

SLOVAKIA



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Slovak Republic



Total Area: 49,034 km²

Population: 5,450,000

Capital: Bratislava (430,000 inhabitants)



Geography

Slovakia is in the very heart of Europe, the geographical centre of which is St. John's Church in the village of Kremnické Bane.

The neighbouring countries are the Czech Republic and Austria in the West, Hungary in the South, Poland in the North. The 96 kilometres of border with Ukraine in the East make it the country's shortest border. Although Slovakia has no direct access to the sea, Slovaks don't have to go far to reach it. Air distance to the Adriatic is just 361 kilometres and Baltic Sea is 440 kilometres.



History in figures

- **c. 100,000 BC**

The Neanderthal man lived by the hot springs in what is now the region of Spiš, in Northern Slovakia. The remains of a female skull were found in the travertine hill in the town of Gánovce.



- **5th – 1st century BC**

The Celts brought the first advanced civilisation building *oppidia* (towns), smelting iron and minting coins.



- **179 AD**

Roman legionaries carved an inscription on the castle rock in Trenčín to mark the victory over the Germanic tribe of Marcomans.

- **5th century**

The first Slavs crossed the Carpathians to reach the territory of the present-day Slovakia.



- **623 – 658**

The Frankish merchant Samo became the leader of a Slavonic tribal union. Samo's Dominion was the first state of the Western Slavs.

- **833**

The Moravian Prince Mojmir I drove out Prince Pribina from Nitra and founded the Great Moravian Empire by annexation of the Principality of Nitra.



● **1241 – 1242**

The Tartar hordes attacked the Kingdom of Hungary. Many stone castles were built as fortresses, and King Béla IV invited settlers from Germany to colonise the depopulated country.

● **1412 – 1769**

King Sigismund loaned 16 towns in the region of Spiš to the Polish ruler Ladislaus Jagiello (Ladislaus II). The towns were later recovered during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa.

● **1467 – 1490**

The first university on the territory of the present-day Slovakia, the Academia Istropolitana, opened its gates to students in Pressburg (Bratislava).

● **1526**

In the battle against Turks at Mohács on 29 August the army of the Kingdom of Hungary suffered a massive defeat. King Louis II was killed in the battle.

● **1536**

The Parliament of the Kingdom of Hungary declared Pressburg (Bratislava) the capital of the Kingdom. That made it the coronation city for the next 267 years. Ten kings, eight royal spouses and a queen – Maria Theresa were crowned here. Pressburg served as the capital until 1783, as the coronation city until 1830 and the seat of the Hungarian Parliament until 1848.

● **863**

On the invitation by the Great Moravian prince Rastislav, missionaries and later saints Constantine and Methodius arrived from the Greek city of Thessalonica to Christianise the local population.

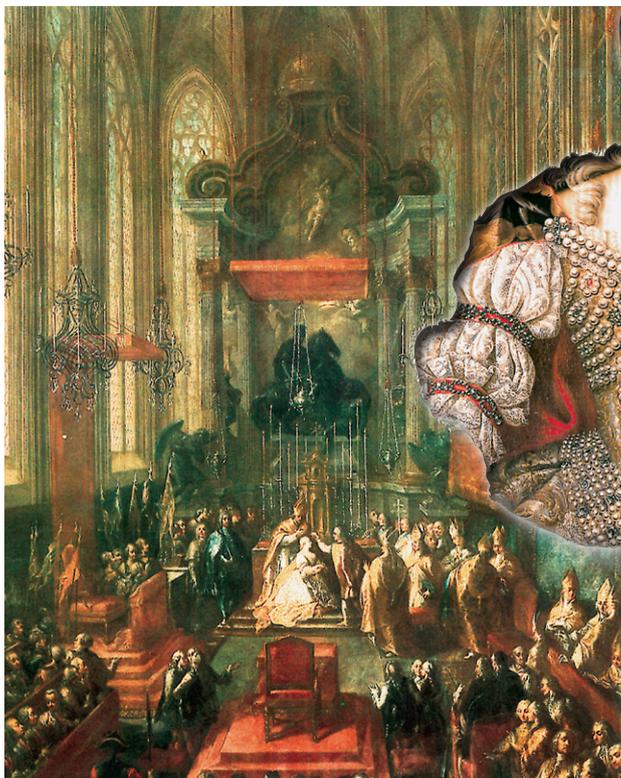
● **1000**

The Hungarian state that included the territory of the present-day Slovakia was founded and ruled by King Stephen I.

● **1238**

King Béla IV granted Trnava, as the first town in Slovakia, the privileges of a free royal borough.





● **1635**

Cardinal Peter Pázmány founded a university in Trnava.

● **1740 – 1780**

The enlightened reign of Empress Maria Theresa and later of her son Joseph II brought major progressive reforms to the society.

● **1787**

Anton Bernolák, Slovak linguist and Catholic priest, codified the first literary form of the Slovak language. This first attempt to install the codified language was not widely implemented.

● **1843**

The second attempt to codify the Slovak literary language, by Ľudovít Štúr, one of the leading figures among Slovak intelligentsia, proved more successful. It was generally accepted and remains in use.

● **1848 – 1849**

The Slovak Voluntary Corps organised the first armed uprising of Slovaks. The three campaigns by the Corps fighting side-by-side with the Imperial troops did not succeed in bringing freedom to the Slovaks.

● **1861 – 1863**

The Slovak National Assembly adopted the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation in 1861. The first national institution to promote education and culture among Slovaks, Matica slovenská, was founded in the city of Martin two years later.





- **1944**

The anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising broke out on 29 August in Banská Bystrica, Central Slovakia. With over 30 nationalities joining in, the Uprising acquired quite an international support. The insurgent army of around 60,000 played a key role in defending the territory. After their first successful operation, the German army occupied the centres of the Uprising, forcing Slovak soldiers and partisans to retreat to the mountains.

- **1944 – 1945**

The Red Army entered Slovakia through the Dukla mountain pass on 6 October 1944 and began to liberate the country from the Nazi occupation. Bratislava was liberated on 4 April 1945.

- **1946 – 1948**

In contrast to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party did not win the 1946 elections in Slovakia. Nevertheless, after the Communist coup in February 1948, Slovakia also fell under the control of the Communists and the Soviet Union.

- **1867**

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise brought an increased oppression to Slovaks.

- **1918**

Slovakia became part of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic declared in Prague on 28 October. The Slovak National Council confirmed the Constitutional Act on 30 October in the city of Martin.

- **1939**

The independent Slovak State was declared on 14 March 1939 in Bratislava. Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest, became President of the new puppet state of Nazi Germany.





- **1968**

Slovak politician Alexander Dubček epitomised the hopes of the Czechs and Slovaks for a political change. Slovakia as part of Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Soviet troops since August 1968. The renowned photograph from 29 August 1968 captures public protests against the occupants in Bratislava.



- **1989**

Massive demonstrations calling for political change were held all over Slovakia. The Velvet Revolution in November launched fundamental political change, dismantling the Communist régime and paving the way to democracy and political pluralism.



- **1993**

On 1 January Slovakia became independent and sovereign state, joining the UN on 19 January. The National Council of the Slovak Republic elected Míchal Kováč the first President of the democratic state.

- **2004**

On 29 March Slovakia joined NATO and, on 1 May, the European Union.

- **2007**

On 21 December Slovakia joined the Schengen Area that enhances safety and freedom of movement in Europe.



- **2009**

The Slovak Republic joined the Eurozone and adopted the Euro.

- **2016 (July – December)**

Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union.



