



SLOVAKIA



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



Slovak Republic

Although the Slovak Republic is one of the youngest European states, settlement in its territory dates to the remote past. However, its population, Slovaks, had lived and developed under the Hungarian crown which became part of Austro-Hungarian Empire later. Slovakia did not exist as an administrative unit and was only mentioned as a country somewhere between the Danube River and the Tatra Mountains. Even hundred years ago, few people knew anything at all about Slovaks who were left without a possibility to make decisions regarding their future for a long time.

The 20th century brought about the fulfilment of dreams and longings of several generations of Slovaks about an independent state. It came at the end of the 20th century and in the following millennium Slovakia joined the European Union. The history of this young and dynamic country written by its people is an example of what the media refer to as a success story.



Total Area: 49 034 km²

Population: 5 417 000

Capital: Bratislava
(426 thousand inhabitants)



Geography

Slovakia is a country situated in the heart of Europe. The geographical centre of Europe is in fact the Church of St John in Kremnické Bane, a village in central Slovakia. Slovakia, with its total area of 49 thousand square kilometres and somewhat less than 5.5 million inhabitants, is not a large country. It is only a bit larger than Denmark, Switzerland or Holland. A flight over Slovakia takes only half an hour.

Slovakia fills the space between Poland in the north and Hungary in the south. Its western neighbours are the Czech Republic and Austria while Ukraine lies off its eastern border (its frontier is shortest, only 96 kilometres long). Slovakia has no access to the sea. The nearest sea is the Adriatic in the south (361 km away). Slovaks who want to bath in the Baltic Sea have to travel by air some 440 kilometres from the northern frontier.



Historical dates

- **approx. 100 000 BC**

Neanderthal man lived next to hot springs in the present-day region of Spiš, northern Slovakia. The cast of a skull of a female individual was found in the travertine hill in Gánovce.



- **5th -1st century BC**

Celts lived in the territory of Slovakia.

They built op-pida (towns), smelted iron, minted coins, and represented the first advanced civilisation of its kind in Slovakia.

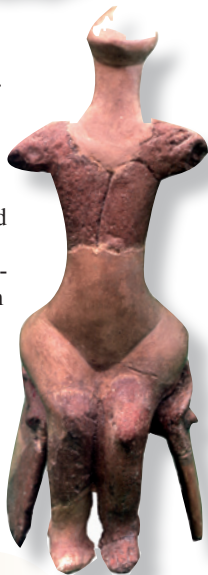


- **179 AD**

The Roman legionaries carved an inscription celebrating a victory over the German tribe of Marcomans in the castle rock at Trenčín.

- **5th century**

The first Slavs crossed the mountain passes of the Carpathians and appeared in the territory of present-day Slovakia.



- **623-658**

The Frankish merchant Samo assumed leadership of a Slavonic tribal union. Founded and headed Samo's Dominion - the first state of the Western Slavs.

- **833**

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

- **863**

Sts. Constantine and Methodius from the Greek city of Thessalonica arrived in the Great Moravian Empire with the mission to Christianise the local people. The Great Moravian Prince Rastislav invited them.

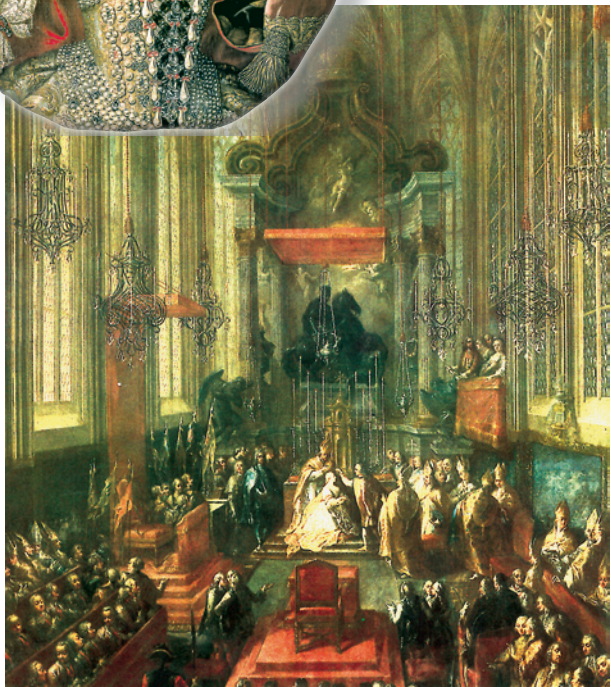


• **1000**

The Hungarian state ruled by King Stephen I was founded. The territory of what is present-day Slovakia was included.

• **1238**

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



• **1241-1242**

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

• **1412-1769**

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

• **1467-1490**

The first university, the Academia Istropolitana in the territory of Slovakia began in Pressburg (today Bratislava).

• **1526**

The army of the Kingdom of Hungary suffered an absolute defeat in the battle

against the Turks at Mohács on 29 August. King Louis II was also killed in the battle.

• **1536**

The Parliament of the Kingdom of Hungary made Pressburg (now Bratislava) to capital of the kingdom.

• **1635**

Cardinal Peter Pázmány founded the university in Trnava.

• **1740-1780**

The rule of the enlightened Empress Maria Theresa. Her son Joseph II continued reforms, which meant revolutionary changes for the kingdom.

• **1787**

Anton Bernolák codified the first literary form of the Slovak language. However, it did not catch on.

• 1843

The second codification of the Slovak literary language authored by Ľudovít Štúr was more successful than that of Bernolák. It was generally accepted and it is still used at the present time.

• 1848-1849

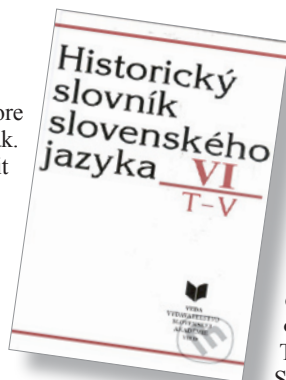
The Slovak Voluntary Corps organised the first armed uprising of Slovaks, but three campaigns by the Corps fighting side by side with the Imperial troops did not succeed in bringing freedom to the Slovak nation.

