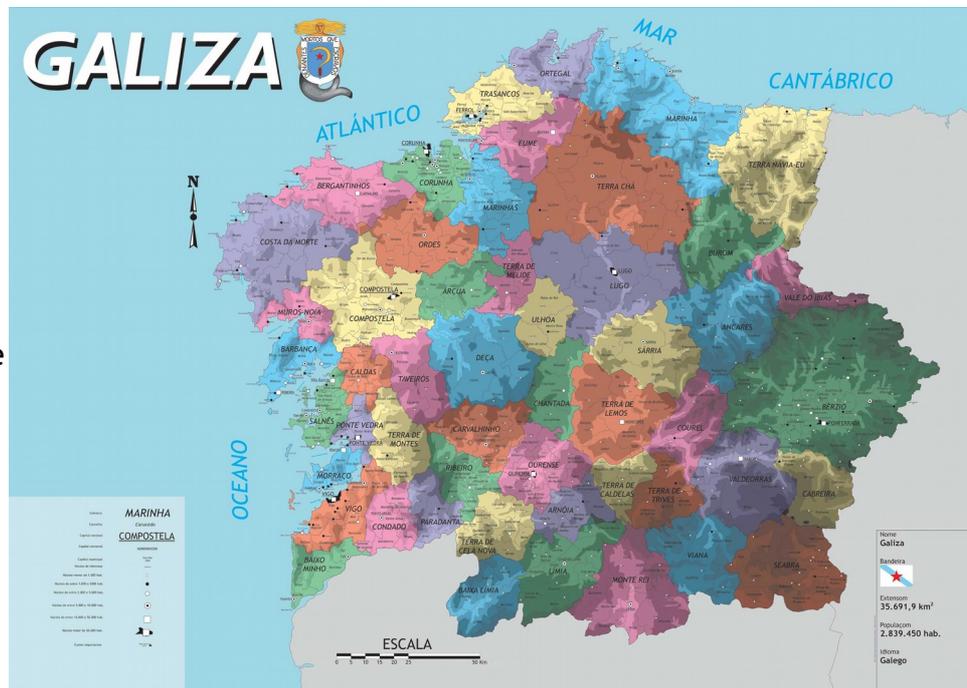


# What and where is Galicia (Galiza)?

Galicia (*Galiza*) may be a place you've never heard about, most certainly because it is – at present – a stateless nation within the framework of the Spanish State.

Sure, it is an autonomous territory with its own Parliament and so on, but nobody gets to know you if you don't have your own shade of colour in a world map or you don't have your own national football team amidst the FIFA rankings (works better than the UN for that sort of publicity thing, actually).



It doesn't help either having been a backward, rural country, colonised and forced into isolation for the last few centuries. If you don't make any noise nobody will really pay any notice to you, unlike the Basques, the Scots or the Catalans. One could say we're old news, perhaps...

Funnily enough, Galicia can rightfully claim the title of "first country in Europe", after the Galician Kingdom was established in 410 CE. It was indeed a key actor in the shaping of Europe through different historical stages. The Galician national personality is an indisputable fact surviving all odds. If only for that, the world should have known a bit about us (notice some ranting here).

Thus, the best way to let yourself be known is to talk about yourself, I guess, so please allow me to take a moment and briefly show you this unique land of vibrant culture, folklore and traditions, transmitted from antiquity, and with so much potential for the future.

Find below three sections I've compiled, starting with some basic facts and figures, followed by a summarised chronology and, lastly, some fun facts. Feel free to [ask](#), read about, and explore our little Atlantic European corner. You're in for some surprises!

This is a 2015 revision of a bilingual text initially written for the Irish Centre for Galician Studies (University College Cork, Ireland) in 2007, which was also republished at [republicagalega.eu](http://republicagalega.eu) (now extinct). More texts and works from the author available at [xoan.net](http://xoan.net)



## Facts and figures

*Local name:* Galiza.

*Other names:* Galicia (English, Spanish), Galice (French), Galicien (German). Not to be confused with the Polish-Ukrainian region of *Galicja*!

*Population:* [2,767,524](#) (in official Galician territory; Galicians abroad could mount up to 1 million).

*Surface:* Administrative Galicia: 29,575 km<sup>2</sup> (the actual autonomous region set up by Spain) – [Territories](#) of Galician culture: 35,692 km<sup>2</sup> (approx. the size of Belgium or Taiwan).

*Capital:* Santiago de Compostela.

*Location:* North-West corner of the Iberian Peninsula (Southern Atlantic Europe), right above Portugal.

*Currency:* Euro (€).

*Languages:* Galician-Portuguese ([48% monolinguals](#)), Spanish (15% monolinguals).

*Ethnic groups:* [Galician](#) (87%); Spanish (10%); Other (3%).

*Main cities:* Vigo (293,255), Corunha (243,320), Ourense (108,137), Compostela, (93,470), Lugo (93,450), Ponte Vedra (80,096), Ferrol (76,399).

*National holiday:* 25<sup>th</sup> July.

*National symbols:* [Flag](#), coat of arms and national anthem.

*Date of formation:* 410 CE (establishment of the [Galician Kingdom](#)).