- **September 2017 – September 2018**

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly.

- **2019**

Slovak Presidency of the OSCE.

- **22 – 23 May 2019**

Slovak Presidency at the OECD Ministerial Council meeting.

Personalities



Ján Jessenius (1566 – 1621)
the best-known descendant of the Jesenský family from the region of Turiec. As physician Jessenius earned distinction for the first publicly demonstrated autopsy in Europe.

Matej Bel (1684 – 1749)
the most significant encyclopaedist in the Hungarian Kingdom of the 18th century, nicknamed the *Magnum Decus Hungariae* (the Great Glory of Hungary) for his profound knowledge and scientific excellence. Bel authored some of the major historical and geographical works in Slovakia.



Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav (1849 – 1921)
the foremost Slovak poet, playwright and translator. Hviezdoslav is deemed to be one of the most prominent figures in Slovak literature and culture.

Eudovít Štúr (1815 – 1856)
the most prominent leader of the Slovak national renaissance under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Štúr was an achieved ideologist, politician, linguist, writer, poet, journalist, and editor.



Pavol Dobšinský (1828 – 1885)
the renowned collector of Slovak fairy-tales is compared to Hans Christian Andersen or the Grimm brothers. A Protestant minister by vocation, Dobšinský came from the Southeastern region of Gemer.

**Milan Rastislav Štefánik
(1880 – 1919)**

perhaps the most distinguished of Slovaks who made major contribution to the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic and served the country as the first Minister of War.

Apart from his political activities, Štefánik travelled widely as scientist and earned global repute as astronomer.



Štefan Osuský (1889 – 1973)
politician, lawyer, diplomat, teacher, and writer. Osuský was one of the most important Slovaks in the 20th century and is considered the founder of modern Slovak diplomacy. He significantly contributed to the functioning of the League of Nations.



Otto Smik (1922 – 1944)
was the ‘Ace’ and gradually became the best Czechoslovak fighter pilot in the WWII, unrivalled in the service to the British RAF.



Martin Benka (1888 – 1971)
painter and illustrator, major promoter of Modernism in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century. Benka’s most recurrent theme were the mountainous settlements in Slovakia.

**Jozef Gabčík
(1912 – 1942)**

was soldier and member of the Anthropoid group. He assassinated the Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia Reinhard Heydrich in 1942.





Ján Papánek (1896 – 1991)
diplomat and lawyer, who represented CSR in the UNO and was one of the key authors of the UN Charter. Papánek also participated in foundation of the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees (AFCR).

Ondrej Nepela (1951 – 1989)
was the most successful Slovak figure skater and gold medalist at the 1972 Winter Olympics in Sapporo. Nepela was also triple world champion and five times the champion of Europe.



Alexander Dubček (1921 – 1992)
the leading Slovak politician during the Prague Spring and the symbol of the prodemocratic movement that culminated in 1968. Dubček is perhaps the best known Slovak abroad.



Štefan Nosál' (1927 – 2017)

choreographer of the renowned folk assembly Lúčnica and pioneer in folk dance scenic stylistics. Nosál' is also teacher and the only professor of folk dance in Slovakia.



Jozef Cardinal Tomko (born 11. 3. 1924)
distinguished figure in the Roman Catholic Church and author of theological texts. Cardinal Tomko is full Prefect of the Congregation for Evangelisation of Peoples and President of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses.





Ivan Bella
(born 21. 5. 1964)
the only Slovak astronaut
to date, thus referred
to locally as Slovak
Gagarin. Bella brought
Slovakia into the club of
space exploring countries.



Michal Martikán
(born 18. 5. 1979)
Slovak whitewater slalom racer,
the first Olympic medallist
in contemporary history of Slovakia
and the youngest-ever World Cup
champion in whitewater slalom.
Martikán won five Olympic
medals and forty two either World
or European Cup medals.

Edita Gruberová (born 23. 12. 1946)
major contemporary opera diva and
soloist at the State Opera in Vienna.
Edita Gruberová has made guest
appearances in the leading opera houses
worldwide.

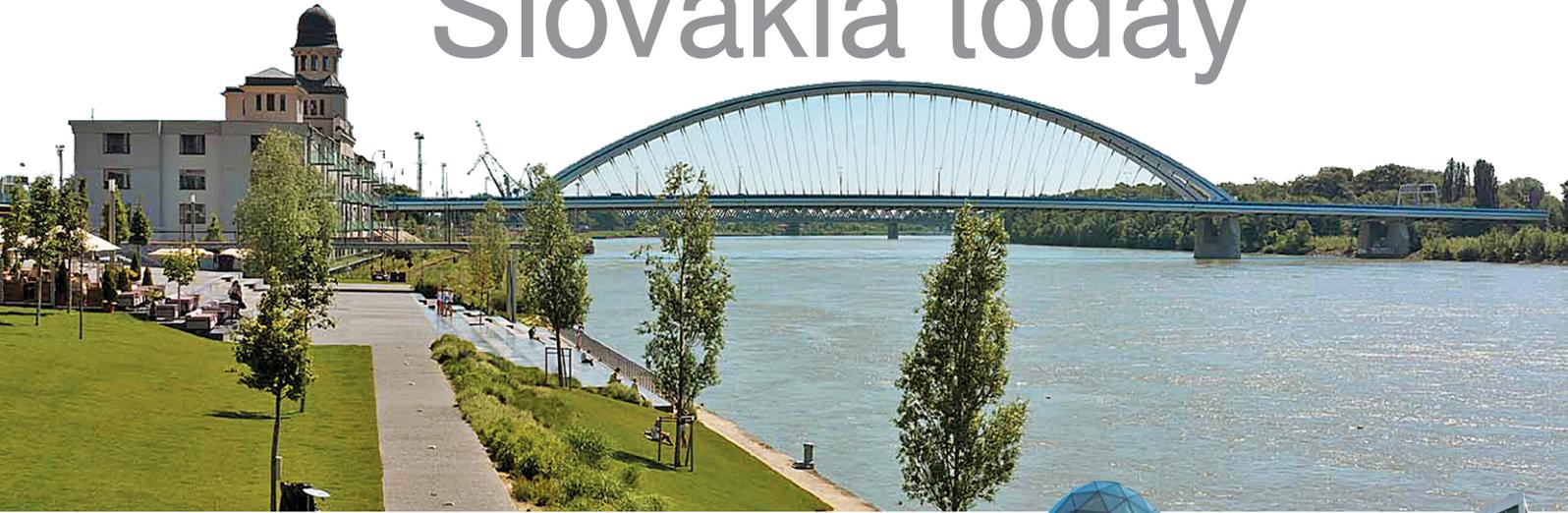


Anastasiya Kuzmina (born 28. 8. 1984)
The biathlete Anastasiya Kuzmina is the most successful
Olympic athlete in Slovak history with three gold and three silver
Olympic medals. She won gold medal in sprint and silver in pursuit
at the Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver 2010. She defended
the gold medal in Sochi 2014 in the same event, as the only woman
in the history of biathlon. She further reaffirmed her qualities
in PyeongChang 2018 by winning one gold and two silver medals.

Peter Sagan (born 26. 1. 1990)
The most famous Slovak rider ever will go down in history as one
of the legends of professional cycling. Sagan has won the World
Championship three years in a row, the only rider to have achieved
this so far. He has triumphed the very first time he rode at the most
prestigious Tour de France race. With the number of his victories
he belongs to the record breakers in the points classification. Sagan
is considered to be the most popular professional rider worldwide
and attracts huge crowds of fans wherever he goes.



