

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

BASIC INFORMATION

The Czech Republic is a state in Central Europe. It occupies an area of 78 864 sq. km and has about 10.33 million inhabitants. It borders with Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Austria. The major nationalities living here are Czech and Moravian, but there are minority groups such as the Silesians, the Romes, the Poles, the Germans, etc.



GEOGRAPHY

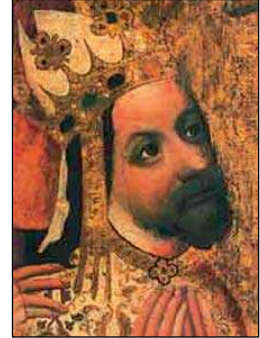
Our state has a varied landscape and there are many spots of great natural beauty. Bohemia is surrounded by a ring of mountains - the Šumava range, the Czech Forest, the Ore Mountains, the Jizera Mountains, the Giant Mountains, and the Eagle Mountains. The Moravian Plain is protected on the West by the Bohemian-Moravian Highland, and on the North by the wooded mountainous ranges of Jeseníky and Beskydy. The highest Czech mountain is Sněžka (1,602 m). Fertile lowlands can be found in the valleys of big rivers - the Vltava, the Elbe (flowing into the North Sea), the Oder (flowing into the Baltic Sea), and the Morava (flowing into the Danube and thence into the Black Sea). Cascades of dams were built on the Vltava River (Lipno, Orlický, Slapy). South Bohemia is rich in ponds. Bohemia and Moravia are quite rich in mineral springs and spas (Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně, Františkovy Lázně, Kynžvart, Poděbrady, Luhačovice, Jeseník, etc.) Among the most beautiful natural places are: the Czech Paradise, "rock town" in Prachov Rocks, the Děčín walls, Czech Switzerland, the Boubín virgin forest, Koněprusy caves, Macocha abyss, the Jeseník Mountains, etc. The climate is mostly continental; the warmest areas are in South Moravia.

There are many places associated with our history because the territory was settled by the Slavs in the 5th century. Among the most beautiful historic towns are Prague, Kutná Hora, Tábor, Telč, Olomouc, Třeboň, Kroměříž. Visitors can walk around preserved old castles or ruins such as Karlštejn, Křivoklát, Konopiště, Bezděz, Hluboká, Zvíkov, Lohotek, Lemberk, Kuks, Lednice, Slavkov, Sychrov.

HISTORY

From the historical point of view our territory has been inhabited by Slavonic tribes since the 5th century A.D. The first Slavonic State was Sámó's Empire which was founded here in 623. With the further development and uniting of Slavonic tribes, the early feudal Great Moravian Empire was formed in the 9th century. After its disintegration, state activities were concentrated in the Czech Lands where in the 9th century power was taken over by the Czech tribe headed by the Přemyslid family. The first historically documented Czech prince Bořivoj I ruled over the territory of the Czech Lands and over a considerable part of Great Moravia.

The Czech princes - and later kings - played an important role in Central Europe. When the Přemyslid dynasty had died out by the sword in 1306 and, after several years of instability, the Czech throne went by way of a dynastic wedding to the Luxemburgs. The Czech Kingdom became also the centre of the Holy Roman Empire mainly during the reign of Charles IV and his son Wenceslas IV. Nevertheless it was a kingdom quite independent of the Holy Roman Empire, and was ruled by the king, the most important of the several electors of the emperors. During the reign of Charles IV (1346 - 1378), Prague grew into one of the largest European metropolises of that era, and was a significant centre of education, architecture and the arts. In 1348 Charles University - the oldest one in Central, Northern and Eastern Europe - was founded in Prague.

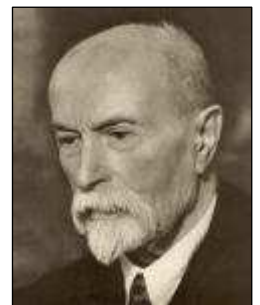


The first part of the 15th century is marked by the Hussite Movement (1419-1437). It is named after Jan Hus (John Huss), professor, dean, and later rector of Charles University. In 1415 he was tried by the Church council in Constance and burnt at the stake as a heretic. The leading representatives of the Hussite Movement were Jan Žižka and Prokop Holý. Žižka, as a Hussite leader, was never defeated. Prokop Holý, in victorious battles, fought off crusades of the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire and was also a prominent Hussite diplomat.

After the reign of King Jiří of Poděbrady - who is known for his appeal to other European kings to make a treaty securing peace - and after the period of the rule of Jagiellonian dynasty on the Czech throne there came the period of the Hapsburg dynasty (1526-1918). These rulers tried to oppress the Czech nation in favour of the Germans and the Roman Catholic Church, but were not successful until the Battle on the White Mountain in 1620, followed by 300 years of endeavours to eradicate Czech statehood and national life - through germanization and the liquidation of Czech literature and culture as a whole, and re-catholicization. Many non-Catholic artists and scientists had to leave the country (e.g. Jan Amos Comenius and Václav Hollar).

Nevertheless the 19th century brought a time of national revival and the period of Enlightenment took place. Czech language became important again and fine pieces of Czech literature were born (Mácha, Němcová, Neruda, Arbes, Jirásek, etc.)

At the end of World War I the Austrian-Hungarian Empire fell and the Czech nation was able to take its fate into its own hands in the newly established Czechoslovak Republic. The independent republic with T. G. Masaryk as the first president was proclaimed in October 1918. Though this was destroyed by the German occupation (1939-1945), it appeared again after World War II. In 1948 the power was taken over by the communists directed by the Soviet Union. The "Prague Spring" in 1968 was oppressed by the invasion of the Soviet army and the "normalization" lasted about other 20 years till the "velvet revolution" in 1989. The following development led to the splitting of the republic, and in 1993 two new states appeared - the Czech Republic comprising the original countries of the Czech crown, Bohemia and Moravia, and part of Silesia, the greater part of which was lost in the 18th century during the Seven Years' War, and the Slovak Republic.