• 1861-1863

The National Assembly of Slovaks in Martin adopted the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation in 1861. Two years later, Matica slovenská, the first national institution involved in promotion of education and culture of Slovaks, was founded in Martin.

• 1867

The Austrian-Hungarian Compromise meant increased oppression of Slovaks by Hungarians.



• 1918

Slovakia became part of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic declared on 28 October in Prague. The Slovak National Council confirmed the act on 30 October in Martin. Bratislava joined the state on 1 January 1919.

• 1939

The independent Slovak State was declared on 14 March 1939 in Bratislava.

Jozef Tiso, a catholic priest, became the President of this new state practically established by Nazi Germany.

• 1944

The Slovak National Uprising broke out in central Slovakia.

It was announced on 29 August in Banská Bystrica. After the first successful operations of the rebels, the German army occupied the centres of the uprising and the Slovak soldiers and partisans had to retreat to the mountains.

• 1944-1945

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

• 1946-1948

In contrast to Czechia, 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.





• 1968

Slovak politicians led by Alexander Dubček actively participated in the process of the Prague Spring. The expectations of democratic change though, were truncated by Soviet troops under the Warsaw Pact, which entered and occupied the country in August 1968.

• 1989

The Velvet Revolution brought about the essential political change, deprived the Communists of power and opened the way to democracy and plurality. Massive demonstrations supporting the change took place all over Slovakia.

• 1993

Slovakia became the independent and sovereign state on 1 January and entered the UNO on 19 January. The Slovak National Council elected Michal Kováč the first president of the new democratic state.

• 2004

On 29 March, Slovakia acceded to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and on 1 May became a member of the European Union.

• 2007

On 21 December Slovakia was included to the Schengen Area also referred to as the area of safety, freedom and justice.



• 2009

Slovak Republic officially joined the eurozone and adopted euro.



Personalities



Ján Jessenius (1566 – 1621)

Ján Jessenius was the best-known descendant of the Jesenský family from Turiec and as a medical doctor he became famous for the first publicly demonstrated autopsy in Europe.

Matej Bel (1684 – 1749)

Matej Bel was the most significant encyclopaedia writer of the Hungarian Kingdom of the 18th century and the author of the greatest and the most important historical and geographical work in the territory of Slovakia. He was called “Magnum Decus Hungariae” (the great adornment of Hungary) for his deep knowledge and the high level of his scientific work.



Móric Beňovský (1746 – 1786)

Count Móric Beňovský was a traveller, writer, and soldier who became famous as the king of Madagascar.



Ľudovít Štúr (1815 – 1856)

Ľudovít Štúr was the most prominent personality of the Slovak national revival, which occurred while Slovakia was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He codified the literary Slovak language. He was an ideologist and the leader of the national movement, a politician, linguist, writer, poet, journalist and editor.



Pavol Dobšinský (1828 – 1885)

The best-known Slovak fairy-tale collector, Pavol Dobšinský, comes from Gemer in the south-east of Slovakia. He was a protestant minister whose work can be compared to the work of Hans Christian Andersen or the Grimm brothers.



Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880 – 1919)

Milan Rastislav Štefánik was probably the most significant personality in Slovak history because he greatly contributed to the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. He was the first minister of war and besides his political activities he was a worldwide recognised scientist – astronomer.



Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav (1849 – 1921)

Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav was a great Slovak poet, a dramatist and translator. He is considered one of the most prominent personalities of Slovak literature and Slovak culture.



Alexander Dubček (1921 – 1992)

Alexander Dubček was the most important Slovak politician of the Prague Spring period and he became the symbol of the revival movement in 1968. Abroad he is considered as the best-known Slovak.

Martin Benka (1888 – 1971)

Painter and illustrator Martin Benka was one of those that promoted Modernism in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century. His works of art mostly represent the mountainous settings of Slovakia and he kept returning to the theme.



**Jozef Gabčík
(1912 – 1942)**

Jozef Gabčík was a Slovak soldier, and a member of the parachute group called Anthropoid. He assassinated the Reich Protector of Czechia in 1942.



Štefan Osuský (1889 – 1973)

Slovak politician, lawyer, diplomat, teacher and writer Štefan Osuský was an outstanding personality in the European and world politics. His vision was the united, democratic and free Europe void of wars.



Ján Papánek (1896 – 1991)

Slovak diplomat and lawyer Ján Papánek was among the most important authors of the text known as the Charter of the United Nations and represented CSR in the UNO. He also participated in foundation of the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees (AFCR).



**Otto Smik
(1922 – 1944)**

Otto Smik was the “Ace” and most successful pilot of WWII. He gradually became the best Czechoslovak fighter pilot, unmatched in the service of the British RAF.



Ondrej Nepela (1951 – 1989)

The most successful Slovak figure skater and so far the only gold medal winner of the Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo (1972). He was the triple world champion and a quintuple champion of Europe.



Jozef Cardinal Tomko
(11. 3. 1924)
Recognized Church dignitary and writer of religious texts Jozef Cardinal Tomko is also a full Prefect of Congregation for evangelization of nations and the President of the popal committee for the International Eucharistic Congresses.



Štefan Nosál
(20. 1. 1927)

Štefan Nosál is a choreographer of the well-known folklore group Lúčnica and a pioneer in the domain of scenic stylistics of folklore dancing. He is also a teacher and the only professor of folklore dancing in Slovakia.



Edita Gruberová (23. 12. 1946)

The most prominent contemporary opera singer, Edita Gruberová, an opera diva and a soloist of the State Opera in Vienna has appeared as guest on the best known opera stages all over the world.

Ivan Bella (21. 5. 1964)
Ivan Bella is the first, and so far the only Slovak astronaut. Slovaks appreciate him in the same way as the Russians appreciate Gagarin. His flight helped Slovakia become part of the club of space countries.



Michal Martikán
(18. 5. 1979)

Slovak slalom racer Michal Martikán is the double Olympic champion and a quadruple world champion, holder of two silver medals from summer Olympic Games and a champion of Europe.