Slovakia today



The emerging democracy brought along the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the foundation of the independent Slovak Republic. Since 1 January 1993, Slovakia has been a sovereign state that joined the United Nations in the same year. Slovakia gradually joined all key European organisations and institutions and has been NATO and EU member state since 2004. 2007 saw the country enter the Schengen Area. Slovakia is also member of the European Monetary Union, the Eurozone, since 2009. The adoption of Euro concluded Slovakia's formal integration into the European Union.





Slovakia is parliamentary democracy. The head of the state is the President, elected for a five-year term. The President and the Government represent the executive power in the Slovak Republic. The supreme legal authority is vested in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, a single chamber parliament with 150 members. The MPs are elected for a 4-year term. The fundamental legal document is the Constitution of the Slovak Republic of 1992. The executive power is vested in the Government of the Slovak Republic led by the Prime Minister. The President, the Parliament and the Government are all based in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.



From July 1996 Slovakia is divided into 8 administrative regions and 79 districts. The public administration reform to strengthen local self-governments was launched in 2001. Eight higher territorial units that correspond with regional administrative units were introduced. They are led by zhupans, using the historical term for the post.



Economy



A number of industrial branches have a long and successful tradition in Slovakia. Mining, metallurgy, glass manufacturing and food processing have been historically quite advanced. The interim war period brought growth of armaments industry. Slovakia was widely industrialised during the Communist period after World War II with major developments particularly in heavy industry. Today, Slovakia is one of the world's major car manufacturers. The highest number of cars per inhabitant

reflects massive investments in automobile industry in the cities of Bratislava (Volkswagen), Trnava (PSA Peugeot Citroën) and Žilina (KIA).

Slovakia is the major producer of iron and steel, and related commodities. The industry is dominated by the metallurgical giant of U.S. Steel, which acquired The East Slovak Steel Works (Východoslovenské železiarne) in Košice.





Chemical industry is also quite advanced. The leading companies are based in Bratislava: the oil processing corporation Slovnaft and the petrochemical plant Istrochem that produces a different classes of petrol, diesel, synthetic materials and fibres, as well as organic chemical products. Paper and pulp processing enjoys a long tradition in Slovakia. Mondi SCP in Ružomberok is one of Europe's largest companies of the kind. Electrical engineering also deserves a mention. The major manufacturers include Sony near Nitra, and Samsung by Galanta and Trnava.

Slovak economy focuses on attracting international capital and reduction of unemployment. Foreign investment in Slovak economy have increased by some hundred thousand Euro per year (www.nbs.sk). The major trend in the influx of direct foreign investment involves the shift from car manufacturing to mechanical and electrical engineering.

Apart from metallurgical production, mechanical engineering, glass manufacturing, chemical and paper

processing industries, Slovakia trades in textiles and food. Slovak textile and cotton processing plants were among the largest in Central Europe in 19th century, and the tradition continues. Distinctive Slovak food products include sheep cheese (such as from the region of Liptov), beer (Topvar, Corgoň, Zlatý bažant, Steiger, Šariš), wine (Tokaj, Matyášák, Elesko, Karpatská perla, Mrva&Stanko) and chocolates (Figaro).

A number of traditional Slovak dishes feature on the EU list of protected products. Apart from a few types of cheese and sheep cheese called *bryndza*, the list includes sweet pastry roll from the town of Skalica, Skalický trdelník (the pastry is wrapped around a tube called *tralo* and baked on an open fire), Paprika Žitava known for its special taste and aroma, Bratislavské rožky (Bratislava Rolls), Spišské párky (sausages from the region of Spiš), Špekačky (meat and bacon sausages), and two types of salami.

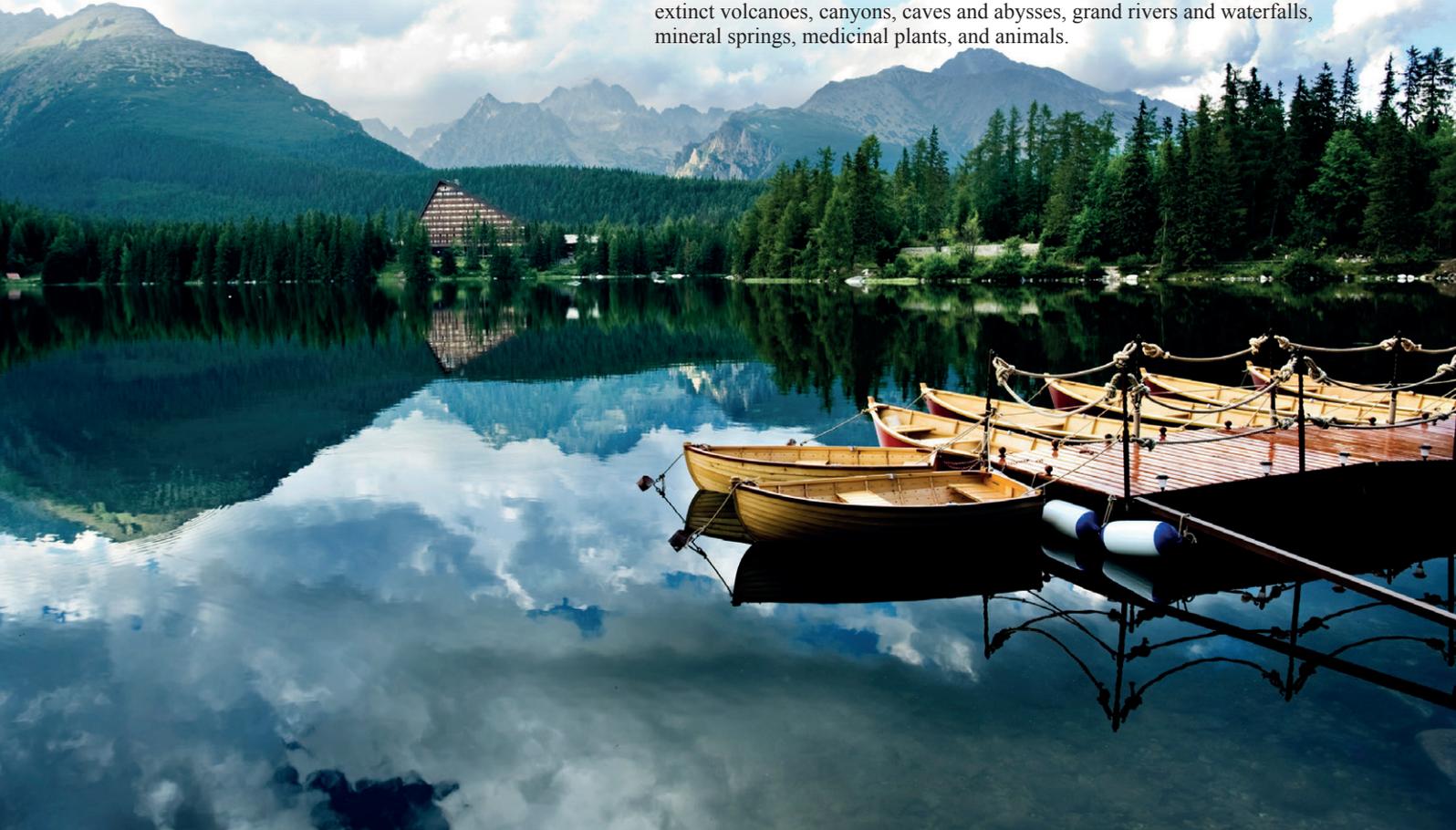
The accession of Slovakia in the European Union brought a number of new challenges and incentives for the country. The Government of the Slovak Republic prepared a document referred to as the National Plan of Development concerning industry, services, tourism, transport, and human resources. It focuses on the support to small and medium enterprises; modern environmentally friendly technologies; development of industrial parks; education and sustainable development of villages and rural area.

