

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRESENTATION

The main objective of this guide is to assist foreign researchers who wish to come to Cantabria for work or research purposes, fellowships, exchange programmes, doctoral programmes, etc... in their search for information. This guide has been designed to answer the many questions researchers are faced with when they arrive in our self-governed region, be it alone or accompanied by their family. We have tried to present a comprehensive picture of the working conditions, everyday life and singularities of our region, as well as the different procedures required to settle here.

1.2 CANTABRIA

Cantabria is a one-province region where Spanish is the only official spoken language.



Note: At the end of this guide there is an appendix where other maps and street plans can be checked.

SELF-GOVERNED REGION OF CANTABRIA: MAIN FIGURES

- Extension:** 5253 km²
- Coastal length:** 284 km
- Provinces:** 1 (562.309 inhabitants)
- Capital:** Santander (183.955 inhabitants)
- Official language:** Spanish
- Time zone:** European Continental Time Zone
- Currency:** Euro (€)
- Average temperature in August:** 19^o C
- Average temperature in December:** 9.5^o C

Geography

Cantabria stands out because of the great diversity of its environment. The coastal landscape of beaches, bays and cliffs blends together with valleys and highland areas, such as the mountain range of The Picos de Europa, situated in the western area. Several short but fast-flowing rivers cross the region, forming valleys perpendicular to the Bay of Biscay.

Climate

The weather is very mild and rainy throughout the year (the average temperature in August is approximately 19 °C and in December 9.5 °C). This humid, mild weather gives the region a rich and varied nature with plenty of woods and meadows.

Religion

Cantabria is a non-denominational region, although the vast majority of its population is Roman Catholic. Most holidays have religious backgrounds. Nevertheless, any other form of religion is respected and protected under the Constitution.

Welfare State

Cantabria's welfare indicators are above the Spanish average in terms of income, health, education, culture, leisure, employment and housing. Life expectancy is 75 years for men and 82 for women. Almost all the population (97%) is covered by the Spanish National Health System through the regional "Servicio Cántabro de Salud". School Education is compulsory from 3 to 16 years. Most schools are totally or partially financed by the Regional Government.

Social Context

Cantabria is endowed with a favourable social environment guaranteed by means of a Social Agreement between Trade Unions, Employers and the Regional Government, which provides a stable social framework. This agreement has been in force since 1999 in order to improve the competitiveness of the industry while fostering the creation of a dynamic region with social stability and economic growth. As a result of this agreement trade disputes are currently almost irrelevant.

Economy

Production in Cantabria is comprised of three main areas:

- **The Tertiary Sector:** most of the population of Cantabria work in the services sector, especially in the outlying areas of the region's capital.
- **The Agricultural Sector:** approximately 50% of the population are involved in this primary sector, above all in those areas that are physically more inaccessible such as Liébana, Valderredible and the Pas and Miera Valleys.
- **The Industrial Sector:** once again approximately half of the population works in industry. This sector of production is to be found primarily in the area of the Besaya and Pisueña Valleys, Campoo de Enmedio and Reinosa.

It is industry that represents the most important strategic economic sector, generating approximately 24% of the regional Gross Value Added. The breakdown by areas of activity is as follows:

Metallurgy and manufacturing of metallic products	26%
Food, drink and tobacco	18%
Machinery and mechanical equipment	9%
Electrical, electronic and optical material and equipment	7%
Transport equipment	6%
Chemical industry	6%
Miscellaneous non-metallic mineral products	6%
Rubber and plastics	5%
Wood and cork	4%
Paper, printing and graphic arts	4%
Miscellaneous manufacturing	3%
Extraction, energy and water	3%
Textile, clothing, leather and footwear	2%

The industries that stand out in this sector (in terms of how much they contribute to the regional GDP) are: component parts for the automobile industry, linked to a highly competitive ancillary automobile industry that is recognised both nationally and internationally; metalworking, an industry long established in many parts of Cantabria and which, comprising many companies devoted to metallurgy, iron and steel, and metal parts, is today still one of the pillars of the sector; food, very closely linked to the region's natural resources and represented by important dairy industries and canneries etc.; chemicals, where a quite considerable number of multinational companies are to be found and, finally, other industries such as electrical mechanics, distribution and logistics (taking advantage of Cantabria's potential and ideal location), Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), etc. which, though not of such significance as the other previously mentioned industries, do clearly represent a percentage that is by no means insignificant and which has constantly grown over the last few years.

1.3 SANTANDER

Santander is a coastal city that grew in 19th century thanks to a flourishing commercial activity and also throughout the 20th century thanks to tourist activity promoted by the Spanish Royal Family. It currently offers a friendly atmosphere within a very beautiful natural setting with large beaches and attractive promenades. All these features make Santander a comfortable city to live in, with a wide range of cultural and sport attractions (*for more information refer to chapters 15, 18, 19 y 20 of this practical guide*).

Interesting webs:

- Web: <http://www.santanderciudadviva.com/>
- Web: <http://www.cantabriajuven.com/santander>