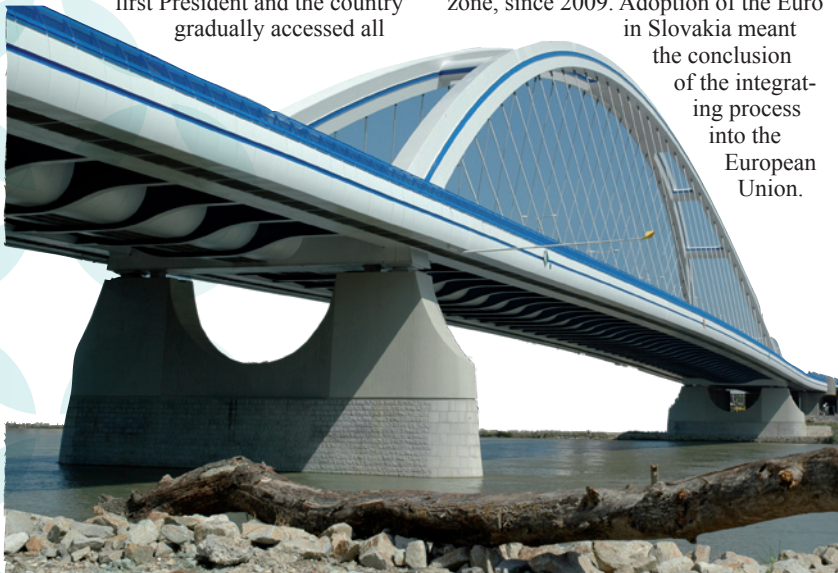


Present

The new democratic situation also led to disintegration of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks and establishment of an independent Slovak Republic. Since 1 January 1993, Slovakia has been a sovereign state that joined the United Nations Organization the same year.

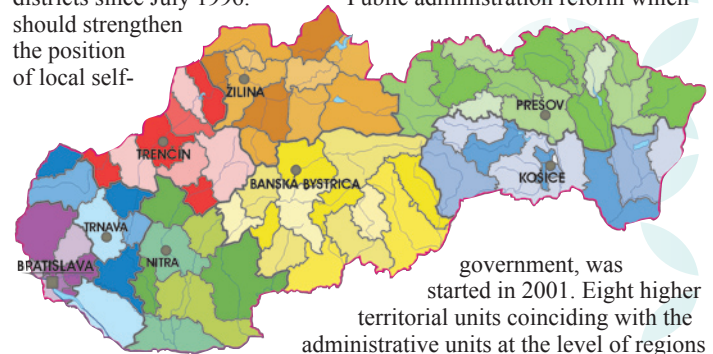
People of Slovakia elected their first President and the country gradually accessed all

important European associations and institutions. The Slovak Republic has been a member of NATO since 2004 and became the coequal member of the European Union in the same year. Slovakia was included into the Schengen Area in 2007 and is the 16th member of the European monetary union, the eurozone, since 2009. Adoption of the Euro in Slovakia meant the conclusion of the integrating process into the European Union.





Slovakia has been divided into 8 administrative regions and 79 districts since July 1996. Public administration reform which should strengthen the position of local self-



government, was started in 2001. Eight higher territorial units coinciding with the administrative units at the level of regions were established and headed by chairmen denoted here by the historical term “župan”.

Slovakia is a parliamentary democracy. The head of the state is the president with a 5-year functional period. He shares his powers with the Parliament, the official name of which is the National Council of the Slovak Republic. This top legal authority of the Slovak Republic is single-chambered and it has 150 members. The deputies are elected for a 4-year functional period. The most important legal document is the Constitution of the Slovak Republic from 1992. The executive power is in the hands of the government of the Slovak Republic headed by the prime minister. The president, parliament, and the government have their seat in the capital of Slovakia – Bratislava.



Economy

The economy of the Slovak Republic is gradually drawing to the end of a transition period. Several branches of the economy in Slovakia have enjoyed a long and successful tradition. In the past, Slovakia was one of the most advanced parts of the Kingdom of Hungary. Mining, metallurgy, glass manufacturing and the food processing industry were fairly developed then. In the period between the First and the Second World Wars many armament plants were moved here from Czechia. Massive industrialization in Slovakia came in the post-war communist era. Above all heavy industry experienced explosive development. However, the fall of Communism changed the economic situation.

Although Slovakia is a small country, it is now one of the biggest producers of cars in the world, and outputs the greatest number of cars per inhabitant (more than 100 cars per thousand inhabitants) thanks to the German Volkswagen company which bought out the Bratislavské automobilové závody plant in 1989 and constructed a huge factory for the manufacture of different VW cars. Another big investment associated with automotive industry was opened in Trnava (PSA Peugeot Citroën) and in Žilina (KIA).

Slovakia is also an important producer of iron and steel and commodities made of this raw material. The metallurgical giant of U.S. Steel, which bought Východoslovenské železiarne in Košice dominates the industry.



The chemical industry is also developing. It is represented by plants in Bratislava, one processing crude (Slovnaft) and the petrochemical plant of Istrochem, which produces several classes of petrol, diesel oil, synthetic substances/fibres and organic chemical products. Production of paper and pulp is traditional in Slovakia and the central Slovakia plant Mondi SCP in Ružomberok is one of the biggest in Europe. Electrical engineering is also worth mentioning (for instance, Sony near Nitra or Samsung situated near Galanta and Trnava).

The topical task of the Slovak economy is to attract foreign capital and to reduce unemployment, which has exceeded 20% in some regions. Foreign investments into the Slovak economy have increased every year and in 2008 represented more than billion euros. The most significant trend in the influx of direct foreign investments is the shift from the automotive industry to mechanical and electrical engineering.