According to Eurostat, Bratislava is among the wealthiest regions in the European Union in terms of per capita GDP.



Nature

Slovakia is bestowed with ample and diverse natural assets. High mountain peaks are interlaced with deep valleys and gorges. Vast forests, meadows and pastures create an eye-catching patchwork alongside with fertile lowlands. Mountain torrents gradually change into quiet rivers, all adorned by spectacularly rich flora and fauna. The bounty further includes extinct volcanoes, canyons, caves and abysses, grand rivers and waterfalls, mineral springs, medicinal plants, and animals.

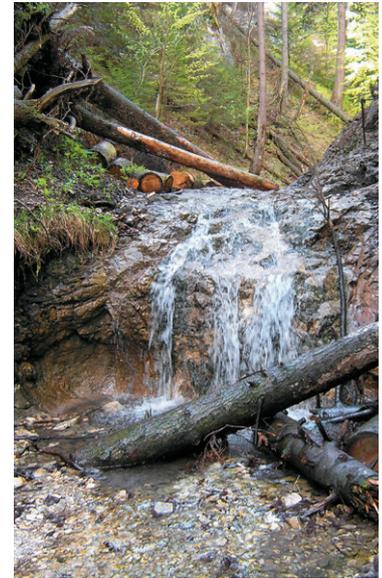


The varied natural landscape is typical for Slovakia, including a number of virtually virgin areas that remain intact. The valleys and ravines of Central and Northern Slovakia hide much that is missing in modern world. Rare natural nooks draw local and international visitors regardless the season.

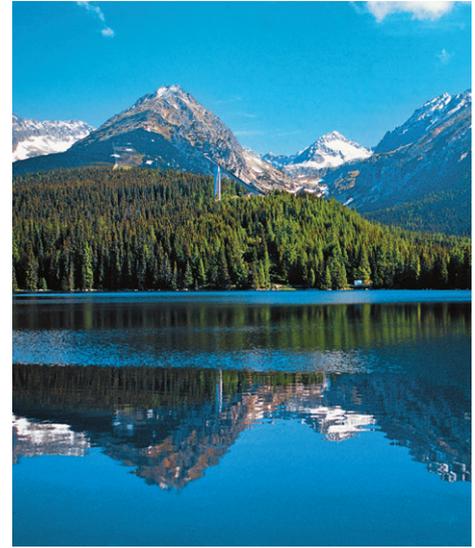
Variations in altitude are typical of Slovakia. The difference between the highest (Gerlachovský peak 2,654 metres) and the lowest spots (Streda nad



Bodrogom 94 metres above sea level) also makes a difference in climate and thus the variety of flora, fauna and soil types. The Carpathian Arch falls into several more or less parallel



mountain ranges (for instance Low Tatras, Malá Fatra and Veľká Fatra – all highly popular among tourists), which are separated by depressions. The low areas form a belt of valleys connected by narrow passes or wider river valleys. The varied surface also displays three lowlands: Záhorská nížina in the West, Podunajská nížina in the Southwest and Východoslovenská nížina in the Southeast of Slovakia.



Many songs and poems present Slovakia as the land between the Tatras and the Danube. The Tatras are considered the gem of the West Carpathian Arch, which occupies a great part of Slovak territory. Made of resistant granite and crystalline shale rocks, the High Tatras is also the tallest mountain range in Slovakia (twenty five peaks are over 2,500 metres high). The Tatras were formed by glaciers and represent a wonderful set of natural beauties with glacial valleys, cirques, lakes, waterfalls and peaks.

The Tatras are often referred to as mini-Alps. The tiny area of 341 square kilometres (260 square kilometres on the Slovak side of the border with Poland) offers all that can be found in the Alps, except for the glaciers. The peaks of the Tatras are

also the tallest in the entire Carpathian Arch and the tallest mountains North and East of the Alps. The Tatras are thus the most attractive tourist range in Slovakia.

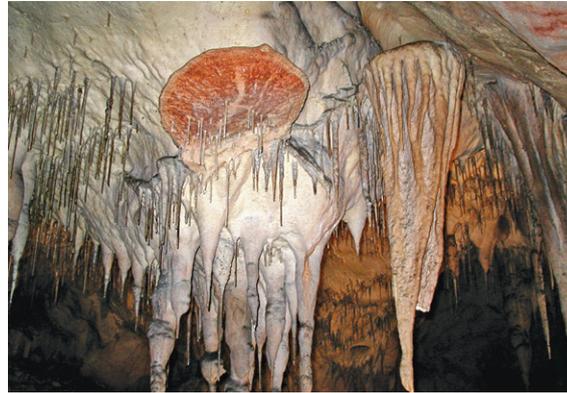




Caves, some of them of world significance, are highly attractive phenomena in Slovak landscape.

The underground cave system of Slovenský kras and the Aggtelek karst was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995 as the first natural area in Slovakia.

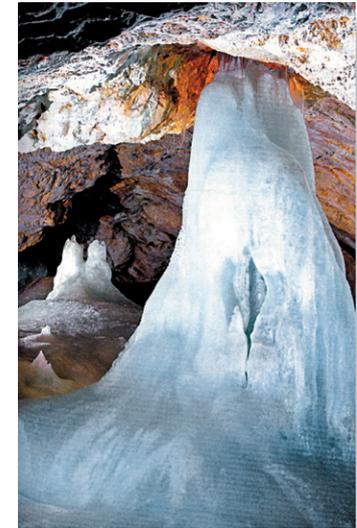
Sixteen of the caves are open to public. Demänovská jaskyňa slobody has extraordinary stalactite



decoration; Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa contains splendid ice formations, while Ochtinská aragonitová jaskyňa has charming aragonites in forms resembling sea corals arranged into astonishing patterns. The much sought after Dómica cave resembles the navigation of the underground Styx River. A number of additional caves can be visited with a guide. A visit to Krásnohorská jaskyňa situated in Slovenský kras offers an unforgettable experience.

From hydrological point of view the surface of Slovakia resembles a roof. Part of the European water partition that divides the waterbeds of the Baltic and Black Sea, is in Slovakia. The Danube plays a major role in Slovak economy, culture

and tourism. Only a short stretch of the river flows through Bratislava with additional 149.5 km lining the border with Austria and Hungary.





When ice thaws in the springtime in the Austrian Alps, the river flow reaches its highest intensity, as is the case of other Slovak rivers (Váh, Hron, Ipel’).

Most lakes in Slovakia are of glacier origin. These lakes called *plesá* represent the remains of glacier activity in the final phase of Ice Age when water from the thawing glaciers filled surface depressions. There are about a hundred such lakes in the High Tatras. In combination with peaks they add extra charm to the mountainous landscape. Each lake has its specific colour determined by its location and shades of the surrounding mountains. The largest (20 hectares) and deepest (53 metres) is Veľké Hincovo pleso. Glacier activity in the Tatras is also behind the origin of waterfalls. The tallest is Kmeťov Waterfall in Nefcerka Valley. The height of its cascades is about 80 meters. Many of the local waterfalls form staircases with

ascades that adorn several valleys. Slovakia also boasts numerous mineral springs and abundant groundwater reserves. While mineral springs are all over the territory, the largest groundwater reserves are in the river sediments of the Danube and above all those of the Žitný ostrov river island in the South with some 10 billion cubic metres of high-quality



groundwater. The attractions, which invite visitors, are the graceful nooks of vegetation on the banks of the Danube and its network of tributaries where time and life seem to have stopped.