*Physical geography:* The [territory](#) is highly fragmented, with highlands in the east, central plateaus, ample estuaries and a myriad of rivers. Galicia has a climate of transition, from Oceanic to Mediterranean. Pockets of Continental climate are present inland. Weather is in general humid with moderate temperatures.

*Territory:* Administrative Galicia is divided into 53 [comarcas](#) or *bisbarras* (regions), 316 [concelhos](#) (municipalities), 3,781 *paróquias* (parishes). Galicia has more than 33,000 settlements. A number of territories with strong Galician influence remain outside administrative Galicia, in the Spanish regions of Asturias and León. Northern Portugal is also strongly akin to Galician culture.

*International disputes:* Full devolution/independence from Spain. Controversies over eastern territories of Galician culture in Spanish territory (outside administrative Galicia).



## Brief Chronology

*500,000 BCE*: First known human [settlements](#) in what today is Galicia (estimate).

*8000-2000 BCE*: [Megalithic Culture](#). Maritime contacts with Atlantic Europe.

*2000-700 BCE*: Bronze Age. Sea-trade with Atlantic Europe and the Mediterranean.

*1000 BCE*: Evidences of proper [Celtic culture](#). Iron Age.

*9<sup>th</sup> C BCE – 1<sup>st</sup> C CE*: *Castro Culture*: A [Celtic civilisation](#) based in Galicia.

*19 BCE*: Military establishment of the Roman Empire. Introduction of Latin language and Roman law. Weak level of Romanization. [Gallaecia](#) province.

*2<sup>nd</sup> C CE*: Introduction of Christianity (mixes with Celtic religion).

*4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> C CE*: Priscilianism, Galicia's own Christian movement, strongly influenced by Druidry.

*410 CE*: Foundation of the [Galician Swabian Kingdom](#) by means of a treaty with Rome. Galicia becomes "the first country in Europe". Period of territorial, cultural and economic growth.

*5<sup>th</sup> C CE*: Mass [Celtic migration](#) to Northern Galicia (coming from Britain).

*585-711 CE*: End of Swabian Dynasty. Visigoth rule (Viceroy).

*711 CE*: Muslim occupation of Iberia: The Visigoth Empire is dismantled. Re-establishment of the Galician Crown. Muslims never successfully conquer Galicia. Still, they attack and temporarily occupy the southern part of the Kingdom.

*813 CE*: "Discovery" of the remains of St James the Apostle: ancient pilgrimage route is Christianised and reactivated ([Way of St. James](#)). Galicia progressively becomes the dominant force among Iberian Christian [kingdoms](#) and gains European relevance. Growing stability.

*846-1008 CE*: Waves of Viking invasions, all repelled.

*1037*: Vermudo III dies: end of the direct succession of the Galician Dynasty.

*1065-1072*: Garcia II King of Galicia: attempts to restructure and revitalise the Kingdom.

*1072-1110*: Political instability: dynastic wars.

*1093*: *Compostela Age*: cultural splendour that lasts for more than a century, influencing the whole European continent.

*1121*: Independence of the county of Portugal (current Northern Portugal). The Kingdom [splits](#) in two political halves, but the common culture continues to develop.

*1175*: First known document written in Galician-Portuguese language in its entirety.

*1230*: Afonso VIII dies: [Castile](#) arises as a new force in Iberia. Galician culture will yet flourish, but Galicia's political influence gradually diminishes.

*1366-1387*: Attempts made in the search of an union/alliance with Portugal.

*1431-1469*: *Revoltas Irmandinhas*: major popular uprisings against nobility because of abusive taxes and restrictions. These revolts were the first of their kind in Europe.

*1474*: Dynastic conflicts in Castile: sectors of Galician nobility seek to recover former supremacy and an alliance with Portugal.

1483: End of armed resistance to Castilian (Spanish) forces.

1486: Spanish 'Catholic Monarchs' initiate their policy of «taming and castration of the Kingdom of Galicia». Galicia becomes a [colony](#).

Late 15<sup>th</sup>C to 18<sup>th</sup>C: 'The Dark Centuries': Cultural, political, administrative and economic activity is controlled by Castile (Spain). Rurality and isolation: backwardness. Emigration.

1<sup>st</sup> half 19<sup>th</sup>C: Mass emigration to South America.

1808-1813: War of Independence against France (Napoleonic occupation). Spanish troops retreat. Autonomy. Establishment of the *Xunta* (Galician Government).

1812: *Xunta* proclaims Galicia's self-rule, but soon Galicia is reoccupied by Spain.

1833: Galicia formally loses its condition of Kingdom: Spain moves towards the creation of a centralised nation-state, imitating the French model.

1840-1846: Provincialism: reactivation of the Galician self-consciousness.

1846: Military uprising: claim for self-rule. The Martyrs of Carral.

2<sup>nd</sup> half 19<sup>th</sup>C: Regionalism and Federalism. Intense cultural and language revival: the *Rexurdimento* movement ('Renaissance').

1<sup>st</sup> half 20<sup>th</sup>C: Emigration to the Americas. *Xeración Nós* ('Generation Us'): intellectuals incite Galician patriotism with success.

