

## A brief history of Spain

The Iberian Peninsula was inhabited since prehistory times by a succession of civilizations spread out all over the territory. The Iberians were the first inhabitants followed by the Celts, the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Carthaginians. Spain was then under Roman rule for 6 centuries in which time the peninsula became a true Roman province. The most important heritage Rome left to Spain is in the language, the law, the urban system and the Christian religion. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Spain was invaded by the Visigoths, who by the end of the 6th century had occupied the whole country. The Moors arrived from the southern coastal areas at the beginning of the 8th century and conquered the whole of the Peninsula rather swiftly apart from a small northern region from where the Christian reconquest started years later. The reconquest of Muslim Spain was pursued throughout the Middle Ages by the Christian kingdom in the North and was completed in 1492 with the conquest of Granada by Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. The union of Spain begun by the marriage between Ferdinand and Isabella was now complete. The 16th century was Spain's golden age with overseas explorations leading to the formation of an empire in the New World, which brought great wealth to Spain. The country's prestige and power in Europe were furthered by the Habsburg kings Charles I and his son Philip II. The Canary Islands were discovered and became part of Spain in 1495. In the meanwhile the Spanish hegemony in the Mediterranean displaced France with the conquest of the Kingdom of Naples and Navarre. The revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish rule led to the secession of the Dutch provinces and in 1588 Spain suffered defeat by the English. After the Thirty Years' War Spain lost its position as the leading European power to France. The death of the last Habsburg king Charles II led to the Spanish Secession at the beginning of the 18th century, which confirmed the Bourbon succession and also deprived Spain of the Spanish Netherlands, Naples, Milan, Sardinia and Sicily. At the beginning of the 19th century Napoleon established his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne, but the country's resistance contributed to Napoleon's defeat and in 1814 the Bourbon king Ferdinand VII was restored. The first republic was proclaimed in 1873, but it was short lived as a military action two years later restored the Monarchy with Alfonso XII. During the 19th century Spain lost its American colonies and with the abdication of Alfonso XIII in 1931 the second republic was established. The new republic lasted only for five years during which time it was ridden by economic, political and social conflicts. A military movement in 1936 led to three years of civil war; in the same year General Franco became the Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces beginning a dictatorship that will last 40 years. During Franco's dictatorships political parties were made illegal with the exception of the National Movement. Following Franco's death in 1974 the Monarchy was restored with Juan Carlos de Bourbon who established himself as a promoter of western-style democracy culminating with the first democratic parliamentary elections in 1977.

In the early 1980s the regions of Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia and Andalusia were granted their own self-government.