CULTURE

Our cultural heritage is very rich and it can offer the world many outstanding values. E.g. in literature - the Cosmas Chronicle from the 12th century, Dalimil's Chronicle, the Kralice Bible from the 16th century, the outstanding personalities of Komenský, Jungmann, Mácha, Karel Čapek, Jaroslav Hašek, Bohumil Hrabal, a poet Jaroslav Seifert, who is a Nobel prize winner. In music we have beautiful middle-age chorals, great composers such as Janáček, Dvořák, Smetana, Martinů, Rafael Kubelík. Prague is a museum of all possible architecture styles. The most outstanding architect of the gothic period was Petr Parléř. All around the country we can find many monuments with gothic and baroque architecture. The most famous baroque artists were the architects the Dienzenhofer brothers and a sculptor Brokoff. Artists of the 20th century are admired abroad as well: sculptors Jan Štursa, Otto Gutfreund, painters Jan Zrzavý, Josef Šíma, František Tichý, Emil Filla and many others.

The attention of tourists may be drawn either by natural wonders such as famous spas or they can visit historic town preserves, old castles, galleries and museums or national costume parades in Moravia.

NATIONAL ECONOMY

One of our most significant raw materials is coal. Black coal and anthracite are to be found mainly in the Ostrava Coal Basin, but also in the area of Kladno and elsewhere. The most significant supplies of brown coal or lignite are in the North Bohemia Coal Basin and in Western Bohemia in the Sokolov Basin. There are also small deposits of iron ore, uranium, oil etc. The rich deposits of kaolin and clay are important for the ceramics and glass industries as well as abundant quarries of stone and limestone for the building industry.

The Czech Republic is traditionally an industrial country. The greatest percentage is represented by the engineering industry (machine tools, locomotives, tractors, agricultural machines). Besides this there are the chemical industry, food industry, textile industry, metallurgy and other kinds of industry. Glass, cut glass and china industries have a long tradition, too. Also the agriculture is developed enough to feed the population and be able to export its products too. The main items of our agriculture are wheat, maize, sugar-beet, grapes, hops and fruit. In animal production, cattle-breeding and pig-breeding are the most important. Fish-breeding, especially carp-breeding has a long tradition in South Bohemia ponds.

POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE CR

The Czech republic is a sovereign, united, and democratic state. Its government is divided into three branches the **legislative**, represented by the Parliament, the **executive**, represented mainly by the president and the government, and the **judicial**, represented by courts at various levels.

The **Parliament** consists of two chambers - the **Chamber of Deputies** and the **Senate**. The 200 Deputies and 81 Senators have the exclusive duty of making laws. These two groups of members of the Parliament differ in the way in which they are elected and in the length of the terms they serve. The elections to the Chamber of Deputies take place every four years while every two years one third of the Senators is renewed. When these times come, every citizen from the age of 18 can exercise the universal, equal, direct, and secret right to vote. The Parliament's main task is to pass laws, ratify international treaties, and decide on sending troops abroad.

The parliament is a **law-making body**. A new law-to-be, a bill, can be proposed by a deputy, a group of deputies, the Senate, the government, or higher level (local) authorities. The bill first goes to the Chamber of Deputies, which debates and ultimately votes on it. A bill that has been passed by the Chamber of Deputies is then submitted to the Senate where the process begins anew. The law (act) must be approved by the government. A law must be signed by the head of the Chamber of Deputies, the Prime Minister, and the president.

The **president** is elected every five years by the Parliament but no one can serve more than two terms in office in a row. The president represents the state abroad and concludes foreign treaties. He has also many duties in relation to the other bodies of government: appointment of all judges, generals of the army, ambassadors and other officials. The president is also the commander-in-chief of the army. In the law-making process he can exercise the power of veto which means not signing a bill within the assigned 15 days and returning it to the Parliament. In relation to the judicial power he can grant a pardon to a convicted person or declare an amnesty. His task is also to call a general election. The leader of the winning party is then appointed the Prime Minister and on his suggestion the president makes appointments of all the other members of the government.

The **government** is composed of the premier, the vice-premiers, and the ministers. The hierarchy of the executive branch goes further down to the local authorities where the municipality is the smallest unit. The municipal elections take place every four years. The winners form town councils, district authorities etc. The head of the municipal authorities is called a mayor. The several ministries, headed by ministers, enforce laws made by the Parliament. Some of the ministries are: Interior, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Justice, Industry, Commerce, Agriculture, Finance, Transport, Labour and Social Affairs, Education, Culture, and Health.

The judicial power is divided into a system of courts, starting with the **Constitutional Court** and the **Supreme Court** and going down to the courts at all levels of regional government (the lowest being district ones). The courts check the constitutionality of existing laws. They apply the law in practice in individual cases. They can nullify a law except for a constitutional one. Judges serve for an unlimited period of time, must have a good reputation, and must be professional lawyers.

In the **elections** the citizens can choose from a variety of political parties. Among these three groups can be distinguished: the left wing, the moderate, and the right wing. The most important right wing parties are e.g. the Civic Democratic Party, the Union of Liberty and the Christian parties. The moderate party is for example the Social Democratic Party and the left wing is represented by the Czech-Moravian Communist Party etc.

NATIONAL SYMBOLS

