Catalonia at a glance
Capital: Barcelona  
Population density: 224.6 /km²  
Area: 32,107 km²  
GDP: €216,923 million (2008)  
GDP per capita: €29,184 euros (2008)  
Life expectancy: 81.39 years  
Immigration rate: 15.4% (2008)  
Official languages: Catalan, Spanish, Occitan (in Vall d’Aran)  
Climate: Mediterranean  
Universities: 12  
Natural spaces: 16 natural parks  
Currency: euro  
Internet domain: .cat  
International phone prefix: +34  
Time zone: CET (CEST in summer)  
National holiday: 11 September  
Patron saint: Saint George (Sant Jordi)  
Government: Generalitat de Catalunya (historical name of the Government of Catalonia)  
Location:

Catalonia at a glance
The Catalan Parliament is one of the oldest in Europe; its origins date back to 1263, when the Catalan King Pere II, the Great, lost absolute power and needed the approval of the clergy, the nobility and the representatives of the towns for laws to be passed. The Catalan Corts, consisting of these three estates, are considered a true medieval parliament.

As a political entity Catalonia dates back to the twelfth century, when a number of counties broke away from Frankish domination and became sovereign territories. In the Middle Ages the Catalan kings conquered Valencia, the Balearic islands, Sicily, Sardinia and the Kingdom of Naples, making Catalonia a major power in the Mediterranean. In the 19th century Catalonia went through a notable period of industrialisation, which coincided with a Catalan linguistic and cultural renaissance. Around the turn of the last century the cultural revival led to a movement to obtain political recognition and Catalonia achieved autonomous status in 1931. However, in 1939 Catalonia was occupied by Franco’s troops and the country’s language, culture and democratic institutions were outlawed. Nevertheless, with the return of democracy to Spain, Catalonia recovered its autonomous status in 1979, through the Statute of Autonomy. In 2006 the Statute was revised to extend the powers of Catalan institutions.

The eleventh of September is Catalonia’s national day. It commemorates the Catalans’ fierce desire to reinstate self-government after their defeat in 1714 by Philip V’s Spanish army. Catalonia, which had until that date been a sovereign nation, lost its national freedoms, its political institutions, its laws, and the Catalan language was banned.
The Catalan language ranks thirteenth in the European Union in terms of the number of speakers, ahead of Danish and Finnish, and comparable to Swedish, Greek and Portuguese. Over nine million people speak Catalan and it is understood by over eleven million people. It is Catalonia’s official language. In Spain it is also an official language.

Catalan is spoken by more people than 10 of the EU’s official languages in Valencia and the Balearic Islands and is spoken in part of Aragon (the Franja de Ponent), Catalonia is also spoken North of Catalonia (in the southern French department of Pyrénées-Orientales) and in the town of Alghero (Sardinia). Catalan is the official language of Andorra and thus spoken in the United Nations.

As a language, Catalan developed between the eighth and tenth centuries, evolving from Latin, like French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and other Romance languages. Every year 10,000 works are published in Catalan. The number of works translated into Catalan ranks tenth in the world. It is taught at 166 universities on five continents.

Catalan is very much alive on the internet, so much so that in 2006 ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) authorised the “.cat” domain for websites in Catalan. Just over two years later 30,000 domain names had been registered.

Parla.cat is a highly innovative on-line language learning system available to all on the internet.

Hortilies d’Organyà, the first text written in Catalan (12th century)
The area of Catalonia is 32,107 km². It is as big as Belgium (30,528 km²) and comparable to Holland (41,543 km²) and Denmark (43,098 km²). Its landscape is varied. To the north we find the Pyrenees, with dozens of peaks over 3,000 m and to the southeast a 580 km coastline. The climate is Mediterranean, with mild winters and hot summers. The country’s 16 natural parks and protected areas are the finest examples of its exceptionally rich landscape.
The population of Catalonia is over seven million, comparable with Austria, Bulgaria or Israel, higher than many countries belonging to the United Nations and greater than most of the new member states of the EU. The population density is 224.6 / km², slightly lower than Germany or the United Kingdom and considerably higher than the European average (112 / km²).

Historically, Catalonia has been a gateway to Europe via the Mediterranean coast and a major centre for trade. As a result Catalonia has always been a country where different cultures and traditions meet.

Catalonia is a welcoming country. Between 1950 and 1975 one and a half million people arrived from the south of Spain and since the 1990s it has absorbed hundreds of thousands of immigrants, especially from the Maghreb, South America and Eastern Europe. Catalan society is multicultural, with people from over 180 countries who have found a land of opportunity here.