Although human activity has changed the landscape and deforested lowlands and basins, Slovakia’s mountain ranges have retained vast forests.





Compared to other European countries Slovakia is densely forested (forests occupy 36% of territory). As a result of the varied ecological conditions, Slovakia is extremely rich in plant and animal species. About 2,400 original vascular plants, and even more species of mushrooms,



lichens and mosses can be found. That is more than for instance in Poland, the area of which is six-time larger. Some of the species exist only in Slovakia.

Fauna amounts to more than 40 thousand species. Majority of them live in forests. It includes boar, red deer and bear. Slovak specialties include the European bison – the largest European mammal living in the reserve near Topoľčianky, and chamois living in the highest parts of the Tatra mountains. Water streams and rivers, lakes and ponds are used for fish breeding. Attractive fishing ranges are in Central and Northern Slovakia with abundant trout-bearing streams.

Many plants and animals are protected by law. Entire territories, which include national parks, landscape areas and nature reserves, are likewise protected. In total, there are over thousand protected territories with an area exceeding 9,500 square kilometres. They include nine national parks and fourteen protected landscape areas.



The national parks are mostly situated in the Carpathian mountain area. The oldest is the Tatras National Park (TANAP) founded in 1948. The National Park Pieniny is the smallest and the National Park Nízke Tatry is the largest of the parks. In its territory the National Park

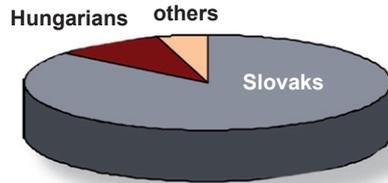


Slovenský raj contains an astonishing karstic plain landscape with deep gorges and one of the largest ice caves in the world. The Westernmost national park is that of Malá Fatra. The Southernmost National Park Slovenský kras with its wild mountain and karstic landscape is the least affected by man.

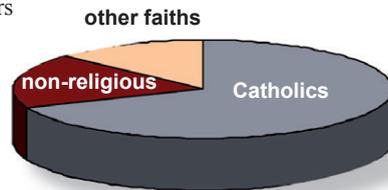
The Easternmost National Park Poloniny is home to original Eastern Slovak beech and fir forests. This is also why several primeval forests in the region were inscribed on the UNESCO Natural Heritage List in 2007.

Population and Cities

The population of Slovakia is circa 5.4 million. Ethnic composition consists of Slovaks (81%) as the majority; Hungarians (10%) as the most numerous ethnic group living largely in the in South and the Roma (2%), which live mostly in the Eastern and Southern parts of Slovakia. Ethnic minorities further include the Czechs, Ruthenians and Ukrainians. Slovak legislation guarantees the use of minority languages in official communication in villages and towns where over 20% of minority lives. The visible effect of this regulation is bilingual road signs.



Most people in Slovakia are affiliated to a faith group. Slovakia can be referred to as a Catholic country, because Roman Catholics represent as much as 62 percent of total population. Protestants represent the second largest group. Greek Catholics and members of the Russian Orthodox Church live in the East. About 13 percent of population do not identify with any church or denomination.



The population of Slovakia has experienced several changes as people emigrated abroad in increasing numbers in emigration waves. In 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century Slovaks left their homeland largely for the USA. The reasons were mostly economic. Political reasons and search for a more tolerant and free home triggered the next emigration wave, that followed after the end of World War II. Over two millions of people of Slovak origin live outside Slovakia, particularly in the US. Some of them were very successful. Among them, for instance, is Andy Warhol, the prominent pop art painter whose parents came from Eastern Slovakia. There is also Eugene Andrew Cernan, the last man to step on the Moon in 1972, whose grandfather was Slovak.





The 11th century brought an emergence of the first towns in Slovakia. They became centres of trade and crafts and received special privileges. They were circumscribed by walls and hosted regular markets. A boom came in the 14th and 15th centuries when mining

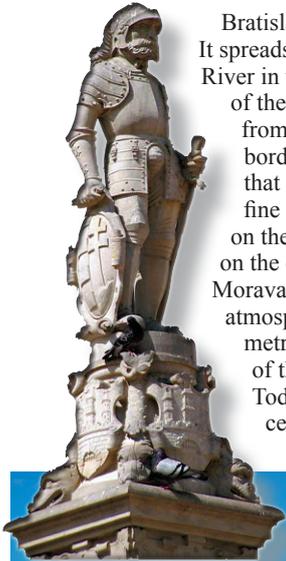


and crafts fully developed with astounding prosperity. Today there are 138 cities in Slovakia that are home to majority of population. The largest cities are Bratislava and Košice.

Tnava is often referred to as the Little Rome because of the great number of churches. The city tower with a high-rise terrace overlooks the historic city centre.

Nitra is another ancient city in Western Slovakia. It used to be the seat of the Principality of Nitra and the rulers of the Great Moravian Empire. The Nitra Castle from the 11th century is the dominant landmark in the city.





Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. It spreads along both banks of the Danube River in the extreme Southwestern part of the country within short distance from both the Austrian and Hungarian borders. There are few cities in Europe that enjoy similarly privileged and fine setting like Bratislava. Its position on the great European river particularly on the confluence of the Danube and Morava rivers gives Bratislava special atmosphere of a Central European metropolis. It used to be the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary. Today it is a modern city and centre of commerce and industry.

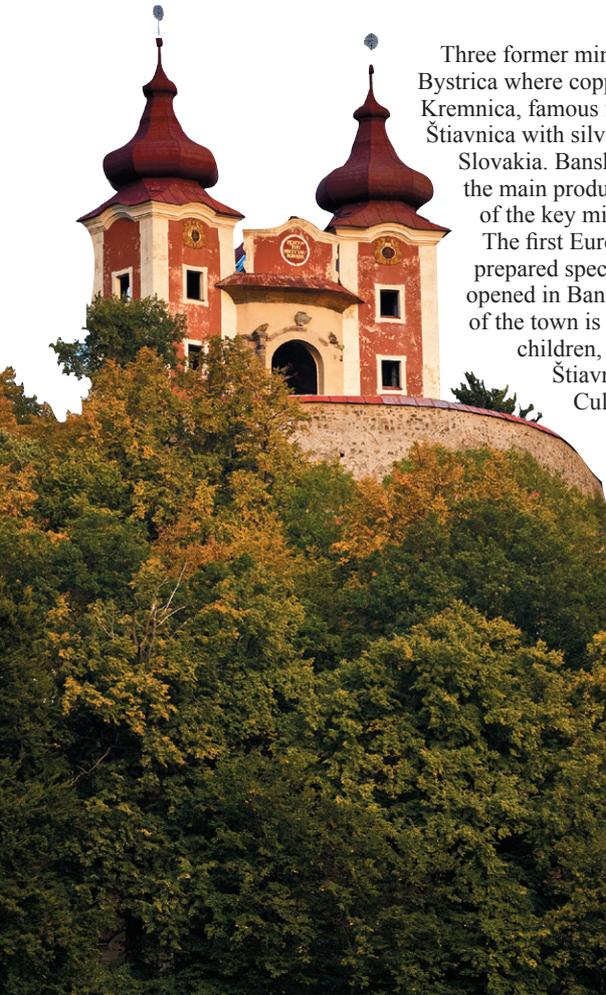




The two main landmarks are the castle and St. Martin's Cathedral in the very centre of the old town. The Cathedral was the coronation church for the sovereigns of the former Kingdom of Hungary and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Narrow mediaeval lanes cross the old town. Most lead to Hlavné námestie (Main Square) with the Renaissance Maximilian Fountain. It portrays Emperor Maximilian II as the legendary Knight Roland, the protector of towns.

