

# Maturita Card 25: The Czech Republic

# Bridge

## ● What basic facts do you know about the Czech Republic?

The Czech Republic is located in the middle / centre / heart of Europe. It is surrounded / bordered by Germany to the west, Poland to the north, Slovakia to the east and Austria to the south. It has a population of about 10 million. The capital city is Prague. The local currency is the Czech Crown.

## ● What facts do you know about Czech history?

The country began to form in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of Great Moravia. After its fall, the Czech state emerged. The Czech lands became a part of the Holy Roman Empire in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. King Charles IV was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1355. His rule is known as "the Golden Age" of Czech history. He established Charles University, the first university in Central Europe, in 1348. The religious leader Jan Hus was executed in 1415. The Hussite Wars followed. Under the reign of the Habsburgs, the Czech lands became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Rudolf II's rule is associated with Prague being a place of magic and mysticism. In 1618, a revolt by Czech protestants against Catholic rule started the Thirty Year War, which led to the final defeat of the Czech protestants in 1620 at the Battle of White Mountain. Much of the Czech aristocracy left the country afterwards. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the revival of the Czech language and of Czech national consciousness. The country became independent from the Austro-Hungarian Empire / An independent Czechoslovakia was formed on October 28, 1918. Masaryk was the first President. In 1938 the Munich Agreement between Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain saw the Sudetenland region given to Germany. The next year Germany invaded what remained of Czechoslovakia. In 1948 the Communist Party took power. In 1989 the 'Velvet Revolution' saw the end of communism. Václav Havel became the first president of a newly democratic Czechoslovakia. In 1993 the 'Velvet Divorce' saw the separation of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In 2004 the Czech Republic became a full member of the European Union. In 2007 it became a member of the Schengen Area.

## ● What can you tell me about Prague?

Prague is the largest city and the nation's / country's capital. It is a popular tourist destination. Prague is known as "the Golden City" and "the City of a Hundred Spires" because of its rich architecture (many churches and cathedrals). Some popular sites in Prague are Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, the Astrological Clock, and the Old Town Square.

## ● What can you tell me about the Czech Republic's regions and major cities?

The country / nation can be divided into three broad historical / cultural regions: Bohemia (in the west), Moravia (in the east) and Silesia (in the north-east).

Traditionally / typically, Bohemia is seen as more urban / cosmopolitan / industrial and Moravia is seen as traditional / rural / religious. Brno is the second largest city and unofficial capital of Moravia. Moravia is known for its wines. Brno was once called the "Moravian Manchester" because of its fast industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is famous for the Tugendhat Villa. Ostrava is known for its mining history. Plzeň and České Budějovice are internationally famous for their beers. Karlovy Vary is a famous spa town.

## ● How would you describe Czech geography?

The Czech Republic has a temperate continental climate / four distinct seasons. The terrain / landscape is hilly / quite mountainous around the borders and flatter in the centre. A number of rivers such as the Labe, the Vltava and the Morava flow through the country. There are many ponds in south Bohemia. The country often suffers from floods. The land is quite heavily forested. Šumava in the south has some of the oldest forests in the country. Český ráj (Bohemian Paradise) is a popular area for hiking and has many interesting rock formations. Moravian Karst is famous for its cave systems.

## ● What do you know about the Czech political system?

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy. The parliament is bicameral / two-chambered. The lower house is called the Chamber of Deputies and the upper house is called the Senate. Elections for the Chamber of Deputies are held every four years (unless the government is dissolved / ends earlier). The Chamber of Deputies has proportional representation. A third of the Senate is elected for a six-year term with elections occurring every two years. The government is formed from the lower house. The head of the government is the prime minister. The head of state is the president, who is elected every five years and can only be elected for two terms.

## ● Who are some famous Czechs?

Charles IV is famous for being the only Czech to be Holy Roman Emperor. Jan Hus was an important religious leader of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Jan Komenský (John Comenius) was an important educational theorist and reformer in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Karel Čapek, Milan Kundera and Jaroslav Hašek are famous Czech writers. The internationally renowned writer Franz Kafka lived in Prague. Miloš Forman is an Oscar-winning director. Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana are significant composers. Two Czechs have won the Nobel Prize: Professor Jaroslav Heyrovský for chemistry and Jaroslav Seifert for literature. Contact lenses are the invention of / were invented by the chemist Otto Wichterle. Some famous athletes are Jaromír Jágr for ice-hockey, Martina Navrátilová for tennis.