it contains the burial vault of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. Since Granada lies so close to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Granada serves as a departure point for those planning ski trips in the area.

Bilbao is a small city in the northern mountainous Basque region. It is an important port for oceanic vessels and an industrial area for steel and chemical works. A European branch of the Guggenheim Art Museum is the latest major addition to the city.

Important rivers

The *Ebro* is the only river in Spain that flows to the east. It empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

The *Tajo* is Spain's longest river. It flows through Toledo, passes through Portugal, and empties into the Atlantic Ocean.



The city of Toledo is almost completely surrounded by the Rio Tajo (Tagus River).

The *Guadalquivir* is the most navigable river in the country. It flows through Seville, its chief commercial port, and empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

The *Duero* drains north central and northwestern Spain. It flows westward through Portugal and into the Atlantic Ocean.

The *Guadiana* flows to the west, as well. When it reaches Portugal, the river turns south and empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

Important facts

- With the exception of the Guadalquivir, the rivers of Spain are, primarily unnavigable. That means they are often too shallow or too rocky to use for shipping or for the purpose of long-distance transportation. Instead, the rivers serve as sources of electric power and are used for pleasure boating.
- Spain and Portugal are the two nations that share the Iberian Peninsula. That is the part of Europe that extends south of France, projecting into the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. The sea plays a major role in the daily lives of many Spaniards. The Pyrenees Mountains (*los Pirineos*) form a natural boundary between Spain and France. The principality of Andorra lies within this huge mountain range.
- Besides Spanish, there are three other languages spoken in the country: Euskera, spoken by the Basques in northern Spain; Galician, spoken in the province of Galicia in the northwest; and Catalan, spoken in the eastern province of Catalonia.
- Spain is a member of the European Union, a friendly economic alliance of 25 nations.

Mexico (México)

Important cities

México, D. F. (Distrito Federal) is often referred to as Mexico City. It is the 1 city of the nation and the oldest city in North America. At an altitude of 7349 feet, it is the highest city in North America, and with a population of roughly 18 million people, it is the second most populated city in the world.

Its history and culture can best be appreciated by visiting some of the museums and buildings. The *Palacio Nacional* (National Palace) is the headquarters of the Mexican government. This palace contains impressive wall paintings (called murals) created by the artist Diego Rivera. These



enormous paintings show 2000 years of cultural changes and the history of the Mexican people.

The Aztec heritage of the city is most evident in the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* (National Museum of Anthropology), one of the world's best archaeological museums. It contains artifacts (original objects) from the many Native American societies that lived in this area long before the Spanish invaders arrived. Probably the most famous artifact is the Aztec calendar stone. The museum also has tombs and a reconstructed Mayan temple.

The colorful folk dancing group *Ballet Folklórico de México* performs at the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Palace of Fine Arts). This building is also a place for visitors to see the murals of Rivera and other Mexican artists by the names of José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

El zoológico (zoo) is home to many animals, including panda bears. The grounds contain recreational features for children and adults alike, such as a miniature train and small lakes for boating. It is built on the same site where the Aztec chief Moctezuma II originally kept his zoo.

Guadalajara is Mexico's second largest city. It is situated in the western-central part of the country and is known for hand-glazed pottery and crafts. The downtown section has houses and plazas that date back to the colonial period of the 16th century. The *Instituto Cultural Cabañas* (Cultural Institute Cabañas) promotes all kinds of cultural programs—from rock concerts to floral and art exhibits—while the *Teatro Degollado* (Degollado Theater) offers concerts and dance performances.