Košice (population 240 thousand) is the metropolis of Eastern Slovakia and the country's second largest city. Its key historic building is the Cathedral of St. Elisabeth from the 14th century, the largest Gothic temple in Slovakia. Adults and children like to spend Sunday afternoons on the charming central square playing in the fountain. Košice was the 2013 European Capital of Culture, a title awarded to the city in 2008.





Three former mining towns, Banská Bystrica where copper was mined, Kremnica, famous for its mint, and Banská Štiavnica with silver mines, are in Central Slovakia. Banská Štiavnica was once the main producer of silver and one of the key mining towns in Europe.

The first European university that prepared specialists in mining was opened in Banská Štiavnica in 18th century. An attractive feature of the town is the open-air mining museum where visitors, including children, can visit one of its now inactive mines. Banská Štiavnica was inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1993.





In the Eastern part of Northern Slovakia, lies the town of Bardejov with the highest number of Gothic monuments in the country, including the St Egidius Church from the 15th century and the Gothic-Renaissance building of the old town hall with a precious collection of icons. The city walls of Bardejov with bastions are the best preserved medieval fortifications in Slovakia. The historic town of Bardejov was inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 2000.



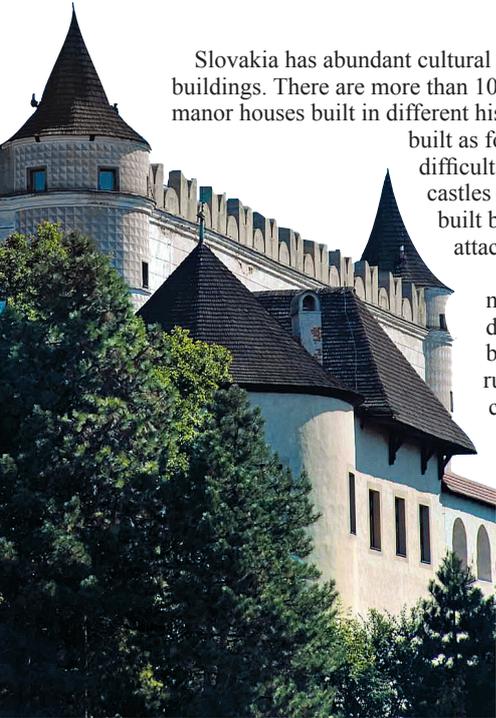
The region of Spiš below the Tatra Mountains was settled by German colonists. It is home to two beautiful towns – Levoča and Kežmarok. Levoča (inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 2009) prides itself in burgher houses, the town hall and St. James' Church. The town is the gem of the region and a pilgrimage site.



Monuments and Architecture

Slovakia has abundant cultural and historical, fortified and stately buildings. There are more than 100 castles and at least twice that many manor houses built in different historical periods. Castles were mostly built as forts and stood in strategic areas with difficult access. Other castles were urban castles (Zvolen, Kremnica, Banská Bystrica) built by wealthy towns in defence against attacks.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, most castles started to fall into disrepair; many of them were burnt on the order of rulers and fell into ruins. The sovereigns considered the castles to be the centres of anti-Habsburg rebellion, what meant their end. Still many of them have survived. Today they are homes to museums and exhibitions illustrating the history of individual regions. The Castle of Spiš and the surrounding monuments were inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1993.



Some castles and forts were rebuilt in the course of 16th and 17th centuries into more comfortable and elegant structures, and were inhabited until the 20th century. They were denoted chateaux. This is why Orava Castle or Zvolen Castle are sometimes referred to as chateaux. The result of the adaptation of many was their romantic, fairytale-like appearance (such as the chateaux of Bojnice or Smolenice).

Manor houses, which replaced the mediaeval castles and chateaux, were mostly built in flat terrain and assumed historical role of the lesser Gothic castles. After the 16th century their former



defensive purpose remained, though emphasis shifted to representative purposes and leisure.

Many of the surviving manor houses have been turned into museums with precious artistic collections (St. Anton, Betliar, Markušovce, Strážky, and Topoľčianky). Some are used by artists or musicians (Dolná Krupá). Others have acquired social functions and provide homes for the ill or elderly.

Construction of churches as the buildings for public Christian services started relatively late in Slovakia. Although some archaeological investigations point to older traditions of sacral architecture, the first churches on the territory of Slovakia were most probably built in the 9th century during the Great Moravian Empire. Foundations of a single-nave church were found in the Nitriansky hrad Castle and those of a three-nave basilica are located South of the Castle of Bratislava.



Apart from the Great Moravian churches, the pre-Romanesque Church of St. George in Kostol'any pod Tribečom, probably from the first half of the 11th century, is considered to be one of the oldest sacral buildings in Slovakia. The Romanesque period was typical for construction



of basilicas (Banská Štiavnica, Biňa, Diakovce, Spišská Kapitula) and lesser single-nave churches (Dražovce, Hamuliakovo).

Gothic style is concentrated in Bratislava and Košice as two significant architectural centres. Classical examples of Gothic style are the St. Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava, influenced by Viennese artists, and St. Elisabeth's Cathedral in Košice.

Likewise, other building styles are evident in the architecture of Slovak churches. Traces



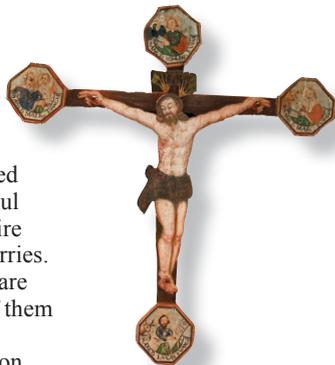
of the Renaissance style can be seen in the parish church in Sabinov. Those of Baroque characterise the University Church in Trnava and monastic church in Jasov. Classicist style is represented by the Protestant Evangelical churches in Banská Bystrica, Levoča and Kremnica.

Wooden churches represent particularly specific examples of sacral architecture in Slovakia. Their builders – folkmen – achieved perfect harmony of human soul with nature, expressing a desire to disengage from earthly worries. The oldest wooden churches are Gothic. The most valuable of them include the churches in Hervartov (the region of Šariš) and Tvrdošín (Orava).

The articulated churches were built under the article of the law issued by Emperor Leopold I at the end of the 17th century. They were built during the expansion of the Reformed

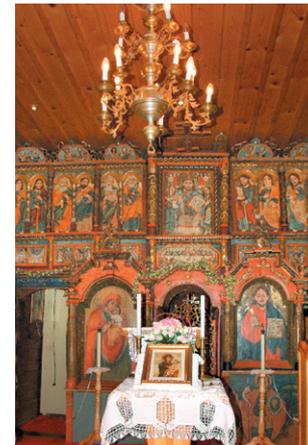
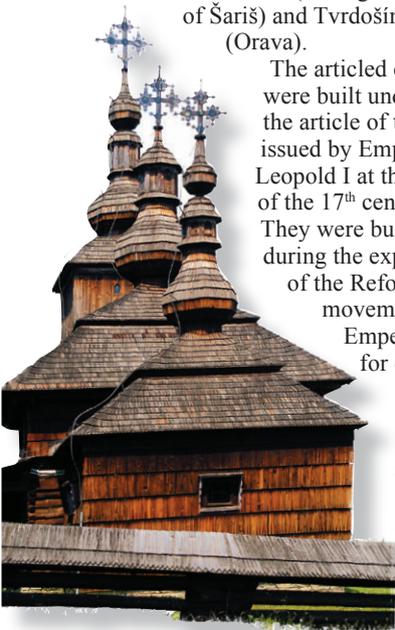
movement. The Emperor's bill allowed for construction of two Protestant Evangelical churches in some counties of the Kingdom.