Apart from metallurgical production, mechanical engineering, chemical and paper manufacturing industries, Slovakia also trades in textile and food. Slovak textile and cotton processing plants were among the biggest in Central Europe in the 19th century and the tradition continues. Typical Slovak food products include sheep



Government of the Slovak Republic prepared a document referred to as the National Plan of Development concerning industry, services, tourism, transports and human resources. Emphasis is laid on the support to small and medium enterprise; modern, environmentally friendly technologies; building of industrial parks; education and sustainable development of villages and rural area. In the near future, Slovakia plans to reach the level exceeding 70% of an average GDP per inhabitant which exists in EU member countries. Such an increase is also viable thanks to the financial help from the community's structural funds.



cheese (for instance Liptov cheese), beer (Topvar, Corgoň, Zlatý bazant, Steiger, Šariš) and chocolate (Figaro).

The sector of tourism and travel has a promising future in Slovakia. Its huge potential is not fully exploited yet. Construction of modern transport infrastructure, namely motorways and a rapid railway network will greatly help to develop this potential.

Accession of Slovakia to the European Union means a number of new challenges and incentives for the country. The

An aerial photograph of a Slovakian landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling green and yellow fields, some with small clusters of trees. A small village with red-roofed houses is visible in the lower-left. The middle ground is dominated by dense green forests covering the slopes of hills. In the background, tall, rugged mountain peaks rise against a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene depicts a diverse natural environment.

Nature

In spite of being such a small country, Slovakia boasts many diverse natural assets. Tall mountain peaks alternate with deep valleys and gorges. Extensive forests, meadows and pastures form an eye-catching patchwork neighbouring with fertile lowlands; mountain torrents gradually change into calm rivers, all adorned by marvellously rich flora and fauna. There are also extinct volcanoes, canyons, caves and abysses, grand rivers and waterfalls, mineral springs, medicinal, poisonous plants and animals.

The varied natural landscape types are typical for Slovakia where many almost virgin areas still survive. One only has to visit the mysterious valleys and ravines of central and northern Slovakia to find everything that is missing in the modern world. This is the reason why many of the natural nooks of Slovakia are sought out by national and foreign visitors. They offer unique experiences which seldom occur in other parts of the world.



Differences in altitude is typical of Slovakia. The difference between the highest (Gerlachovský štít peak 2,654 m) and the lowest situated spots (Streda nad Bodrogom 94 m above sea



level) also presumes great differences in climate and consequently flora, fauna and soil types. The Carpathian Arch falls into several more or less parallel mountain ranges (for instance Nízke Tatry, Malá Fatra and Veľká Fatra, so popular among trippers), which are separated by depressions. These low areas form a belt of valleys sometimes connected by narrow passes and sometimes by wider river valleys. The varied surface of Slovakia also displays three lowlands: Záhorská nížina in the west, Podunajská nížina in the southwest and the 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. They consist of the western and eastern parts and the most visited and most popular range is the High Tatras. They are “built” of resistant granite and crystalline shale rocks. It is also the tallest mountain range in Slovakia (25 of its peaks are taller than 2,500 m). The Tatras were formed by glaciers and represent a wonderful set of natural beauties with glacial valleys, cirques, lakes, waterfalls and peaks.



Rightly the Tatras are often referred to as the “miniature Alps”, as on a small area of 341 square kilometres (260 square kilometres on the Slovak side of the border with Poland) they offer everything found in the Alps with the exception of glaciers. The peaks of the Tatras are also the tallest in the whole Carpathian Arch and the tallest mountains north and east of the Alps.



Caves, some of them of world importance, constitute very attractive phenomena of the Slovak landscape.

It is no accident that the underground cave system of Slovenský kras and Aggtelek karst was inscribed as the first natural locality of Slovakia into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995.

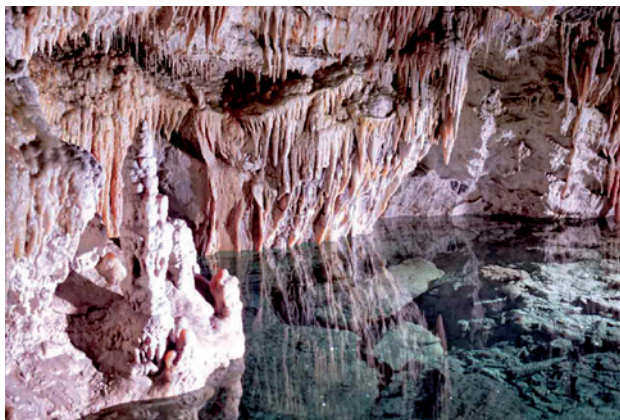
The are twelve caves open to the public in the territory of Slovakia. The Demänovská jaskyňa slobody Cave is remarkable for its stalactite decoration; Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa Cave contains admirable ice filling while the Ochtinská aragonitová



jaskyňa Cave offers charming aragonites in forms not unlike sea corals gathered into dreamy patterns. The much sought out attraction of Domica Cave is navigation on the underground Styx River. Some other caves can be visited in company of a guide. A visit to the Krásnohorská jaskyňa Cave situated in the Slovenský kras Mts. can be an indeed unforgettable experience.

From a hydrological point of view surface of Slovakia can be compared to a roof. The rivers spring in its territory and flow to the neighbouring states. Part of the European water divide, which divides the watersheds of the Baltic and Black Seas, is in the territory of Slovakia. The Danube, which flows here from Germany and Austria, is one of the symbols of this country. Only a short stretch (22.5 km) of the river flows through Bra-

tislava and 149.5 km of it coincides with the Austrian and Hungarian frontier. When the summer ice thaws in the Austrian Alps it the run off reaches its highest intensity, as do the majority of other Slovak rivers (Váh, Hron, Ipel') which peak in springtime.



The majority of lakes in Slovakia are of glacier origin and almost all of them are situated in the Tatras. The glacier lakes called “plesá” represent the remains of glacier activity which took place in the last stage of the Ice Age when the water of the thawing glaciers filled surface depressions. There is about a hundred of them in the High Tatras and in combination with peaks, they add an extra charm to the mountainous landscape. Each of the lakes has its specific colour determined by its location and shades of the surrounding mountains. The largest (20 hectares) and deepest (53 m) of them is



the Veľké Hincovo pleso lake. The glacier activity in the Tatras is also responsible for the origin of waterfalls. The tallest of them is the Kmeťov vodopád waterfall in the Nefcerka Valley of and its individual cascades are about 80 meters high. Many

of the local waterfalls are arranged in step-like manner and their cascades adorn several valleys.

