PORTUGAL

Location

The Portuguese Republic, better known as Portugal, is located in Southwestern Europe on the western side of the Iberian Peninsula. The country is bordered by Spain on the east and north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west and south. The country also includes the Madeira Islands and Azores. Azores consists of nine main islands that are located about 900 miles west of Portugal. The Madeira Islands is made of four main island groups. Two of these groups are uninhabited. Portugal is also the westernmost country in Europe. The capital city, Lisbon, is located on the western coastline. This city has been the capital since 1147.

Geography

Portugal is one of Europe's smallest countries. It measures 560 km (350 mi) north to south and 220 km (135 mi) from east to west. For comparison, this country is slightly smaller than Indiana. The areas north of the Tagus River are heavily populated and characterized by rivers, valleys, forests, and mountains. The southern portion of the country is less populated and consists of rolling plains.

The main rivers of the country include the previously mentioned Tagus, the Douro, the Sado, and the Guadiana. All of these rivers begin in Spain and flow through Portugal to the Atlantic Ocean. The river valleys provide most of the agricultural areas for the country.

The north-central region, called Beira, is home to Portugal’s highest mountain range, the Serra da Estrela. However, the highest elevation point of 2,351 meters is found in Azores, while Serra da Estrela is the highest point in continental Portugal at 1,993 meters.

Climate

The climate of Portugal is classified as maritime temperate. The northern portion is mostly cool and rainy, while the southern portion is warmer and drier.
History

Before Portugal was established as an independent monarchy, many different groups controlled and settled in the Portugal area. Greeks, Romans, Visigoths, and Muslims were just a few of these groups. Out of these, the Romans had by far the greatest impact on current day Portugal.

The first Portuguese dynasty, the House of Burgundy, lasted from 1128 until 1383. The House of Avis, the second dynasty, would carry the nation into the sixteenth century until collapsing in 1580. This dynasty would be responsible for exploring the west coast of Africa, and discovering and colonizing Madeira and Azores. With further exploration, Portugal was able to open a passage to India around Africa, build an empire in Asia, and colonize Brazil.

In 1820, a written constitution was established in Portugal. However, the Portuguese monarchy would last until 1910. Upon the downfall of the monarchy, the First Republic was established. This regime would collapse on April 25, 1974, making way for the current-day democratic regime known as the Second Republic.

Important Dates/Holidays

The following are important dates for Portuguese residents: New Year’s Day (January 1), Mardi Gras (February/March), Good Friday (March/April), Liberty Day (April 25), Labor Day (May 1), Corpus Christi (May/June), Camões-Portugal Day (June 10), St. Anthony (Lisbon, June 13), Assumption (August 15), Republic Day (October 5), All Saint’s Day (November 1), Independence Day (December 1), Immaculate Conception (December 8), Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Population

The 2003 estimated population for Portugal is just over 10.1 million with a growth rate of 0.1%. The capital city of Lisbon is the largest city with a population of 677,790 people. The population density of the country is 108 people per square kilometer. The northern and central portions of the country,
which inhabits nearly six million people, largely enhance this density number. The Madeira Islands and Acores are home to almost 500,000 residents. The majority of the population is of homogeneous Mediterranean stock. Just about 100,000 people are of black African descent. These individuals immigrated to Portugal during decolonization.

Currency
In January 1999, the European Union introduced the euro to the Portuguese economy. The former currency, the Portuguese escudo, was completely replaced by the euro in all transactions in 2002.

Economy
Portugal is a capitalist economy that has been rising slowly since the inception of the Second Republic. This can be attributed to a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) that is only seventy-five percent the size of the leading European Union economies. After joining the European Monetary Union (EMU) in 1998, Portugal joined with 10 other European countries to launch the euro in January 1999. The following year was marked by moderation in growth, inflation, and unemployment. Because of its small size, the country continues to run an extensive trade deficit. The government is working to reform the tax system, to modernize capital plant, and to increase the country's competitiveness in the increasingly integrated world markets. A poor educational system, in particular, has restricted the country from growing at a more desirable rate.

Education
As previously stated, an improvement in education is crucial to the long-term success of Portugal. The current literacy rate for the country is around eighty-seven percent. Education is free and required between the ages of 6 and 15. Secondary education is voluntary. In the 1993-1994 school year, Portugal had 12,472 primary schools.

After completing mandatory school, the students can choose one of three further educational options. These are secondary school, vocational school, and artistic education. The secondary and vocational schools are the two most common choices.

Higher education in Portugal consists of universities and polytechnic schools. Polytechnic schools are comparable to technical schools in the United States. These schools are more popular in Portugal than universities.

Language
The language spoken by the citizens of Portugal is Portuguese.

Religion
The main religion in Portugal is Roman Catholic. This religion is said to comprise about ninety-four percent of the country. The rest of the population is mostly Protestant.

Agriculture

The main crops grown in Portugal are wheat, barley, corn, rice, potatoes, grapes, olives, and tomatoes. The tomatoes and grapes are the main crops in this area. Portugal is the world's largest exporter of tomato paste and a leading exporter of wines. Crop yields and animal productivity in Portugal are well below the European Community average. Much of this can be attributed to low agricultural investment, minimal machinery, and a lack of fertilizer usage.

Forestry is also a major industry since the mountainous areas are well suited to this industry. Because of this, one-third of Portugal is forested.

Portugal's long coastline and the abundance of fish in the surrounding waters have favored the development of the fishing industry. Sardines, anchovies and tuna caught near the coasts make a large contribution to food supplies. The fish industry has prospered and its products are exported all over the world.

Trade

Since Portugal is such a small country, it relies heavily on foreign trade. The country has to import large quantities of food and beverages, wheat, crude oil, machinery, automobiles, and raw materials. For 2000, the country imported an estimated $41 billion worth of materials. Portugal mainly exports fish, textiles, clothing, footwear, paper pulp, wine, cork, and tomato paste. Despite the numerous exports, the country expected to only bring in about $26 billion for its exports in 2000. Portugal’s main trade partners are Britain, Germany, France, U.S., and Japan.