

climbing the pine- and fir-covered south slopes of the Pyrenees.

After bowling through the Cadí Tunnel (second-longest tunnel in Europe), we arrived in the crisp mountain air of Andorra in just 3½ hours.

A 13th-century quarrel over Andorran sovereignty was resolved by declaring the country an "autonomous principality," governed jointly by the Spanish bishop of Urgel and the French head of state.

Until recently, the two co-princes were paid a feudal-style "tribute." The president of France and the bishop of Urgel each collected a token sum of pesetas every second year, but for reasons unknown the bishop was favored with a gastro-nomic bonus of six hams, six cheeses and 12 hens.

Shoppers, take note

One of the world's oldest and smallest states (its 188 square miles are one-sixth the size of Rhode Island), Andorra nowadays prospers on tourism and shopping.

The mountainous principality, with spectacular scenery, avalanches of duty-free bargains and superb ski facilities, attracts over 12 million tourists a year. Not bad for a pastoral people who 40 years ago earned a meager living farming potatoes and tobacco and grazing cows and sheep.

In the capital, Andorra la Vella ("Andorra the Old"), the chic store window displays along Avenue Meritxell plus the shopping centers bursting with brand-name logos and hordes of bag-toting bargain hunters have earned Andorra the title "Hong Kong of Europe."

In a country mostly known to philatelists for its prolific issues of postage stamps, one observer recently suggested a shopping cart as a suitable theme for a future stamp.

Overlapping cultures

Andorra's cultural ties to the neighboring Catalonian region of Spain are plainly evident: Catalan is Andorra's official language; Catalan law is widely used in the courts and institutions, and the large number of Andorrans of Catalan descent continues to preserve the influence of Catalan music, dance and cuisine.

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