Slovakia also boasts numerous mineral springs and abundant groundwater reserves. While mineral springs are dispersed 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 of Slovakia where there is approximately 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 pace apparently stopped.

Although man has changed the landscape and deforested lowlands and basins in Slovakia, its mountain ranges withheld large forest complexes. Slovakia, compared to other European countries is densely forested (forests occupy 36% of the total territory). As a con-





sequence 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 occur here and it is more than compared to, say Poland, the area of which is six-fold larger. Some of these species exist only in Slovakia.

The fauna amounts to more than 40 thousand species is also varied. The majority of them live in the forest. It includes boar, red deer, and bear. Specialities of Slovakia are the European bison, the largest European mammal liv-

ing in the reserve near Topoľčianky and chamois, occurring in the top parts of the Tatra Mts. Water streams and rivers, lakes and ponds are used for fish breeding. Attractive fishing ranges are found in central and northern Slovakia with abundant trout-bearing streams.

Many plants and animals are protected under legal provisions. Entire territories, which include the national parks, landscape areas and nature reserves, are likewise legally protected. In total, there are more than thousand protected territories with an area exceeding 9,500 square kilometres. They include 9 national parks and sixteen protected landscape areas. The national parks (NP)



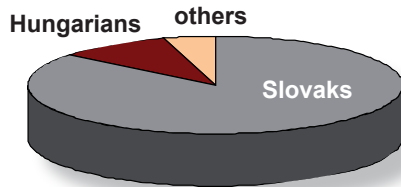
are mostly situated in the Carpathian mountain area. The oldest of them is the Tatra National Park (TANAP) designated as early as 1948. The Pieniny National Park is the smallest and the Nízke Tatry National Park is the largest of the parks. In its territory the Slovenský raj National Park protects the remarkable karstic plain landscape with deep gorges and one of the largest ice caves in the world. The Malá Fatra National Park is the westernmost situated of the Slovak high-mountain ranges. The Slovenský kras National Park with its wild mountain and karstic landscape least affected by man is in turn the southernmost situated of them.

The easternmost situated is the National Park of Poloniny with the original Eastern Slovakia beech and fir forests. This also was the reason why several primeval forests in the region were inscribed into the UNESCO List of the Natural Heritage in 2007.

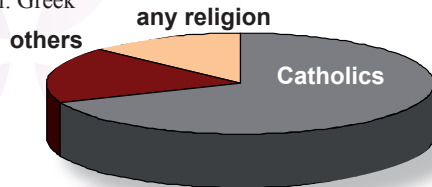


Population and Cities

The population of Slovakia is about 5.4 million inhabitants. Most of them are Slovaks (86%) The most numerous ethnicity living in the territory of Slovakia is Hungarians (10%) who inhabit the southern boundary of the country. The Roma ethnicity living in Slovakia is also fairly numerous but no exact data is available, as many Romas prefer to adhere to either Slovak or to Hungarian nationalities. A reliable estimate of their number is around 400,000. The Romas inhabit prevaillingly the eastern and southern parts of Slovakia. Czech, Ruthenian and Ukrainian minorities also live in Slovakia. The Slovak legislation guarantees use of minority languages in official contact for the inhabitants of villages and towns where their number exceeds 20% of overall population. The visible effect of this regulation is in the form of bilingual road signs.



The majority of inhabitants of Slovakia are believers. Our country can be referred to as a Catholic country, because Catholics represent as much as 69 percent of its total population. The second most represented Church is the Evangelical. Greek Catholics or members of the Orthodox Church live in the eastern part of the country. About 13 percent of the population do not adhere to any church or religion.



The population of Slovakia has experienced several changes when as the population emigrated abroad in increased numbers. They were called emigration waves. Slovaks abandoned their homeland in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century when they left for the USA. The reasons were mostly economic. Political reasons and search for a more tolerant and free environment motivated the next emigration wave, which followed the end of the Second World War. Today, more than two million Slovaks live outside Slovakia and the majority of them in the USA. Some of them were very successful. Among them, for instance, is Andy Warhol, the famous pop art painter whose parents were from eastern Slovakia. Ancestors of several American movie stars of such as Paul Newman or Steve McQueen were from Slovakia. Eugene Andrew Cernan's forefathers, who was the last human to step on the Moon surface in 1972, were Czech and Slovak.



The first towns emerged in Slovakia in the 11th century. They became centres of trade and crafts and received special privileges from rulers. They were circumscribed by walls and markets were regularly held there. The oldest free royal borough in Slovakia is Trnava. A boom came in the 14th and 15th centuries when mining and crafts fully developed with amazing prosperity. There are now 138 towns in Slovakia. The largest cities are Bratislava and Košice. The majority of population lives in towns.



Trnava is often referred to as the Little Rome due to the great number of its churches. The town tower with a viewing terrace overlooks the historic core of the town.



Nitra is another very old town in western Slovakia. It was once the seat of the Nitra Principality and the rulers of the Great Moravian Empire. The dominant feature of the town is Nitra Castle from the 11th century.



The capital of Slovakia is Bratislava. It spreads along both banks of the Danube River in the extreme south-western part of the country within a short distance from both the Austrian and Hungarian frontiers. There are few cities in Europe with such a privileged and fine setting like Bratislava. Its position on the great European river particularly on the confluence of the Danube and Morava River endows Bratislava with the special atmosphere of