In 2008 Catalonia was visited by 27 million tourists

Catalonia is a very pleasant country to live in. Catalan people are hard-working and enterprising, combining effort with imagination, creativity with rigour and tenacity with seriousness. The geography of Catalonia is rich and varied. The sea and coast, by the Mediterranean, and the mountains and valleys inland, offer a wide range of leisure options throughout the year. Barcelona has established itself as the European city with the best quality of life and Catalans have one of the world’s best figures for life expectancy.

Because of its geographical position, the diversity of its natural resources and its rich cultural and artistic heritage, Catalonia is a particularly attractive destination for tourists. There are few places in the world where you can ski in the mountains in the morning and sunbathe on the beach in the afternoon. Catalonia’s infrastructure, heritage, wide range of hotels and first class public services make it a world leader in the field of tourism.

Historically, Catalonia has been a gateway to Europe via the Mediterranean coast and a major centre for trade.
Catalan culture is both national and cosmopolitan. Catalonia has traditionally been receptive to new currents of art and thought, thanks to its geographical position, its openness to Europe and the Mediterranean, and to the global attraction of Barcelona. This is one of the main reasons why Catalonia has produced so many internationally renowned artists: the architects Antoni Gaudí and Enric Miralles; the painters Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí and Antoni Tàpies; the writers Ramon Llull, Mercè Rodoreda, Baltasar Porcel and Quim Monzó; the musicians Pau Casals, Montserrat Caballé and Josep Carreras; the scientists Narcís Monturiol, Joan Oró and Joan Massagué; and the chef Ferran Adrià, among others.

a universal and unique culture

In response to a proposal by Catalonia, UNESCO has declared 23 April to be “World Book and Copyright Day.”

Saint George’s Day, 23 April, is Catalonia’s national day and is a celebration of love and culture, symbolised by roses and books. Every town and village is full of stalls selling books and roses, which people give to their loved ones.

Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí are two of the great masters of Catalan painting. Pablo Picasso spent many of his formative years in Barcelona.

The raising of human castles is the most spectacular of Catalonia’s traditions.

Photo: Joan Miró / Bayl

Photo: Lluerna@A. Bofill

Photo: © Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d’Arquitectes de Catalunya (F. Català-Roca)
Sports moves Catalonia

Catalonia has a rich sporting life, with numerous sports clubs and associations. Barcelona Football Club is an outstanding example, a club with a proud history and one of the world’s leading sports clubs, with over 100,000 members.

In Catalonia there are world class sportsmen and sportswomen who have excelled in motor racing, tennis, mountaineering and synchronised swimming.

Catalonia has an excellent sports infrastructure network, including the Circuit de Catalunya, a modern track used to host major motor racing events including Formula 1; the Olympic complex; and the high performance centre (CAR), a modern athletic centre with all the facilities needed for training elite sportsmen and sportswomen.
Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia and is the driving force behind many areas of the country’s life. With over 2000 years of history, Barcelona’s role is that of a great Mediterranean metropolis, having been influenced throughout its history by a variety of civilisations: Iberian, Roman, Jewish, Arab and Christian.

On the occasion of the 1992 Olympic Games, still considered an international benchmark, the city of Barcelona underwent a spectacular transformation, with the redevelopment of its sea front, the building of the Olympic Village and the Anella Olímpica, and the construction of the Olympic Games complex on Montjuïc, the hill dominating the city. The process of opening Barcelona to the sea culminated in the hosting of the “2004 Universal Forum of Cultures” with contributions by nations worldwide.

Barcelona has many cultural attractions, which make it a popular destination for tourists. Art nouveau has gifted Barcelona with an exceptional architectural legacy including Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia cathedral and the Güell Park.
Catalonia is strategically located. It is a major point of entry to Europe and a nexus linking different parts of the Mediterranean. Industry is one of the pillars of the Catalan economy. As well as the textile industry, which has a long tradition in Catalonia, other important industries include vehicle and vehicle accessory manufacture, chemicals, foodstuffs, shipbuilding, furniture and electrical appliances, and latest generation IT and data communication equipment.

Graphic arts and the publishing industry represent a decisive sector within the Catalan economy, alongside biomedicine, biotechnology and particularly the tourist industry which is in a state of constant growth. An important financial role is played by Catalonia’s big savings banks. These powerful, centralised entities hold nearly 70% of private bank deposits and have considerable influence over major Catalan and Spanish businesses.

With average growth at 3% on average between 2000 and 2008, Catalonia’s GDP is one point above the EU average (2%). Catalonia has led the way with one of the most significant rates of sustained economic growth in the Mediterranean arc, which extends from the north of Italy, through the south of France and into the east of Spain.

