The Slovak Republic

(Slovenska Republika)

Location & Geography

The Slovak Republic encompasses 49.035 sq. km (18.933 sq. miles) in Central Europe (Basic). It is located between 47°N and 50°N latitude and 16°E and 23°E longitude, which is similar to the latitude of North Dakota. The central and northern areas of Slovakia are mountainous regions, with the Carpathian Mountains crossing through the area. Southern and eastern Slovakia is a lowland region, which is an important agricultural area. Slovakia shares 679 km of its border with Hungary, 597.5 km with Poland, 265 km with the Czech Republic, 127.2 km with Austria, and 98 km with Ukraine. The Danube River makes up one-third of the shared border with Hungary, from the capital, Bratislava, to the southwest. The Danube connects Slovakia with Vienna, the Rhine-Main channel, and harbors at the Black sea. The country is proud to boast the beauty of its mountains, valleys, lowlands, mountain ranges, and rivers and lakes high in the mountain ranges.

Climate

The Slovak Republic lies in a mild zone of continental climate, with distinct rotations of the seasons. The average daily temperature is 28° F in winter and 70° F in summer. January tends to be the coldest month with July and August being the warmest. On average, the snow is present up in the highest locations 130 days a year.

History

The people of Slovakia descended from the Slavic people who settled the Danube River basin in the 6th and 7th centuries B.C. Traditionally, the Slovak people were demoted to the peasant class and even after liberation they have had strong links to tilling the soil.

In 1918, the Slovaks formed Czechoslovakia with their neighbors, the closely related Czechs. Following the chaos of World War II, Czechoslovakia became a communist nation within Soviet-ruled Eastern Europe. Under communism, some industrialization was undertaken and today Slovak society includes both elements of folk traditions and modern society. Soviet influence collapsed in 1989 and Czechoslovakia was once again free. On January 1, 1993, the Slovaks and the Czechs agreed to separate peacefully.
Since then, the unity with the European Union is a high priority of the Slovak foreign policy. Mutual relations of Slovakia with the EU are based on the European Association Agreement that was signed on October 4, 1993 and came into force on February 1, 1995.

The Flag

The Slovak Republic adopted its official flag on September 1, 1992. It is composed of three equal horizontal bands of white (top), blue (middle), and red (bottom) superimposed with the Slovak emblem centered on the hoist side (Quick).

The official Slovak Republic emblem consists of the Cross of Lorraine atop 3 hills (blue) in a shield; the cross being white, centered on a background of red. The Cross of Lorraine is a Latin cross with a second, longer, horizontal bar intersecting the end of the vertical bar. It was employed by St. Cyril and Methodius during their campaigns to Christianize the people of the Danube. The three hills are said to represent the three ranges of the Carpathian basin: Small Tatras, High Tatras and Small Fatras. Accordingly, the emblem represents both the spiritual and geographic history of the Slovak people.

Important Dates

According to the Slovak Tourist Board, the national and public holidays in Slovakia include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1</td>
<td>New Year's Day, Establishment of the Slovak Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 6</td>
<td>(Three Magi, Orthodox Christmas)</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
<td>Good Friday</td>
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<td>April 16</td>
<td>Easter Monday</td>
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<td>May 1</td>
<td>May Day</td>
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<td>May 8</td>
<td>Victory Day - The End of the second World War</td>
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<td>July 5</td>
<td>The Holiday of St. Cyril and St. Methods</td>
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<td>August 29</td>
<td>The anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising</td>
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<td>September 1</td>
<td>The Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic</td>
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<td>September 15</td>
<td>Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>All Saints' Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 24</td>
<td>Christmas Eve</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 25</td>
<td>Christmas Day</td>
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Population

The population of Slovakia in 1999 was approximately 5.4 million people. Eighty-six percent of the population is of Slovak decent; ten percent is Hungarian, while the remaining four percent are a mix of Romany, Czech, Ruthenian, German, Polish, and Ukrainian background. The population density of the country is approximately 110 people per km² (285 people per sq. mi). Infant mortality rates for Slovakia are at 8.6 deaths per 1000 live births. This is 1.5 deaths worse than the United States, but a lot better than the Eastern Europe’s average of 14 deaths per 1000 live births. Fifty-seven percent of the Slovak Republic’s population lives in urban areas. This is a lot lower than Europe’s and the United States’ averages of seventy-three and seventy-five percent, respectively. The Slovak capital of Bratislava has a population of 452,288, which is less than two-thirds the population of Columbus, Ohio.

Currency

The official currency of the Slovak Republic is the Slovak Crown, or Slovenská koruna (SK). One SK equals 100 halier. Notes are in denominations of Sk 5000, 1000, 500, 100, 50 and 20, while coins are in denominations of Sk 10, 5, 2, 1 and halier 50, 20 and 10. As of July 2002, 1 USD = 44.47 SK and 1 EUR = 44.64 SKK.

Education

Many people in Slovakia enter into secondary school. From 1993-1997, enrollment for both men and women was in the 90th percentile; ninety-six percent of women were enrolled, while only ninety-two percent of men were enrolled.

The city of Kosice, alone, has 120 secondary vocational and apprentice training schools, with more than 35,000 students enrolled. Kosice also has three institutions of higher education, with greater than 16,000 student enrolled.