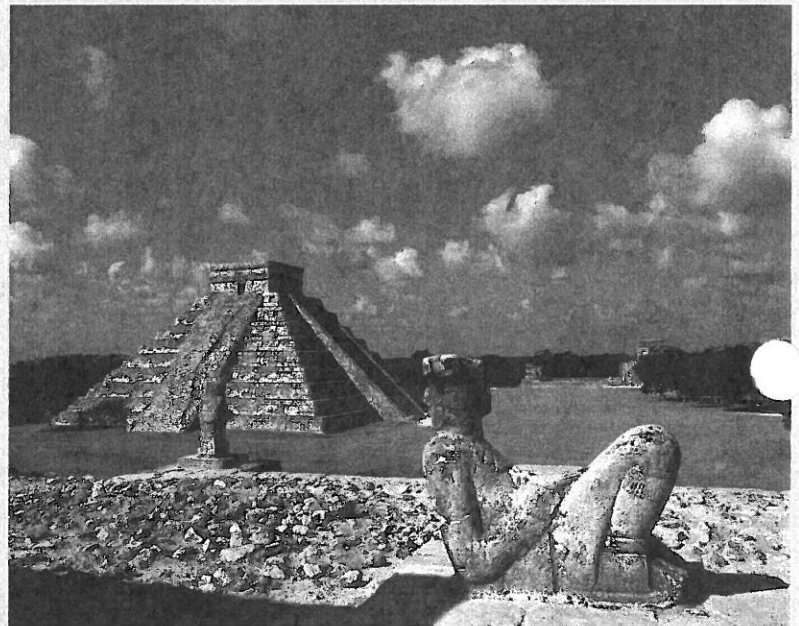
Monterrey is Mexico's third largest city. Situated in the northeast, it is an industrial city with a major convention center and a sports arena. American baseball teams play there when invited for international competitions. This city has two important museums, the *Museo de Historia Mexicana* (the Mexican History Museum) and the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo* (Museum of Contemporary Art).

Mérida, located on the northern coast of the Yucatán peninsula, is the major Mayan cultural center. In fact, it was built on the ruins of a Mayan city. Today the Maya people make up most of its diverse population. In addition, the city's architecture reflects not only the Mayan culture but also the European and Moorish-Arabic styles. The *Museo de Arte Popular* (Museum of Popular Art) displays the arts and crafts of the Yucatán region. The *Centenario*, the zoo, has the added attractions of a playground, walking trails, and picnic sites.

Veracruz is a port city situated on the Gulf of Mexico, about 200 miles east of Mexico City. The residents share a mixed cultural heritage of Africans, Cubans, and Native Americans. What used to be a simple fishing village has become a city famous for dancing and singing. In fact, the song *La bamba* started in Veracruz, where the local musicians who play harps and guitars have their own style of music. The seaport is protected by a fort, which was first built by the Spanish as a defense against pirates. Today, people can see the old fortress and visit an aquarium and marine research center called the *Acuario de Veracruz*.

Important Facts

- Mexico is divided into two long vertical sections by a dual mountain chain called the *Sierra Madre*. This chain has served as a barrier to communication, transportation, and national unification. For those who can't afford to fly, travel through the Sierra Madre is long and difficult.
- There are even two volcanoes near Mexico City, and there is always the possibility of eruptions and earthquakes.
- There were many Native American or indigenous groups of people living in Mexico when Hernán Cortés and his army arrived in 1517. Two of these groups, the Aztecs and the Mayans, had advanced civilizations. Today, over 80 percent of Mexico's population is of indigenous or Native American origin. In addition to Spanish, many of them speak a native language such as Náhuatl or Zapoteca.
- The *Península de Yucatán* was once the home of the Maya civilization. Other indigenous groups lived here, too. Archeological ruins contain the remnants of their pyramids, temples, villages, and ceremonial areas.
- Mexico's foreign and domestic economy is based largely on agriculture.
- Lack of fresh water is one of Mexico's greatest problems.
- The *Río Bravo* is what the Mexicans call the Río Grande. This river forms part of the border between the United States and Mexico. (There are many other rivers, but most are short, shallow, and too hazardous for shipping and commercial or reliable transportation. Some are perfect for white water rafting!)
- Ocean-side resorts attract many international visitors and vacationers. One resort on the Pacific side is Acapulco (site of the famous cliff divers), and another on the Atlantic side is Cancún (on the Yucatán Peninsula).



The Pyramid of Kukulcan, built around 800 A.D., is located in Chichén Itzá on the Yucatán peninsula.