Austria

Location

Austria is located in Central Europe, north of Italy and Slovenia. Austria has a total of 83,858 square kilometers, land is 82,738 square kilometers, and water is 1,120 square kilometers. Lying between 47° N and 20° N latitude, and between 13° E and 20° E longitudes, Austria is bordered by Czech Republic 362 km, Germany 784 km, Hungary 366 km, Italy 430 km, Liechtenstein 35 km, Slovakia 91 km, Slovenia 330 km, and Switzerland 164 km. Austria is also a land locked country.

Geography

Austria is a small, predominantly mountainous country located in south-central Europe. It is twice the size of Switzerland and slightly smaller than the State of Maine. Most of the country is Alpine or sub-Alpine, that have heavily wooded mountains and hills cut by valleys of fast-flowing rivers. There are plains around Vienna and Danube Valley in northeast Austria and the lowland areas contain most of the population. Danube, the principal river flows east through northern provinces and Vienna. There is only 20 percent of arable land, 29 percent pasture, 44 percent forest, and 7 percent barren. The country measures almost 600 kilometers in length, extending from Lake Constance on the Austrian-Swiss border in the west to the Neusiedler Sea on the Austrian-Hungarian border in the east. The contrast between these two lakes is that one is located in the Alps and the other is a typical steppe lake on the western most
fringe of the Hungarian Plain, which illustrates the diversity of Austria’s landscape. The two best-known features of the Austrian landscape are the Alps and the Danube River. The Danube has its source in southwestern Germany and flows through Austria before emptying into the Black Sea. It is the only major European river that flows eastward. Its importance as an inland waterway has been enhanced by the completion in 1992 of the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal in Bavaria, which connects the Rhine and Main rivers with the Danube and makes possible barge traffic from the North Sea to the Black Sea. The Alps cover 62 percent of the country’s total area. Three major Alpine ranges are the Northern Alps, Central Alps, and Southern Alps, and they run west to east through Austria. The Central Alps, which consist largely of a granite base, are the largest and highest ranges in Austria. The Central Alps run from Tirol to approximately the Styria-Lower Austria border and include areas that are permanently glaciated in the Ötzal Alps on the TiroleanItalian border and the High Tauern in eastern Tirol and Carinthia. The Northern Alps, which run from Vorarlberg through Tirol into Salzburg along the German border and through Upper Austria and Lower Austria toward Vienna, and the Southern Alps, on the Carinthia-Slovenia border, are predominantly limestone and dolomite.

Climate

The Alps serve as a watershed for Europe’s three major kinds of systems that influence Austrian weather. The Atlantic maritime climate from the northwest is characterized by low-pressure fronts, mild air from the Gulf Stream, and precipitation. It has the greatest influence on the northern slopes of the Alps, the Northern Alpine Foreland, and the Danube Valley. The continental climate is characterized by low-pressure fronts with precipitation in the summer and high-pressure systems with cold
and dry air in the winter. It affects mainly eastern Austria. Few clouds and warm air
characterize Mediterranean high-pressure systems from the south, and they influence
the weather of the southern slopes of the Alps and that of the Southeastern Alpine
Foreland, making them the most temperate part of Austria. One peculiarity of the
Mediterranean weather systems is the föhn, a warm air mass that originates in the
African Sahara and moves north rapidly, periodically raising temperatures up to 10°C in
a short period of time. Many people respond to this rapid weather change with
headaches, irritability, and circulatory problems. During the winter, the rapid warming
that accompanies a föhn can thaw the snow cover in the Alps to such an extent that
avalanches occur.

History

After the fall of the Roman Empire, of which Austria was part, Bavarians and
Slavic Avars invaded the area. Charlemagne conquered the area in C.E. 788 and
encouraged colonization and Christianity. In 1252, Ottokar, King of Bohemia, gained
possession, only to lose the territories to Rudolf of Hapsburg in 1278. Thereafter, until
World War I, Austria's history was largely that of its ruling house, the Hapsburgs. Austria
was home of the Habsburgs, the continent's most influential and long-lasting dynasty.
Once the center of power for the large Austro-Hungarian Empire, Austria was reduced
to a small republic after its defeat in World War I. Following annexation by Nazi
Germany in 1938 and subsequent occupation by the victorious Allies, Austria's 1955
State Treaty declared the country "permanently neutral" as a condition of Soviet military
withdrawal. Neutrality, once ingrained as part of the Austrian cultural identity, has been
called into question since the Soviet collapse and Austria's increasingly prominent role
in European affairs. A prosperous country, Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and the euro monetary system in 1999.