Language

Official language of the Slovak Republic is Slovak. Slightly fewer than 5 million people in Slovakia, and about half a million people outside the country, primarily in the United States and Canada, speak Slovak. Slovak belongs to the West Slavic branch of the Slavic Languages. It is divided into three dialect areas: west, central, and east. Slovak is written in the Latin alphabet with diacritics or diacritical marks, and it is most closely related to Czech, from which it has developed through most of its history. Slovak has preserved many of the basic Slavic word roots and sounds of Common Slavic, the original language from which all the Slavic languages
descended. Slovak developed as a national language in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, prompted by a rise in the Slovak people's awareness of their national identity and the accompanying need for education and literacy (Society).

**Religion**

Sixty percent of Slovakia is Roman Catholic. Other religions include Greek Catholic, Protestant of Augsburg confession, atheist, Orthodox, and Jewish.

**Agriculture**

The political transformations of 1989, after Soviet influence collapsed and brought new freedoms that have considerably widened the common outlook of the people, yet many of the cultural movements are still beginning. Consequently, a large part of the elderly population is still rural and dependent on agriculture.

Seventeen percent of the farmers in Slovakia are women, and 53% of those women are over the age of 50 years. In all, 50% of all farmers, both men and women, are over the age of 50 years. From the total group of farmers, 37% have had some form of secondary education, while 81% of these people have completed secondary education (30% of the total). Fourteen percent of Slovak farmers have had higher education in the form of college or university (Farm).

The Slovak Republic has 7215 farms total. Thirty-four percent of those farms are crop production only, while ten percent are animal production only, and more than half (55%) are both, crop & animal production. Sixty-two percent of the agricultural land in Slovakia is arable, while 37% is in pastures or meadows. The remaining land is in orchards or vineyards.

Slovakia has over 11.5 million poultry, 1.2 million hogs, 500 thousand cattle (beef and dairy), 280 thousand sheep, 17 thousand bee colonies, 6000 goats, and 5400 fur-bearing animals. Most interestingly are the amount of milk and honey production (compared to the number of animals) from November 2000 to August 2001:

- Sheep’s milk: 11,369,742 L
- Goat’s milk: 1,285,777 L
- Cow’s milk: 1,002,362 L
- Honey: 189,068 kg

**Trade**

The Slovak Republic carries out over half its trade (59.7%) with the European Union (EU). The main countries that it exports to within the EU are Germany, Austria, and Italy. Slovakia also exports a substantial amount to the Czech Republic. The country’s main exports are machinery and transport.
equipment (39.4%), intermediate manufactured goods (27.5%), miscellaneous manufactured goods (13%), and chemicals (8%).

Slovakia also gets over half of its imports from the EU (51.4%). The main countries that it receives imports from within the EU are Germany and Italy. Slovaks also import goods from the Czech Republic and Russia. The country’s main imports are similar to their exports; machinery and transport equipment (37.7%), intermediate manufactured goods (18%), fuels (13%), chemicals (11%), and miscellaneous manufactured goods (9.5%).

**Food**

Traditional Slovak eating and drinking habits date back to the old Slavic period influenced later by Hungarian, Austrian and German cooking. Slovak food is based on many different kinds of soups, gruels, boiled and stewed vegetables, roasted and smoked meats and dairy products. The style of cooking varies from region to region. Slovak specialties include salted and sweetened dishes made with flour, including dumplings. One such dish is the popular bryndzove halusky (small potato dumplings with sheep cheese).

Popular drinks include Slovak beer, wine and mineral waters. Borovicka (strong gin) and slivovica (plum brandy) are particular specialties with wine from the Tokaj region and sparkling wine from the Bratislava region.

**Landmarks**

Many believe that the Slovak Republic’s caves and chasms enhance the magic and beauty of the country. In Slovakia there are about four thousand registered caves with twelve of them being open to the public. The best-known ones have been declared as national monuments.

All of the caves that are open to the public offer excellent conditions for the cure of respiratory disorders and allergies. The basic procedure of speleotherapy is a stay in the cave accompanied with activities increasing the effect of the aerosol.

The twelve caves open to the public include:

- The Belianska Cave 1,135 m are accessible to the public
- The Bystrianska Cave 490 m of cave spaces are open to the public serving for speleotherapeutic procedures
- The Demänovská Cave of Liberty 1800 m are accessible to the public serving for speleotherapeutic procedures
The Demänovská Ice Cave 650 m are accessible to the public

The Dobšinská Ice Cave 1,232 m are accessible to the public. Total volume of ice is 110,132 cubic meters with maximum thickness of 26.5 m.

The Domica Cave 1,315 m are accessible to the public, including a 140 m boat trip

The Driny Cave 410m are accessible to the public

The Gombasecká Cave 285 m are accessible to the public serving for speleotherapeutic procedures

The Harmanecká Cave 720 m are accessible to the public

The Jasovská Cave 550 m are accessible to the public

The Ochtinská Aragonite Cave 300 m are accessible to the public

The Važecká Cave 235 m area accessible to the public

Along with the Slovak caves, come the beauty of the mountain ranges. The Tatras, like their more famous cousins, the Alps, have their particular charm for every season of the year. In some places, snow survives throughout the whole year.

With the mountains and caves, come the valleys and rivers. Slovakia is a country with a extraordinary number of curative springs. It also has extensive deposits of high-quality healing peat and mud. For a long time people have taken advantage of these resources to cure a variety of diseases and ailments. In this small country there are 1160 registered mineral and thermal springs!

There are also sites to see within the cities. In the Slovak Republic, there are so many places to visit, it would be impossible to name them all.

Megan Burgess