The articulated churches had to be built outside



the settlements, without a bell tower. Their entrance had to be made in the wall facing away from the settlement. Such churches include those in Svätý Kríž (Liptov), Leštiny (Orava), Kežmarok (Spiš) and Hronsek (Pohronie).

There is also a third type of wooden churches, which were normally built in Eastern Slovakia. Some originally Greek Catholic churches later changed to Russian Orthodox. Most of them date to the 18th century. The special features of the Eastern Christian rite are reflected in their interior decoration dominated by the unique Carpathian icons.



Folk Architecture and Culture

Folk architecture can be seen in numerous open-air museums. The best known include those in Martin, Nová Bystrica, Zuberec, Pribylina, Stará Ľubovňa, and Bardejov. The museums host different types of cultural events or social functions in the summer, and re-enactments of life, work or leisure activities of our ancestors.

Perhaps the best-known site of folk architecture is the village of Vlkolínec with a remarkable set of wooden buildings that was inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1993.



Apart from the open-air museums there are also numerous town or village monument reserves. The village of Čičmany, for instance, prides itself in several original log houses with white ornaments; log houses and shingle roofs are in Podbiel; dwellings carved into volcanic rocks in Brhlovce.



People living in the countryside mostly engaged in farming have preserved their traditional costumes to the present time. Embroidery is the dominant and typical ornamental element. Many regional and local features are reflected



in the patterns and composition of garments.

Woodcarving was part of typical rural activities. Wood-carved jugs to keep sour sheep milk are still used in the Northern regions of Slovakia. Folk art set the basis for professional art in Slovakia.

Statues of saints and figures of the nativity scene, paintings on glass and ornamented Easter eggs were typical manifestations of fine art in Slovakia. Pottery, particularly ceramic jugs, was widespread in Southern and Western Slovakia. Jugs, plates, and other kitchenware made by folk artists were decorated by motifs typical to every region and taste of the locals.

Key dates were always marked by special songs and dances.

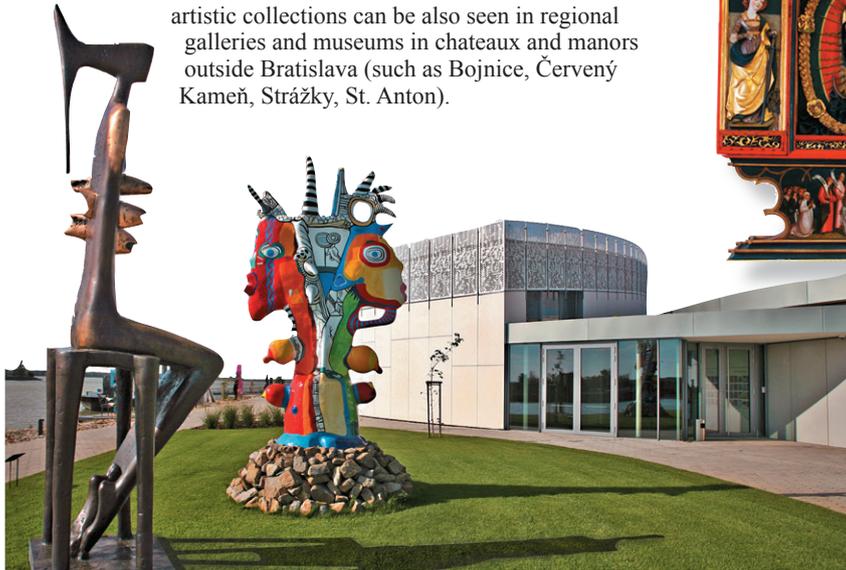


Every region has a different and typical style of songs and dances linked to the local context. Shepherd or bandit songs are typical for Central and Northwestern parts of Slovakia. Folk festivals held in different parts of Slovakia are the best opportunities to learn the local usage. Slovaks and international visitors regularly visit them. The major ones are annually organised in Východná, Myjava, Detva, Zuberec, and Červený Kláštor. They are held in the summer months, with each festival being unique and different.



Culture and Museums

Cultural awareness formed in Slovakia over many centuries resulted in a number of valuable works of art. Those by the leading Slovak artists are exhibited in the Slovak National Gallery or the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava. Valuable artistic collections can be also seen in regional galleries and museums in chateaux and manors outside Bratislava (such as Bojnice, Červený Kameň, Strážky, St. Anton).





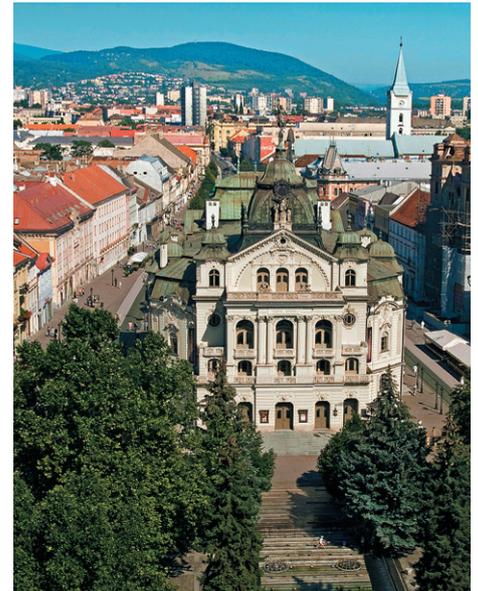
The Museum of Modern Art of Andy Warhol in Medzilaborce, in Eastern Slovakia with its unique collection, is among European curiosities. Andy Warhol (1928 – 1987), the leading representative of pop-art was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Slovak immigrants. Andrej and Júlia Warhol were originally from the village of Miková in Eastern Slovakia.



The Museum was established in 1991, and the collection consists mainly of paintings and authentic documents provided by the Andy Warhol Association. Besides three permanent expositions, visitors can watch films about Andy Warhol's life and work.



A modern landmark in cultural history of Slovakia was the title of the European Capital of Culture that was awarded to the city of Košice in September 2008. The Interface Project is one of long-term transformation for the city, the purpose of which is to develop a milieu conducive of culture and creativity.



