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I INTRODUCTION

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Andorra, country in southwestern [Europe](#), located high in the eastern [Pyrenees](#) Mountains between [France](#) to the north and [Spain](#) to the south. Andorra is one of the smallest nations in the world, with an area of 468 sq km (181 sq mi) and a population (2008 estimate) of 72,413. The capital and largest city is Andorra la Vella (population, 2004 estimate, 22,035).

Andorra is a rugged land marked by deep gorges, narrow valleys, and towering mountains. The lowest part of Andorra stands about 914 m (3,000 ft) above sea level. Due to its alpine location, winters are cold, and heavy snowfall frequently blocks the mountain passes, especially the road

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linking Andorra to France. Summers are cool, dry, and sunny.

Isolated for centuries, Andorra had become a popular tourist destination by the 1950s. Although tiny, Andorra offers some of the best [skiing](#) and [snowboarding](#) in the Pyrenees. Great hiking, [mountain biking](#), and stunning alpine scenery attract visitors in summer. But most of the visitors to Andorra are day travelers from France or Spain, who take advantage of Andorra's duty-free shopping. Merchants selling electronic goods, alcohol, tobacco, and luxury items crowd the streets of Andorra la Vella and other nearby towns.

Tourism is Andorra's main source of revenue, but some Andorrans still raise [sheep](#) and [cattle](#) as they have since ancient times. In the summer months, villagers herd livestock up the mountains to graze in alpine pastures. Most of the small patches of land suitable for cultivation are used to grow [tobacco](#).

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For more than 700 years Andorra was ruled jointly by the leader of France and the [Roman Catholic](#) Bishop of Urgel in northwestern Spain. These leaders, known as the "princes of Andorra," served as overlords of Andorra. The country formally remains a co-principality (jointly ruled by princes) to the present day. In 1993 Andorrans adopted their first constitution, which established the country as an independent democratic co-principality. Today, the president of France and the Bishop of Urgel remain Andorra's heads of state, but their roles are largely ceremonial.

II LAND AND RESOURCES

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Andorra occupies a region of gorges and valleys in the eastern [Pyrenees](#). The country is almost completely encircled by high mountains. The Coma Pedrosa, which rises to 2,946 m (9,665 ft), is Andorra's highest peak.

Over the centuries, settlers have cleared much of Andorra's original alpine forest cover, including [birch](#), [pine](#), and [fir](#), creating pastures in valleys and on the slopes. Overgrazing by livestock has caused soil [erosion](#) in some mountain meadows.

Andorra is drained by the Valira River. Many streams meet to form the Valira, which flows south into Spain. [Waterpower](#) is one of Andorra's few significant natural resources, and it permits the country to produce nearly half of its electricity needs. Andorra has small deposits of [iron](#) and [lead](#), but they have not been mined extensively because of the high costs of transportation. Some [marble](#) is also quarried.

III PEOPLE

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The citizens of Andorra account for only about one-fourth of the entire population. French and Spanish immigrants, allowed residence in Andorra under a strict quota system, make up the majority of the remaining population. Most native Andorrans trace their ancestry to [Catalonia](#).

Andorra's official language is [Catalan](#), which is spoken by about 30 percent of the population as a first language. [Spanish](#) is spoken by more than half the population, and a small percentage of residents speak [French](#) as a mother tongue. Few Andorrans speak [English](#). [Roman Catholicism](#), the religion of 89 percent of Andorrans, exerts a strong influence on social and cultural life.

Most of the people of Andorra live in seven small towns. The capital and largest town is Andorra la Vella, with a population of 22,035. Located on the Valira River in west central Andorra, the town is a center for the retail trade in duty-free goods. Other sizable towns include Escaldes-Engordany, Encamp, Saint Julià de Lòria, and La Massana. The overall population density of Andorra is 155 persons per sq km (401 per sq mi).

IV ECONOMY

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Before [World War II](#), Andorra's economy was based largely on farming and the processing of [tobacco](#) and timber (see [Forestry](#)). Tourism has boomed since the 1950s and now dominates the principality's economic life. Andorra receives more than 3 million tourists and more than 8 million *excursionists* (day trippers) every year. Visitors are drawn by the excellent facilities for winter sports, the sunny alpine climate, the old churches and quaint towns, and the availability of a wide assortment of duty-free goods.

Andorra also collects revenues on the sales of its distinctive postage stamps, which are purchased by tourists and collectors.

Financial services emerged as an important facet of Andorra's economy in the 1990s, aided by strict banking secrecy laws and low business taxes. In 2002 Andorra refused to sign an [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (OECD) agreement on tax evasion that would have compelled the country to share information about potential tax evasion and make transparent its own banking arrangements.

Because only about 4 percent of Andorra's land is suitable for cultivation, most food is imported. Nevertheless, farming—especially [sheep](#) and [cattle](#) grazing and the growing of [tobacco](#)—remains a visible feature of Andorran life and culture. Andorra manufactures cigarettes and cigars, and timber harvested from Andorra's slopes is used to produce furniture. In 2004, the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#) (UNESCO) listed Andorra's Madriu-Perafita-Claror Valley as a World Heritage Site (*see* [World Heritage Committee](#)) for its living tradition of mountain pastoral farming and culture.

Although Andorra is not a member of the [European Union](#) (EU), in 1990 it signed a [customs union](#) with the EU that regulates the duty-free allowances permitted visitors to the country. In 2002 Andorra adopted the EU's common currency, the [euro](#). Previously, Andorra had used the Spanish *peseta* and the French *franc*, both of which were also replaced by the euro.

Andorra has no railroad or airport but possesses an excellent road system. Even so, heavy traffic frequently clogs the streets of Andorra's towns. Public television and radio broadcasting services are provided by Andorra Televisió and Radio Nacional d'Andorra. Andorrans also have access to broadcasts from France and Spain. There are two major daily newspapers, *el Periódicó* and *Diari d'Andorra*.



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