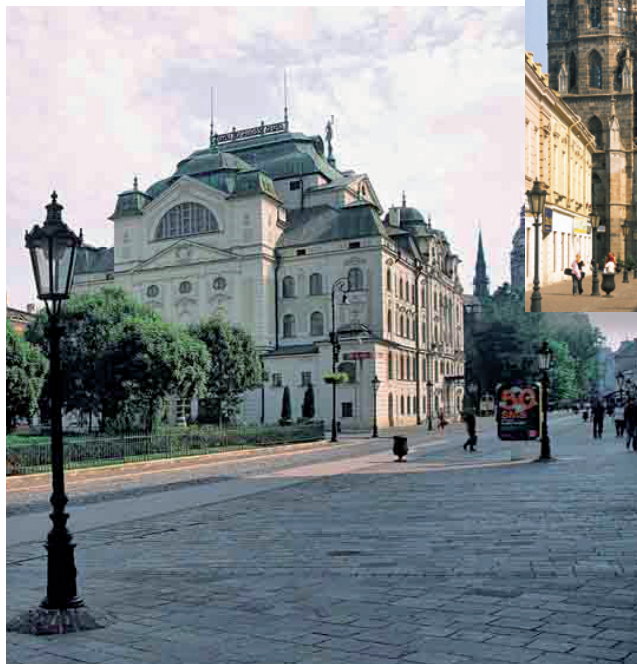
a Central European metropolis. It used to be the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary. Now it is a modern city and important centre of commerce and industry. The conspicuous dominants of Bratislava are its castle and





the Church of St Martin situated in the core of the old town quarter. St Martin Church was the temple where the rulers of the former Kingdom of Hungary were crowned. Narrow medieval lanes criss-cross the old town and most of them mouth into the Hlavné námestie (Main Square) with the Renaissance Maximilian Fountain in its centre. The statue placed in the fountain represents Emperor Maximilian II as the legendary Knight Roland, the protector of towns.

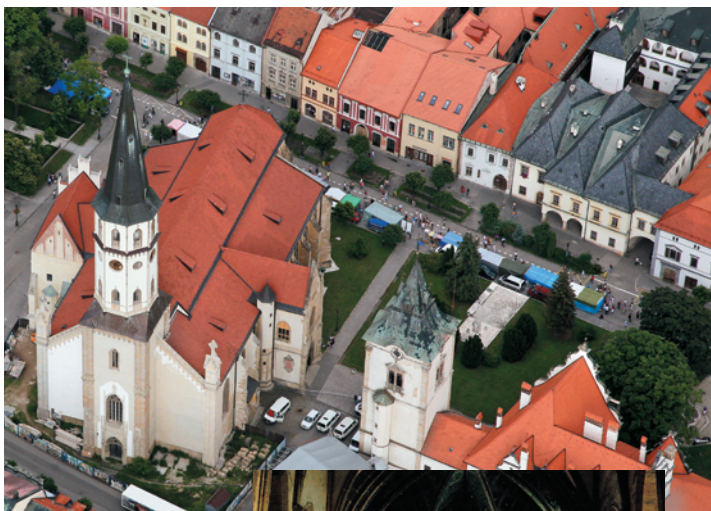
Košice (242 thousand inhabitants) is the metropolis in the east of Slovakia and the second largest city of the country. Its most important historic building is the Cathedral of St Elisabeth from the 14th century, the largest Gothic temple in Slovakia. Adults and children like to spend Sunday afternoons on the charming central square playing in the fountain. In 2008, the city of Košice attracted the attention of the world by obtaining the title of the European Capital of Culture for 2013.





Three former mining towns, Banská Bystrica where copper was mined, Kremnica, famous for its mint, and Banská Štiavnica with silver mines, are situated in central Slovakia. Banská Štiavnica was once the main producer of silver and one of the most important mining towns in Europe. The first European university that prepared experts in mining was opened in Banská Štiavnica in the 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 into the UNESCO List of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1993.





In the east of northern Slovakia, lies the town of Bardejov with the highest number of Gothic monuments, among which is the Church of St Egidius from the 15th century and the Gothic-Renaissance building of the old town hall with a precious collection of icons are most interesting. The town walls of Bardejov with bastions are the best preserved medieval fortifications in Slovakia. The historic town of Bardejov was inscribed into the UNESCO List of Natural and Cultural Heritage in 2000.



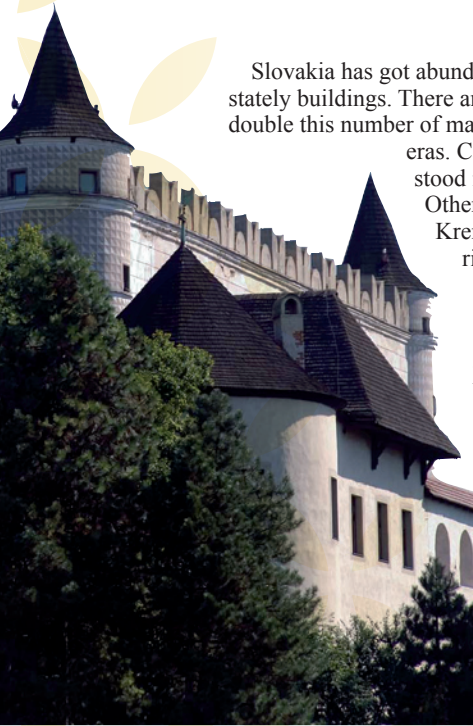
Below the Tatra Mts. in the area called Spiš, settled by German colonists, there are two beautiful towns – Levoča and Kežmarok. Levoča (inscribed into the UNESCO List of Cultural and Natural Heritage in 2009) with its burgher houses, the town hall and Church of St James is the gem of the region and also the site of a pilgrimage.



Monuments and Architecture

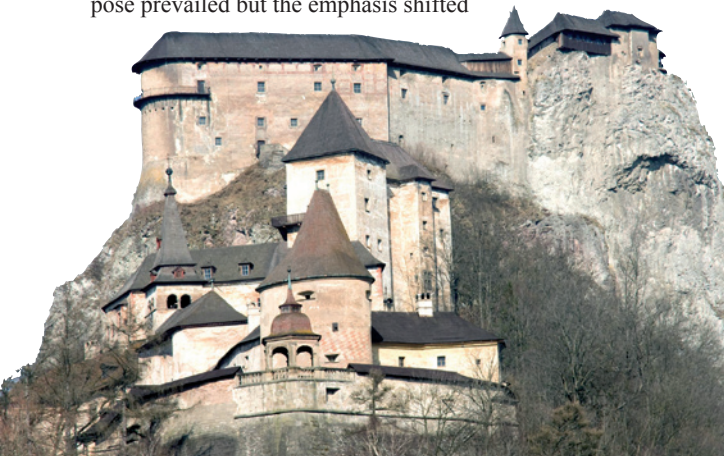
Slovakia has got abundant cultural and historical, fortified and stately buildings. There are more than 100 castles and at least double this number of manor houses built in different historical eras. Castles were mostly built as forts and stood in strategic areas with difficult access. Other castles were town castles (Zvolen, Kremnica, Banská Bystrica) built by rich towns in defence against possible assaults.

