

The Czech Republic

advanced version

Basic Facts

The Czech Republic is a landlocked country, which is situated in Central Europe. It has a population of 10.5 million. It covers an area of 78,866 square kilometres. The capital and the largest city is Prague. The currency is the Czech Crown. The local language is Czech. The Czech Republic consists of the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, and 14 regions. It is the member of the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the United Nations.

History

Archaeologists have found evidence of prehistoric human settlements in the area. The Venus of Dolní Věstonice is the oldest known ceramic article in the world. In the 9th century the area was Christianized with a crucial role being played by the Byzantine mission of Cyril and Methodius. They created the artificial language called Old Church Slavonic and the Glagolitic alphabet. In 935 Duke Václav was killed by his brother Boleslav. Václav became the patron saint of the country. The Czech kingdom expanded during the reign of Přemysl Otakar II and Charles IV. Charles IV established an Archbishopric and founded Charles University. In 1402 Bohemian Revolution was started by Jan Hus. During the next two centuries, most inhabitants were considered Hussites. The kingdom was absorbed into Habsburg Empire in the 16th century. The Czech National Revival was a cultural movement which took place during the 18th and 19th centuries. Its purpose was to revive the Czech language, culture and national identity. In 1918, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the independent republic of Czechoslovakia was created. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk became the first president. During the Second World War the Czech territory was occupied by Germany. In 1948 the Communist Party took control of Czechoslovakia. For the next 41 years, it was a Communist state within the Eastern Bloc. On 17th November, 1989, the Velvet Revolution began democratic changes in the society. On 1st January 1993, Czechoslovakia was peacefully split into the independent Czech Republic and Slovakia. The first President was Václav Havel. In 2004 the Czech Republic joined the European Union.

Geography

The Czech Republic is bordered by Germany to the west, Poland to the northeast, Slovakia to the east and Austria to the south. The highest point is Sněžka (1603 m). It is located in the Krkonoše Mountains on the border between the Czech Republic and Poland. There are four national parks. The oldest one is Krkonoše National Park. The others are Šumava National Park, Podyjí National Park and Bohemian Switzerland. The climate is mostly continental. Summers are warm and winters are cold, cloudy and snowy. The warmest area is the South Moravian Region. Most rain falls during the summer. Many rivers such as the Labe, the Vltava and the Morava flow through the country. Labe is the most important river. It rises in the Krkonoše Mountains, flows through Bohemian towns such as Mělník and Děčín, crosses Germany and drains into the North Sea at Hamburg. In the Moravian Karst there are caves and the gorge Macocha.

Government and Politics

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy. The parliament is bicameral. It consists of the House of Deputies (200 members) and the Senate (81 members). The head of state is the President. He is elected directly for a five-year term. The President appoints the Prime Minister, who is head of government.

Economy

The Czech Republic has a developed export-oriented economy. The unemployment rate is very low. Engineering plays the most important role in Czech industry. Škoda Auto is one of the largest car manufacturers in Central Europe. Other important branches are metallurgical and chemical industries. Typical Czech products are cars, beer, coal, glass and jewellery. The principal crops grown in the Czech Republic are barley, wheat, corn, rye and sugar beets. Farmers raise for example fowl, pigs, cattle and sheep. The Třeboň Ponds are well-known for fish farming.

Demographics

The majority of the inhabitants are Czechs. They are descendants of Slavic people. About 500,000 foreigners live in the country. The largest groups are Slovak, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Russian. The Czech Republic has one of the least religious populations in the world. The major religion is Catholicism. Education in the Czech Republic is compulsory for 9 years. Citizens have access to tuition-free university education.

Places of Interest

There are many historical sights and natural wonders in the Czech Republic. It gets a substantial income from tourism. Prague is the 5th most visited European city. There are many castles in the country, for example Karlštejn, Křivoklát, Hluboká and Konopiště. The castle of Karlštejn was built as a place of safe-keeping for the crown jewels. There are also famous spa towns. The oldest ones are Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně in western Bohemia. The Krkonoše Mountains and the Šumava Mountains provide many good opportunities for skiing. The Czech Republic is also known for its various museums.