1921: Failed attempt to proclaim a Republic of Galicia.

1931: Short-lived proclamation of the First [Republic of Galicia](#). Spain quells it quickly.

1933: Galicia [joins](#) the League of Nations (predecessor of the UN) as a stateless nation. Intense campaigning for international recognition.

1936: Galician Statute of Autonomy: partial recovery of self-government within the framework of the Spanish II Republic. Debates on the prospect of a Galician Free State, following the Irish example.

1936-1939: [Spanish Civil War](#): victory of Spanish nationalists led by General Franco. The Republic is put to an end. Executions. Political refugees. Exile.

1939-1975: [Francoist Dictatorship](#) («Long Night of Stone»): Autonomy is revoked. Brutal [cultural](#), political and ideological repression until the late 1950s.

1960s: Partial relaxation of the Francoist régime: gradual reactivation of the Galician resistance. Emigration towards Western Europe and Spain.

1975: Franco dies: restoration of Spanish monarchy and beginning of a new political regime. Emigration momentarily stops.

1981: New Statute of Autonomy is passed: Galicia is devolved partial self-government and national status is implicitly recognised. However, Galicia is curtailed from international representation and lacks real sovereignty.

1990s: Increased Spanish nationalism and centralism: fears over Galicia's autonomy. Emigration resumes.

2002: Major environmental catastrophe caused by a coastal oil-spill. Mass activation of civil society and grassroots political movements.

2004: Galician culture is considered «endangered» by [UNESCO](#).

2005-2009: New Galician government opens the debate on the reform of the Galician laws and search for greater autonomy, to no avail.

2013: Civic movements and [organisations](#) claiming for full sovereignty and independence from Spain become more visible and active.

2014: Thousands take the [streets](#) demanding the establishment of a (independent) Galician Republic.

Present day (as of 2015): Galician autonomy is monitored and controlled by Spain. Galician culture is threatened and statistics show a decrease in the use of Galician language, motivated by exogenous factors. Emigration and impoverishment are, again, a sad economic and social reality for the Galician People despite the potential of the country. It could be argued that Galicia is a post-modern European colony.

## Trivia - What is Galicia famous for?

*Art* → the capital city of [Compostela](#) was declared by UNESCO as a world heritage site. Galician fine arts and craftsmanship have traditionally been among the best in the world.

*Cuisine* → with specialities such as *polvo* (octopus), *empada* (pie), *caldo* (broth), *marisco* (seafood), *filhoas* (crepes), *lacão com grelos* (stew), *alvarinho* and *ribeiro* wines, *queijos* (cheese), etc.

*Landscape* → with famed breath-taking scenery. You'll have to come and see that for yourself!

*Literature* → Galicia has produced fine literature influencing its European counterparts since the 13<sup>th</sup>C, from Medieval [Cantigas](#) to modern authors such as Rosalia de Castro, Castelao, Pedraio, Novoneira, Cunqueiro, Avilés de Taramancos, Celso Emilio Ferreiro, and many others.

*Music and dance* → from traditional melodies to rock. Someone once said: "We're at the end of the world, but we make the best music in the universe". Some also say that there is a party in Galicia for every day of the year! And that might be true actually.

*International projection* → "Galicians are everywhere". Thanks to millions of emigrants throughout history, and the outstanding expansion of the Galician commercial and fishing fleet, the name of Galicia has been spread all over the globe. The significance of the [Way of Saint James](#) (pilgrimage route) has also been crucial in the making of Europe. As Goethe put it "Europe was built on the pilgrimages to Compostela".

*Sports* → football clubs such as [Deportivo](#) and Celta Vigo have helped to put Galicia on the map. Galician rowing, roller hockey, triathlon, sailing, handball or cycling are also renowned.

**DID YOU KNOW? ... Galicia has a strong Celtic background ... The Galician Diaspora has been labelled as “the greatest Diaspora in times of peace” ... Galicia is the cradle of Portuguese language ... Galicia is considered to be “the first country in the history of Europe” ... There’s a Galician living in almost every country of the Planet ... Irish people are of Galician origin, according to the legends and recent discoveries ... Buenos Aires (Argentina) was the “biggest Galician city ever” and it was even called the “fifth province” ... In the old days, Galicia was considered to be “the end of the World” ... Galicia is often called “The Land of the Witches”, as many say strange magical beings still inhabit Her forests ... Table football was invented by a Galician ... Galicia and North Portugal formed the first ever “Euroregion” within the EU, and they submitted a joint candidature to UNESCO ... Galicia is also called “The Land of the One Thousand Rivers” ... Galicia is a fishing world power, for example, She produces almost half the mussels in the world ... Galicia’s national instrument is the bagpipe ... The current version of the Galician flag derives from a conflict with Russia’s Tzarist navy!**



Based on a previous cohesive and organised (Celtic) culture, Galicia becomes an administrative jurisdiction at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> CE within the Roman Empire. From year 410 CE until today, it is a well-established politically reality, with ups and downs and moving borders, but always maintaining a core national territory and objective distinguishable characteristics.

The 19<sup>th</sup> map above depicts the political divisions in Europe in year 486 CE.