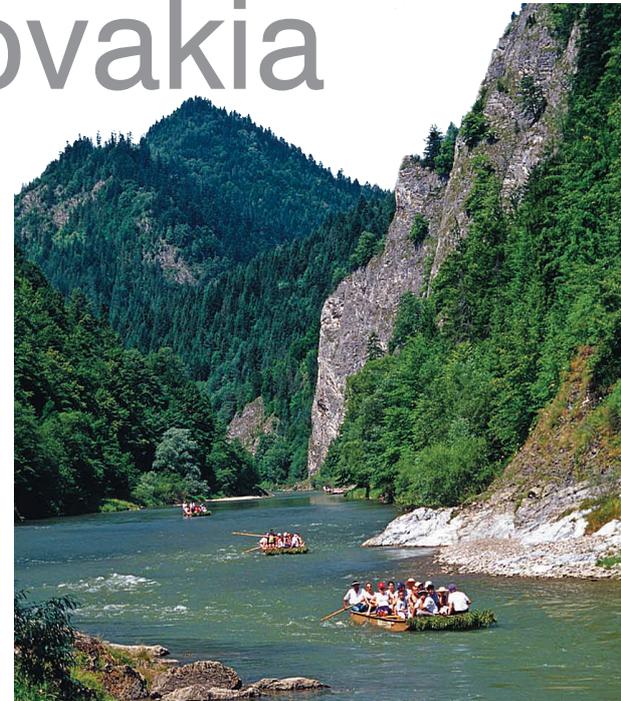
Vacations in Slovakia



The universal beauty, charm and diversity of Slovakia, complemented by favourable climatic conditions, cultural and historic sites and a variety of folklore attract more and more visitors to Slovakia every year. The main interest focuses on cultural and historic sites (Bratislava, Trnava, Levoča, Košice, Bardejov), the centres of summer tourism and ski resorts (in the High and Low Tatras, Veľká and Malá Fatra), ethnographic centres and folk events (Martin, Východná, Zuberec, Pribylina, Červený Kláštor), as well as thermal swimming pools (Veľký Meder, Podhájska, Bojnice, Bešeňová, Oravice, Liptovský Mikuláš and Poprad).

Spa towns represent a special category as far as the number of visitors is concerned. They are among the main tourist attractions in Slovakia as they provide good facilities, pleasant environment and geothermal healing waters.

Slovakia is ideal for summer and winter sports. It is traversed by over 14,000 kilometres



of signposted and well-kept footpaths or tracks for cross-country skiing.

Signposted cycle routes pass mainly through the regions of Podunajsko, Považie and the Tatras. River rafting is also popular. The most attractive routes include Dunajec and Hron rivers. Horseback riding in various places or sledge dog championships in Donovaly highlight the diversity of sports in Slovakia.

Slovakia can easily be called tourist paradise as far as the conditions for hiking and cycling are concerned. The diverse country, where mountainous regions alternate with depressions, provides an exceptionally varied palette of hiking and cycling routes for all age categories. Slovak and international tourists tend to visit particularly the Western Tatras, High Tatras and Belianske Tatras, the Low Tatras, Malá Fatra and Veľká Fatra with signposted footpaths.

The High Tatras rank among the most attractive regions in Slovakia with abundant hiking possibilities. They will take you into an impressive mountain environment full of glacier valleys, mountain torrents, waterfalls and lakes. When combined with the surrounding mountain scene of rocks and peaks, it will enable you to taste the rough beauty of the highlands.

Slovakia is mostly a mountainous country characterised by its diverse terrain. This, along with the inland climate, creates great conditions for skiing.



The Tatras offer ideal natural conditions for winter sports in local centres since the end of 19th century. Skiers know especially the world famous centre Štrbské Pleso and its Dream Area with snowboarding, downhill and cross-country trails and slopes.

Advanced skiers visit Tatranská Lomnica and take ski lift to Skalnaté Pleso, offering fantastic skiing until the end of May. In addition to the other well-known ski resorts in the Tatras and the Fatras there are also several centres

in lower locations equipped with machines that make artificial snow which allows for a wide range of skiing.





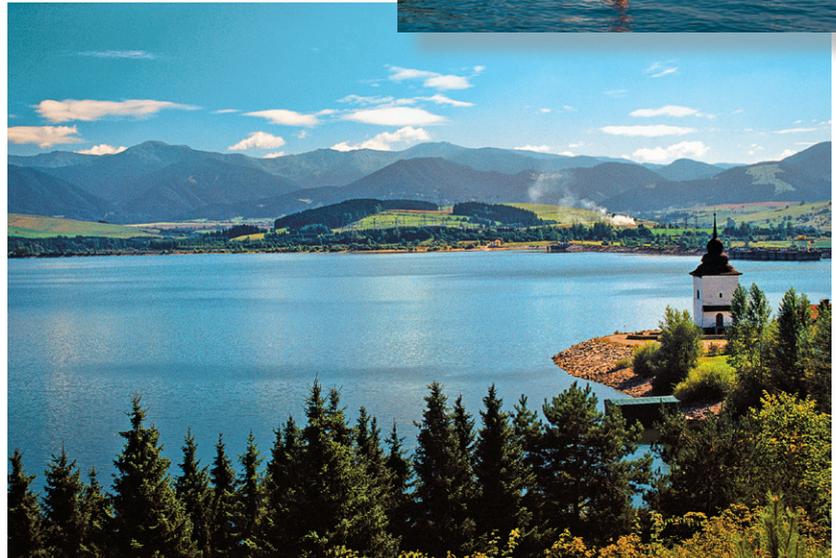
Orava, Liptovská Mara, Domaša or Zemplínska Šírava. The hydroelectric system of Gabčíkovo on the Danube is becoming increasingly attractive for leisure and is a popular tourist destination for local and international visitors.

The artificial water reservoirs in Štiavnické vrchy, called *tajchy* were used for mining during the Middle Ages. Today, they are among the major tourist attractions. The great number of thermal swimming pools in Southwestern part of Slovakia (Veľký Meder, Senec, Galanta, Podhájska, Dunajská Streda, Štúrovo, and Poľný Kesov) were formed by geothermal holes.



Natural lakes and man-made water reservoirs in various Slovak regions have become more and more popular among visitors.

Those who like to stay by the riverside during summer are familiar with Sĺňava by Piešťany, waterdams





Slovakia is extremely rich in mineral waters, many bearing medicinal properties (the most popular ones are Santovka, Slatina, Fatra, Salvator and others).

There are more than 1,200 mineral water springs and there is hardly any area without them. Many of the mineral springs are thermal (with the temperature over 20°C) with balneological effects.

A number of spas and leisure facilities were built next to the mineral and thermal springs. Piešťany spa with its water

reaching 60°C is world-famous and Trenčianske Teplice, Turčianske Teplice, Sklené Teplice, Bojnice, Sliač, Kováčová, Dudince, Bardejovské Kúpele, or Vyšné Ružbachy are also highly popular.



The discovery of mineral springs with healing effects led to the construction of a wide network of treatment and tourism facilities. In addition to spas, the climatic spas for treatment of respiratory diseases, mainly in the High Tatras, are increasingly sought after.



A taste of Slovakia



A few Slovak distinctive spirits include *borovička*, made of juniper berries (*Juniperus communis*), plum brandy *slivovica* or *hriatô*, grog made of roast bacon, spirit and honey. When visiting mountain chalets, one ought to try *pálenka* with macerated gentian root. The liqueur *Demänovka*, made of medicinal herbs and wild berries, is highly popular. Winegrowing in Slovakia reaches well into the Roman times. Today, there is a number of high quality wine varieties. The wine-growing area Tokaj is a famous region where well-known Tokaj wines are made.

The best known wines include the two to five-barrel Tokaj selections. The Low Carpathian wine region in Southwest Slovakia is home to fine wines including Račianska frankovka and Limbašský silván.



The key components of traditional Slovak cuisine were milk, potatoes and cabbage. Their combination resulted in a range of appetising dishes (such as the cabbage gnocchi). Gnocchi with *bryndza* are to Slovaks what sushi is to Japanese and pizza to Italians. The dish is made of potato-dough gnocchi mixed with the traditional sheep cheese *bryndza*. The increased consumption of meat has given Slovak cuisine European touch.



Local and regional products are easily available nation-wide. Bratislava is shoppers' paradise with luxury boutiques in the historical city centre, and a number of the popular combined entertainment and shopping centres selling local and international labels. They have helped Bratislava to become a sought-after cultural and leisure destination in Europe.



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