Azore Islands

Author

Institutional Affiliations

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The Azores islands are located in the Portuguese archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean. Its official name is Autonomous Region of the Azores. It is autonomous of Portugal and lies in the ultra-peripheral location of the European Union. It does not have independent status in the law except for the electoral law. The capital city of the Azores is Ponta Delgada. It is approximately 900 miles distant from Lisbon and 2400 miles distant from the East Coast of North America. It has nine major islands and eight small Formigas. All of the Azores islands are originated by volcanoes; however, Santa Maria is originated by some of the reef contributions. The Azores are categorized into three different groups, namely the eastern, central, and western groups. The eastern group comprises of two islands; Sao Miguel and Santa Maria. The central group consists of Terceira, Graciosa, Sao Jorge, Pico, and Faial islands. While the western group contains Flores and Corvo islands. These islands have lakes, prairies, volcanic peaks and craters, churches, hydrangeas, and azaleas (“About Azores,” n.d.). The temperature there remains mild between 57F to 71F. The general map of the Azores Islands and the distribution of nine islands can be seen in the figures below;



**Figure 1: Map of the Azores Islands (“About Azores,” n.d.)**



**Figure 2: Location of Nine Islands of the Azores (Azevedo, 2017)**

The total population of the Azores as of 2018 records was 243,862 and the population growth was -0.39% per year. The total area is 2322 km square and the density of the region is 105.02 inhabitants per km square. The GDP of the region as of 2015 was $ 4.220 billion USD and GDP per capita was $17,398 USD. The GDP growth rate per year is 2%. As of survey of 2017, the average life expectancy of the region was 77.45 years. The birth rate as of 2014 was 9.40%; however, the death rate was 9.40%. The fertility rate in the region, according to the 2017 reports, was 1.25 children per woman and the infant mortality rate as of 2014 was 3.50%. The literacy rate of the region as per 2015 reports was 95.68%. It is one of the largest tourist attractions as, according to the report of 2016, 1,487,428 people had visited the Azores in a year. The employment rate as of 2016 statistics was 59.7%. The marine surface area of the Azores is 954,596 km square and it earns it the title of the biggest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) within the European Unions (“Azores,” 2019). The geographical location of the Azores archipelagos is tepid and with oceanic, subtropical and mild annual checks of the temperature.

The Azores Islands have enjoyed the status of an autonomous region since 1976. It has its own political and administrative governments and all the institutions are self-governing such as the regional government and the legislative assembly. As the Azores is an autonomous region, it carries its own powers for tax-raising and designing its own regional economic as well as social development plans. It also looks after its regional budget and is involved in the negotiations of international accords and agreements concerning the region. It also has the autonomy of regulating the agricultural policies, fisheries, ocean resources, trade, economics, industry, tourism, infrastructure, environmental concerns and urban and regional planning. The economy and labor market of the region are dependent on the services that it provides. The employment is the matter of public administration, wholesales, transportation, accommodation and eateries. Agriculture and fisheries contribute significantly to the overall economy of the region. Agricultural employment does not require any specific qualifications, reduced transportation cost and these factors make it a less competitive domain among its competitors. Dairy farming has become very common. The production department consists of cereals, horticultural items, wine, fruits, and plants.

The industry is primarily dependent on the agricultural food type, namely cheese, milk, butter and other forestry processing. The amazing landscapes, ecosystems and the variations in biodiversity have contributed a lot in gaining the tourists. These activities imply the benefits of the tourism industry along with the personal broader range of activities. However, in past few years, the region has gone through a huge amount of effort and attention in order to attract innovative technologies. The modernizing and restructuring in the production sector can bring about significant changes in the utilization of new technology as per the requirement. Albeit the current production growth, the structural economic, as well as social flaws, still pose serious challenges for the region that is still in the developing condition (Azevedo, 2017). According to the regional statistics of the year 2014, the regional GDP of the Azores’ nine islands can be seen in the graphs below;

**Figure 3: Graph Representing the Distribution of Regional GDP in Different Islands – 2014**

 The Azores islands were created by volcanic and seismic activity in the Neogene period and the first nascent surfaces started to emerge in the waters of the Santa Maria in the Miocene epoch. Due to the geodynamic environment, the Azore region has remained the center of severe seismic activities, mainly along with the tectonic plates on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the Terceira Rift. The Azores have been receiving aid from the European Nations when Portugal joined it in 1986. The archipelago was recognized as a territory on the basis of Article 349 in the Treaty on functioning of the European Union. They stated that it is remote, small in size, promotes topography and insularity over certain climate change and various other products. Its union with the EU has a positive influence on the regional growth of the GDP. The natural landscapes of the Azores Islands depict a significant geodiversity linked with productive biodiversity. It has, without a doubt, the most beautiful and fascinating sceneries. It is considered as a beginning point for the progress of geotourism. It offers a variety of experiences and emotions associated with values, history, and cultural heritage. It promotes geotourism by the production of quality goods and services as well as traditional activities such as crafts and regional resources (Lima, Machado, & Nunes, 2013).

 The economy and industry of the Azores Islands are quite vulnerable in case of any crises such as small economies and outer most regions. Some geographical priorities must be fulfilled to get through. There are several development challenges that invoke an individual’s economic, financial and scientific problems. The geographical location of the archipelago's is challenging, such that it adds to the costs of goods and services. Thus, in order to compete in the multi-diverse environment, it is important to keep balance along with the traditional production process sample. They also need to improve the production, costs and consequences based on the environmental changes and the whole ecosystem so as to increase the local economy. It is important to maintain a position and attract the businessmen and stakeholders to work through right in the globalized world. The archipelago's provides several opportunities based on its geostrategic location and biodiversity. The natural and cultural heritage of the islands has improved the tourism potential and can help in shaping the regional economy. Climate change also has severe implications on the geography of the Azores. However, these challenges can be regarded as opportunities for the development of pilot projects in order to mitigate the negative aspects and providing adaptation measures.

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