In the 17th-18th centuries, the majority of castles started to fall into disrepair and many of them were burnt at the order of rulers and turned into ruins. As a matter of fact, the sovereigns considered the castles centres for anti-Habsburg rebellion, which meant their end. But many of them survive and are now museums and exhibitions illustrating the history of the individual regions. The Castle of Spiš and the monuments which surround it, have been added to the UNESCO List of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.



Some castles and forts rebuilt in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries as more comfortable and elegant structures were inhabited by their owners until the 20th century. They were denoted chateaux. This is the reason why the Oravský hrad Castle or Zvolenský hrad Castle are sometimes referred to as chateaux. The result of adaptation of many of them was a fairly romantic appearance (chateaux of Bojnice or Smolenice) inspiring fairy-tale impressions in visitors.

Manor houses, which replaced the medieval castles and chateaux, were mostly built in flat terrain and assumed the historical role of the lesser Gothic castles. Originally their defensive purpose prevailed but the emphasis shifted



to their representative function and comfort after the 16th century.

Many of surviving manor houses have been changed into museums with valuable artistic collections (Svätý Anton, Betliar, Markušovce, Strážky, and Topoľčianky), some of them are used by artists or musicians (Budmerice, Dolná Krupá, Moravany) or they acquired social functions and provide homes for the elderly or sick.

Construction of churches as the buildings for public Christian services started comparatively late in Slovakia. Although some archaeological investigations point to older traditions of sacral architecture, the first churches in the territory of Slovakia were most probably built during the Great Moravian Empire in the 9th century. Foundations of a single-nave Great Moravian 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 Kostolany pod Tribečom, probably from the first half of the 11th century is considered to be one of the oldest sacred buildings in Slovakia. The Romanesque period was typical for construction of



basilicas (Banská Štiavnica, Bíňa, Diakovce, Spišská Kapitula) and small single-nave churches (Dražovce, Hamuliakovo).

The Gothic style concentrated in two important architectural centres, Bratislava and Košice. A classical example of the Gothic style in Bratislava influenced by the Viennese artists is the Church of St Martin in Bratislava and St Elisabeth's Cathedral in Košice.

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

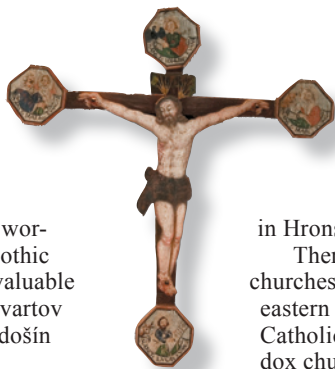


Traces of the Renaissance style can be seen on the parish church in Sabinov. Those of Baroque characterise the University church in Trnava and monastic church in Jasov. While the Classicist style is represented by the Evangelical churches in Banská Bystrica, Levoča, and Kremnica.

Specific samples of sacred architecture in Slovakia are wooden churches. Their folk builders expressed the perfect harmony of the human soul with nature, and the effort to disengage from earthly worries. Among the oldest are the Gothic wooden churches and the most valuable of them are, for example, in Hervartov (region of Šariš) or Tvrdošín (Orava).

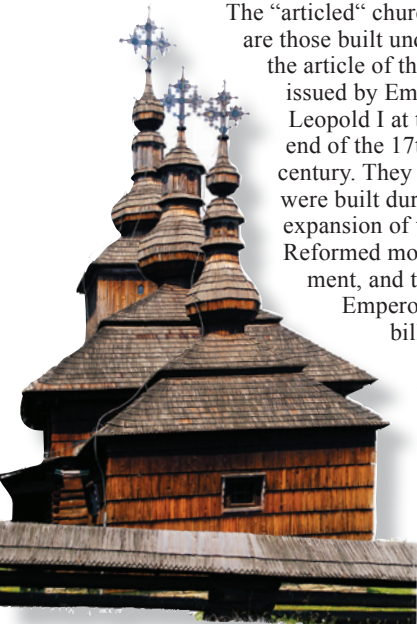
The “articled“ churches are those built under the article of the law issued by Emperor Leopold I at the end of the 17th century. They were built during expansion of the Reformed movement, and the Emperor’s

bill allowed for construction of two Evangelical churches in some counties of the Kingdom. The articulated churches had to be built outside the settlements,



without a bell tower and their entrance had to be made in the wall facing away from the settlement. Such churches are for instance, in Sv. Križ (Liptov), Leštiny (Orava), Kežmarok (Spiš), and in 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 Orthodox churches. The majority of them date to the 18th century. The special features of the East Christian rite are reflected in their interior decor- where the unique Carpathian icons dominate.



Folk Architecture and Culture

Folk architecture can be contemplated in numerous open-air museums. The best known include those in Martin, Nová Bystrica, Zuberec, Pribylina, Stará Ľubovňa, and Bardejov. Such open-air museums are the sites of different types of cultural or social events in the summer where the life, work or leisure activities of our ancestors is reenacted.

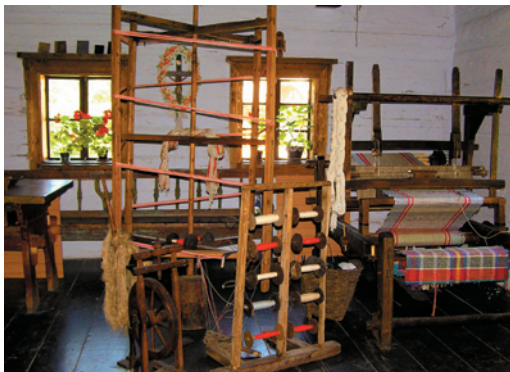
Perhaps the best-known locality for folk architecture is Vlkolíneč with a very remarkable set of wooden buildings that were inscribed into the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1993.