Doplňující otázky

1. What does the flag of the Czech Republic look like?

It consists of a blue triangle and two horizontal bands: one white and one red.

2. What does the coat of arms of the Czech Republic look like?

It displays the three historic regions. The arms of Bohemia show a silver double-tailed lion on a red background. The Moravian red-and-silver chequered eagle is shown on a blue background. The arms of Silesia are a black eagle on a golden background.

3. Which Czechs have won the Nobel Prize?

Two Czech personalities in history have won the Nobel Prize. Jaroslav Heyrovský was awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1959 for the invention and development of the polarographic method. The poet Jaroslav Seifert was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984.

4. Which places of interests have been listed as UNESCO sights?

The historical centre of Prague, the historical centre of Český Krumlov, the historical centre of Telč, the Pilgrimage Church of Jan Nepomuk in Zelená Hora, Kutná Hora, Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape, Holašovice, Kroměříž Castle and Gardens, Litomyšl Castle, Holy Trinity Column in Olomouc, Villa Tugendhat in Brno and Třebíč.

5. What do you know about the national anthem of the Czech Republic?

The national anthem of the Czech Republic is Kde domov můj (Where is my home). It was written by the composer František Škroup and the playwright Josef Kajetán Tyl. It was first performed at the Estates Theatre in Prague in 1834.

6. What do you know about sport in the Czech Republic?

The two most popular sports are football and ice hockey. They get the most attention from the media and the public. The Czech national ice hockey team is one of the most successful teams in the world. The other sports with professional teams are for example basketball, volleyball, athletics, handball and floorball. Winter sports such as skiing and biathlon are also popular. The Great Pardubice Steeplechase is the longest-running racing event on the European continent.

7. Which composers were born in the Czech Republic?

The most famous ones are Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana and Leoš Janáček. Antonín Dvořák is the author of Slavonic Dances and the symphony From the New World. Bedřich Smetana composed a symphonic poem called Vltava. Leoš Janáček is famous for his operas which are based on Czech stories.

8. What do you know about Czech cuisine?

Czech meals typically consist of three courses. The first one is soup, the second one is the main dish and the third one is dessert. The most popular traditional main dishes are roast pork with cabbage and dumplings, beef sirloin with cream sauce and fruit dumplings. The most popular drink is beer.

9. What do you know about Czech language?

Czech is a West Slavic language. 10 million people speak it. It is very similar to the Slovak language. Its vocabulary has been extensively influenced by Latin and German. The modern written standard was codified during the Czech National Revival.

10. What do you know about important Czech cities except Prague?

Brno is the second largest city by population and area. It is the seat of judicial authority. Ostrava is a centre for metallurgical industries. Plzeň is known for its breweries. Liberec is mostly associated with the Ještěd Tower and white tigers. Olomouc has numerous historic religious buildings and the Holy Trinity Column, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Důležitá slovíčka

landlocked	(lendlokt)	vnitrozemský
currency	(karnsi)	měna
revive	(rivajv)	oživit, obnovit
drain	(drejn)	odtékat
gorge	(górdž)	rokle
bicameral	(bikemerl)	dvojkomorový
appoint	(apojnt)	jmenovat
House of Deputies	(haus of depjtís)	Poslanecká sněmovna
branch	(bránč)	odvětví
coal	(koul)	uhlí
jewellery	(džůlry)	šperky
crop	(krop)	plodina
barley	(bárly)	ječmen
wheat	(uít)	pšenice
rye	(ráj)	žito
fowl	(faul)	drůbež
cattle	(ketl)	dobytek
sugar beet	(šugr bít)	cukrová řepa
descendant	(disendnt)	potomek

coat of arms	(kout ov armz)	erb
Pilgrimage Church	(pilgrimidž črč)	poutnický kostel
Holy Trinity Column	(houly trinity kolm)	Sloup Nejsvětější Trojice
anthem	(entm)	hymna
composer	(kompouzr)	skladatel
playwright	(plejrajt)	dramatik
steeplechase	(stýplčejs)	dostih
dumplings	(damplins)	knedlíky
sirolin	(srlon)	svíčková
judicial	(džudišl)	soudní