Catalonia has three international airports: Barcelona, Reus and Girona. Barcelona airport is being expanded to two runways. Catalonia also has two major modern Mediterranean ports, Barcelona and Tarragona. Access to international markets is facilitated by over 12,000 km of roads, nearly 1,600 km of railways and the high speed train, soon to link Barcelona with France and the rest of Europe.

Its network of inter-modal logistics centres, consisting of the Zona Franca logistics park, the Logistics Activities Area (ZAL) and the ProLogis business park, covers a total of 300 hectares in the Barcelona area. A key role is also played by Fira de Barcelona. In addition, Catalonia has an extensive, advanced, reliable telecommunications and data infrastructure.
Catalonia has an extensive network of universities: seven public, four private and one virtual, preparing about 200,000 students for over 500 different qualifications. They include 13,600 overseas students taking part in international exchange programmes.

Catalan universities offer more than 300 Master’s degrees which comply fully with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area, structured according to the European credit transfer system.

Catalonia is a major centre for business training: Catalan business schools such as ESADE and IESE are ranked among the world leaders by publications such as The Wall Street Journal and The Economist.

Catalan universities are highly regarded in Europe.
Catalonia occupies a strong global position in biotechnology and biomedicine, with a network of 60 leading hospitals, including six of Spain’s most productive in the field of science. There are twelve universities and scientific parks, six of them devoted to R&D in biomedicine and agro-food. Research companies and public research institutions work together to promote Catalonia through the Biocat organisation.

Research and innovation, strategic priorities

Barcelona is home to the management office of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) and will also be the site for a new European synchrotron. The Barcelona IBM-UPC Supercomputing Centre houses the Mare Nostrum, currently the most powerful computer in Europe and the ninth most powerful in the world.
Catalonia has a top class health system with a network of 400 healthcare centres and 63 hospitals, both local and highly specialised. The Catalan hospital system is a world leader in transplants and advanced research, as well as health financing and the management of healthcare services.

Barcelona’s hospital and healthcare facilities, both public and private, are extensive and internationally recognised. Consequently, many people from other parts of Spain and abroad come to Catalan hospitals for medical treatment and operations.

Catalan hospitals are connected with leading international research networks.
Historically, Catalonia has always been aware of its international role, thanks to its geographical position, as a gateway to Europe and point of connection with the Mediterranean. Catalonia is a country of communication, exchange and entrepreneurship, a welcoming country with a long tradition of openness to the outside world. After three decades of self-government the Government of Catalonia is implementing an ambitious foreign policy to strengthen bilateral relations with state and sub-state governments and consolidate its presence in multilateral organisations. The Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation is responsible for coordinating and promoting the Government of Catalonia’s foreign policy.

Since 1989 the Government of Catalonia has been promoting its presence abroad, through a solid network of delegations and offices, to promote the country’s interests, raise the international profile of Catalan businesses, disseminate the Catalan language and culture, promote tourism, manage immigration, and foster cooperation for development.

Barcelona has been chosen as the seat of the Permanent Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean.
world famous catalans
‘I decided to do research at the Centre for Genomic Regulation because it’s a very dynamic and innovative laboratory, with leading researchers and research groups. Apart from that I wanted to stay in Europe and, quite frankly, Catalonia and Barcelona are very pleasant places to be in: you have the sea, sun, mountains...’
Adèle Faucherre. Researcher from France

‘I have an industrial and graphic design business and we have customers all over Europe. If all goes well, we’ll soon have customers in Japan too. I live in Barcelona near the Gothic Quarter and the Born area and I like it very much because the people are young and varied. I like nature as well: Montserrat, the Mediterranean coast... I think life in Catalonia fits in with my character.’
Hiroshi Tsunoda. Designer from Japan

‘I set up my business in Catalonia because it’s an area where there are a lot of multinationals and there are good business infrastructures. On top of that, Catalonia is a wonderful country to live in: you have the beach, the mountains, ski resorts and a wide range of cultural activities.’
Lawrence Franks. Businessman from England

‘I studied architecture at the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC) because it’s a centre with a European reputation which gives an excellent all-round education: on the technical, artistic and human levels. My aim is to work in a studio which is in touch with Catalan and Moroccan architecture.’
Adil Khouya. Architecture student from Morocco

‘In Catalonia we have access to highly qualified specialists in technology, which has made it easy for us to build a team. From here we sell software products to the United States, European and Asian markets.’
Mark Meumann. Software developer from England

they have chosen catalonia