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Land

Administratively, Spain is divided into 50 provinces. However, the division into 17 geographic and historic regions (autonomous regions), generally corresponding to the old Christian and Moorish kingdoms of Spain, has been maintained for most practical purposes. The chief cities, other than Madrid, are [Burgos](#), [Valladolid](#), [León](#), [Zamora](#), and [Salamanca](#) in Castile-León; [Toledo](#) in Castile-La Mancha; and [Badajoz](#) in Extremadura.

The center of Spain forms a vast plateau (Span. *Meseta Central*) extending from the Cantabrian Mts. in the north to the Sierra Morena in the south and from the Portuguese border in the west to the low ranges that separate the plateau from the Mediterranean coast in the east. It is traversed from west to east by mountain chains—notably the Sierra de Guadarrama—and the valleys of the Douro (Duro), the Tagus, and Guadiana rivers. Except for some fertile valleys, the central plateau is arid and thinly populated; wheat growing, viniculture, and sheep raising are the principal rural activities. The plateau comprises [Castile-León](#), [Castile-La Mancha](#), and Madrid, which form the heart of Spain, and [Extremadura](#), which is in the west.

To the northeast of the central plateau is the broad valley of the Ebro, which traverses [Aragón](#) and flows into the Mediterranean. Aragón has [Zaragoza](#) as its chief city; it is historically and geographically connected with [Catalonia](#), which occupies the Mediterranean coast from the French border to the mouth of the Ebro. [Barcelona](#), the chief Catalan city, is the largest port and the second largest city of Spain.

The W Pyrenees and the northern coast, paralleled by the Cantabrian Mts., are occupied by [Navarre](#), with the city of [Pamplona](#); the [Basque Country](#), with their capital, are off the coast of Valencia. The southernmost part of Spain, S of the [Sierra Morena](#), is [Andalusia](#); it is crossed by the fertile Guadalquivir valley. The chief cities of Andalusia are [Seville](#), [Córdoba](#), and [Granada](#), the Mediterranean port of [Málaga](#), and the Atlantic port of [Cádiz](#). The [Sierra Nevada](#), rising from the Mediterranean coast, has the highest peak (Mulhacén, 11,411 ft/3,478 m) in continental Spain. Spanish summers are often very hot, but winters vary sharply, being mild in coastal areas and colder inland.

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