



AFE-ADB Europe Chapter Meeting in Andorra 12 – 16 September 2014



HOW FAR IS ANDORRA? AND WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT IT ?

First of all, get an idea of the distances: Madrid is 610 km, Paris is 860 km, Zurich is 1050 km, Brussels 1180 km, London 1260 km, The Hague 1330 km, Berlin 1870 km and Copenhagen 2050 km. However, Andorra is just 210 km from the Mediterranean coast of Barcelona and just 180 km south of Toulouse. Good roads all over!

Now the country:

The Principality of Andorra being the oldest continuously surviving sovereign state in Europe is formed by the natural borders of a chain of 72 high mountains to the west, north, and east of the country. The mountain peaks are all between 2000 and its highest mountain the Coma Pedrosa with 2942 meters at the top. The only natural open area lies on the southern border where the Grand Valira River enters Spain. To go to France one has to go through the barren heights of the Port d'Envalira at 2408 meters and do not forget an asphalted road to France only exists since the nineteen thirties! The climate of Andorra is Mediterranean- mountainous type with warm dry summers and cold snowy winters. The rainy periods are May and October.

What makes Andorra so different from other Countries?

First, it is the highest country in Europe with an average of 1900 meters. It is the only country with two Heads of State and the only country having Catalan as its official language. It has known peace and neutrality ever since its inception. Then there is Europe's largest mountain Spa resort at [CALDEA](#), where mineral springs have a unique setting, of an indoor and outdoor lagoon, Jacuzzis, indo-roman baths, and saunas. However, of course, Andorra is a small country with only 468 sq. km. of which 92 % are forests, lakes and mountains, and 8% urbanized and cultivated areas with a total population of just over 79000 inhabitants.

How did the Valleys of Andorra become the Co-Principality, with their Heads of State living outside its borders? History tells us the following: The powers over the valleys of Andorra being contested in violent clashes in the 12th and 13th century between the Spanish Bishops of Urgell and the French Counts of Foix were brought to an end through arbitration by means of agreements known as the "Pareatges" drawn up in 1278 and 1288. This document forms the birth of Andorra. The political system was based on the regime of a Co-Principedom, while the day-to-day matters were handled by a locally elected Parliament. The first written constitution of Andorra signed in 1993, institutionalized the Parliamentary Co-Principality, with the Bishop of Urgell and the President of the French Republic as Co-Princes of Andorra, on equal terms and in a personal capacity. It set out the division of the three traditional powers, a Legislative Power exercised by the General Council, a single Parliament of 28 Councilors, an Executive Power wielded by the Government, led by a Head of Government (Cap de Govern) with 12 Ministers, and the High Court of Justice that oversees the juridical power.

The motor of the economy of this land-locked country in the Pyrenees consists of Trade and Tourism (60% and finance (16%) After the 1960s, the traditional economy of agriculture and stockbreeding lost its importance as the country opened up for developments of a new era. Important infrastructure projects were undertaken, (road improvements, tunnel and bridge constructions) while a housing-construction boom followed. Andorra modernized in every way. Ski stations were built and developed (there are five now) and more and more visitors came to the country. Andorra introduced the Euro as its currency in 2001 and has minted its own Euro coins in 2013. The signing of the Paris Declaration in 2009 enabled Andorra to follow

a path of tax reforms, culminating in the removal from the list of Tax Heavens. The text embodies international standards for financial transparency and cooperation against tax evasion and information exchanges between countries.

Andorra's cultural heritage can be discovered in its Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque Architecture of its many churches dating from the Xth, XIth and XIIth century, (there are about 40 in all). They are distinguished by their small simple construction, often with sober decoration but with great beauty and harmony and located in unique settings. These were the centers of spiritual and community life in the small villages of the past. There is a predominance of Lombardian decoration in most emblematic churches, often with mural paintings inside. We will visit a number of them during our stay. The country offers further many interesting museums and has scenic landscapes of great beauty and variety. The lakes are significant scenic treasures and many are found inside Andorra's *three* National Parks, *one of which, the Vall del Madriu-Perafita-Claror (4247ha) was declared a world Heritage Valley by UNESCO in the category of cultural scenery.*

To reach Andorra is indeed a bit more complicated since there is no Airport and no Train station in Andorra. The easiest thing is to arrive by plane in Barcelona and take from the airport Terminal 1 or 2 the bus from NovAtel that has a regular daily service to Andorra leaving at 10h30, 13h00, 15h00, 17h00 and 20h30 from Terminal 1 and 15 minutes later from Terminal 2.

This bus for which you can make a reservation brings you in 3 hours 15 minutes to your Hotel in Ordino since it has a door-to-door service. You have to specify : *one way (ida) Hotel Coma, Ordino*, otherwise it brings you only to the Bus-station in Andorra La Vella.

Take an early plane to arrive in time in the Hotel. From the moment of arrival count 30 to 45 minutes to get to the bus, (waiting for the luggage can take a while). *Arriving in Terminal 1* : Coming out of the luggage area into the hall , you go straight on some 100 meters and you find behind the Café di Fiori an Information Desk and on the left the escalators or elevators down to street level. Downstairs you have the NovAtel bus to the left ahead of you waiting in a bay with other buses; NovAtel is the first one. *Arrival at Terminal 2*: *Coming out of the Terminal Building, stay on the sidewalk, find in the middle of the buildings under B a sign NovAtel Andorra. This is where the bus coming from Terminal 1 stops about 5 to 10 minutes at the curb.*

Arriving by train is possible up to the station Hospitalet pres d'Andorre in France, from where there is a corresponding bus service to Andorra La Vella Bus-station. There is a direct train to Hospitalet pres d'Andorre from Paris, Gare d'Austerlitz. This train goes via Toulouse and is not a TGV! *Coming from Paris, there is however a direct TGV connection Paris-Barcelona. (Inaugurated recently)*

Then you might like to drive to Andorra. If so drive to Andorra via Toulouse. You can go over the Valira pass, the highest pass in the Pyrenees 2408 m, a very nice drive especially on the Andorran side, but you can take the Valira Tunnel 3,6 km long to avoid the last climb of 400 meters as the Tunnel starts at 2000 meters only! Coming from Northern Europe you go via Brive and Cahors to Toulouse and onwards, from Austria Germany and Switzerland and Eastern France you have the choice of the Route du Soleil, Lyon, Valence, Montpellier, Narbonne direction Toulouse and before Toulouse to Pamiers, or the route via the Massif Central, Clermont-Ferrand over the Millau Viaduct, the tallest road bridge in the world (the seven pier wonder), 2,5km across, which route brings you to Bezier and Narbonne also, from where you follow the same route as mentioned before. If you have time do not miss Carcassonne Cité, a real jewel. You can set your car destination to GPS coordinates: 42.5555499103056 (Latitude), 1.5350496411068102 (Longitude) to get to the hotel.



The dovecot tower and the commemorative sculpture of the 1993 Constitution in the gardens at the back of the Casa de Vall.