Apart from open-air museums there are also numerous town or village monument reserves. For instance Čičmany boasts several original log houses with white ornamentation, log houses and shingle roofs in Podbiel, dwellings carved into volcanic rocks in Brhlavce, etc.



The common people living in the countryside mostly involved in farming have preserved their traditional costumes to the present time. The dominant and typical ornamental element is embroidery. There are many regional and local features which are reflected in pattern and



composition of garments.

Woodcarving was part of the typical activities of rural areas. Wood-carved jugs used in shepherding held sour sheep's milk are still used in the northern regions of Slovakia. Folk art created the basis for professional art in Slovakia.

Statues of the saints and figures of Bethlehem, paintings on glass and ornamented Easter eggs were typical manifestations of fine art in Slovakia. Pottery, especially ceramic jugs, was widespread in southern and western Slovakia. The jugs, plates, and other kitchenware produced by folk artists were decorated by motifs proper to every region and to the taste of the locals.

Important dates were always connected with special



songs and dances. Every region possesses a different and typical style of songs and dances linked to the environment. Shepherd or robber songs are typical for the central and north-western parts of the country. Folk festivals held in different parts of Slovakia are the best opportunities to learn the local usage. Slovaks and foreigners regularly visit them. The most important ones are annually organised in Východná, Myjava, Detva, Zuberec and Červený Kláštor. Normally they take place during the summer months and each of them is unique and different.



Culture and Museums

Although the culture and arts of Slovakia are young, cultural awareness formed here many centuries ago and some valuable works of arts were created. The protagonists in the multi-cultural environment of Slovakia were members of all present ethnicities.



Works of the most important 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 (at Bojnice, Červený Kameň, Strážky, Sv. Anton, etc.).





The Museum of Modern Art of Andy Warhol in Medzilaborce, in eastern Slovakia with its unique collection ranks among European curiosities. Andy Warhol (1928-1978), the leading member of the pop-art movement was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, in a family of Slovak immigrants. Andrea and Júlia Warhol came from Miková near Medzilaborce.



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.



One modern cultural event of Slovakia is the title of the European Capital of Culture for 2013 that was bestowed by an international jury upon the East Slovakia metropolis, Košice in September 2008. The Interface Project is one of long-term transformation for the city. The purpose of which is to create a milieu favouring culture and creativity.



Holiday in Slovakia

The universal beauty, charm and diversity of Slovakia, complemented by favourable climatic conditions, cultural and historic sights and a variety of folklore attract more and more visitors to Slovakia every year. The main interest is concentrated on cultural and historic sights (Bratislava, Trnava, Levoča, Košice, Bardejov), the centres of summer tourism and skiing resorts (in the High Tatras and Low Tatras, and the Veľká Fatra and Malá Fatra Mts.), ethnographic centres and folklore events (Martin, Východná, Zuberec, Pribylina, Červený Kláštor), as well as thermal swimming pools (Dunajská Streda, Štúrovo, Diakovce, Piešťany, Bojnice, Bešeňová).



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



Slovakia is a country of summer and winter sports. It is traversed by more than 12 000 km of marked and well-kept footpaths or tracks for cross-country skiing.

For cyclists there are marked cycling routes, mainly in the regions of Podunajsko, Považie and in Tatras.



River rafting in the Slovak rivers is popular. The most attractive are the Dunajec and Hron rivers.

Horseback riding in various centres or sled dog championships in Donovaly only emphasise the diversity of sport offered in Slovakia.



Slovakia can easily be called a tourist paradise as far as the conditions for hiking and cycling are concerned. This diverse country where mountainous regions alternate with depressions provides an exceptionally varied palette of hiking and cycling routes for all age categories of tourists. Slovak and foreign tourists mainly visit the West Tatras, the High Tatras and the Belianske Tatras, the Low Tatras, the Malá Fatra Mts and the Veľká Fatra Mts which are covered with well-marked tourist footpaths.

The High Tatras rank among the most attractive regions in Slovakia with a wide offer of 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 a rough beauty of upland country.



Slovakia is mostly a mountainous country characterised by its diverse terrain. This, along with the inland climate, creates suitable conditions for skiing in Slovakia. The Tatras have possess the ideal natural conditions for winter sports in local centres since the end of 19th century. Skiing fans know especially the world famous centre Štrbské Pleso and its Dream Area with snowboarding,

downhill and cross-country trails and slopes.

More demanding skiers visit Tatranská Lomnica and take the ski lift to Skalnaté Pleso, where there is fantastic skiing until the end of May. Besides other well-known skiing resorts in the Tatras and the Fatra there also are several centres in lower locations equipped with machines that make artificial snow which allows for a wide range of skiing opportunities.





Natural lakes and artificial water reservoirs in various Slovak regions have become more and more popular among visitors. Among them the water reservoirs prevail.



All those who like to stay by the riverside during summer are familiar with Sĺňava near Piešťany, Orava dam, Liptovská Mara dam, Domaša dam or Zemplínska Šírava dam. The hydroelectric system of Gabčíkovo on the Danube is becoming more and more attractive for relaxation and it is a popular tourist destination for Slovak and foreign visitors.



The artificial water reservoirs in Štiavnické vrchy Mts, called “tajchy” which were used for mining during the Middle Ages are also interesting for tourists. The great number of thermal swimming pools situated in south-western part of Slovakia (Senec, Galanta, Dunajská Streda, Oravice, Bešeňová, Liptovský Mikuláš and Poprad) were formed by geothermal holes.



Slovakia is extremely rich in mineral waters, many with healing effects (among the most popular are Santovka, Slatina, Fatra, Salvator and others).

There are more than 1200 mineral water springs and there is hardly an area without them. Many of the mineral springs are thermal (with the temperature over 20 °C) with balneological effects.



A number of health spas and recreational facilities was 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, Sliach, Kováčová, Dudince, Bardejovské Kúpele, Vyšné Ružbachy etc. are also very popular.



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



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