A CISC (Complex Instruction Set Computer) works by giving the programmer multiple complex and useful instructions to work with whereas a RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) has only a few instructions are available to program, with each instruction only performing a very simple task e.g. add, load

With a CISC, there are lots of instructions available and lots of memory addressing methods to use and because there is less storing of intermediate results, less RAM is used. However, If you want to do a complex task in a RISC, you have to combine instructions together e.g. to multiply you can do a series of adds. A task can therefore take a number of machine cycles to complete in a RISC.

Comparatively however, the hardware in a CISC is more complex, meaning that It takes more cycles to process each task causing software to generally run more slowly.