**Important Holidays**

Important holidays in Austria include New Years Day-January 1, Epiphany-January 6, Easter Monday-April 16, Labour Day-May 1, Ascension Day-May 24, Whit Monday-June 4, Corpus Christi-June 14, Assumption-August 15, All Saints’ Day-November 1, Immaculate Conception-December 8, Christmas Day-December 25, National Holiday-October 26, St Stephen’s Day-December 26.

**Population**

In Austria, the principal ethnic majority are the Austrians who account for around 98% of the population and are of German origin. The principal ethnic minority groups in Austria are the Croats who account for 0.7% of the population, the Slovenes who count for 0.3% and others which include Magyars, Czechs and Slovaks. With the exception of the population of Vorarlberg and of a small part of Tirol, who are mainly descendants of the Alemannians, the Austrians are by origin a Bavarian people.

**Currency**

In Austria the official currency is the Euro divided into 100 cents.

**Education**

People the age 25 or over having obtained education through lower secondary education is 40.0 percent. The percentage of people with general secondary or
vocational education is up to 54.3%, people with higher education, 5.7 percent. Literacy of people age 15 or over is virtually 100 percent.

**Language**

The official language in Austria is German with 99% of the population speaking it, although different dialects are associated with class distinctions. German is the official language of Austria while the other 2 percent of the population speak languages other than German, chiefly Croatian, Slovenian, Czech, and Turkish. A number of Austrians speak another language as their first language. In the province of Burgenland, for example, about 24,500 persons speak Serbo-Croatian. Burgenland also has some people who speak Magyar. In Carinthia, about 20,000 people speak Slovenian. Small groups in Vienna speak either Czech or Slovak.

**Religion**

In Austria, about 78 percent of the population are of Roman Catholicism. Reformed Lutherans and various other Christian denominations account for 8 percent, Muslims make up 2 percent, and some are also Jewish. Those without a religion or whose faith is unknown constitute 12 percent of the population. Austria and the Pope have a concordat (agreement) under which the Roman Catholic Church in Austria receives financial support from the national government but Austrians have freedom of worship.

**Economy**
Austria with its well-developed market economy and high standard of living is closely tied to other EU economies, especially Germany's. Austria moved to further cut government spending and raise taxes to meet EMU deficit targets after facing unexpected difficulties in reducing the public deficit. To meet increased competition from both EU and Central European countries, Austria will need to emphasize knowledge-based sectors of the economy and continue to deregulate the service sector.

Trade

The major exports from Austria are chemical products, iron and steel, machinery, meat and dairy products, textiles, timber, and wood products. Some of their main trading partners are Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, the former USSR and the UK. The country also has deposits of crude oil, natural gas, salt, and uranium, and is rich in hydroelectric power. In recent years, service industries, including a large banking sector, have become important to Austria's economy, and they now employ more than half of the nation's workforce.

Food

Austrians love good food. Czech, German, or Hungarian cooking has influenced many of their dishes. Austrian food is similar to German food, but with Hungarian and Slav elements lingering from the days of the Empire. Most foods are meat and potatoes, but when you begin to tire of it, you can always liven things up with a spicy gulasch or a dish prepared Zigeuner-style. Popular side dishes in Austria include dumplings, noodles, and potatoes. The popular meats eaten in Austria include beef,
chicken, pork, sausage, and veal. An Austrian dish called Wiener schnitzel (breaded veal cutlet) has become a favorite in many countries.

Conclusion

Austria is a small country in central Europe famous for its beautiful mountain scenery. The towering Alps and their foothills stretch across the western, southern, and central parts of the country. Once the center of power for the large Austro-Hungarian Empire, Austria was reduced to a small republic after its defeat in World War I. Following annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938 and subsequent occupation by the victorious Allies, Austria's 1955 State Treaty declared the country "permanently neutral" as a condition of Soviet military withdrawal. A prosperous country, Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and the euro monetary system in 1999.

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