

## 5 The Czech Republic

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### Location, borders

The Czech Republic is located in Central Europe. It shares borders with Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Austria. It is a land-locked country, which means there is no border with the sea. The country is made up of three parts, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, and fourteen regions.

### Geography, climate

The Czech Republic contains mountains (mostly along the borders), valleys and rolling hills. Southern Bohemia is famous for its many man-made ponds. The longest river in the Czech Republic is the Vltava (430 km), which flows into the Elbe (Labe), a major Central European river. The country has a temperate climate, with warm summers that are sometimes hot, and cold winters with snow.

### Population

There are a little over 10 million people living in the Czech Republic and they are mainly Czech. The top three immigrant groups are Ukrainians, Slovaks and Vietnamese.

### Political system

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with two houses: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The president is the head of state and is in charge of appointing the prime minister, who is the head of government. The president serves a five-year term; deputies serve a four-year term. The president is chosen directly by the people.

### Largest cities

The country's capital and largest city is Prague, located in Bohemia; the second largest city is Brno, located in Moravia. Other important cities include Ostrava, České Budějovice, Olomouc and Plzeň.

### Places of interest

Popular places for tourists, besides Prague, include Český Krumlov, Kutná Hora, the spa town of Karlovy Vary, medieval castles like Karlštejn and the stalactite caves in the Moravian Karst. People like to go skiing in the Krkonoše Mountains (which include the highest Czech mountain, Sněžka, 1,602 m) and biking and hiking in the Šumava Mountains.

### Economy

The Czech economy is primarily export-based, with industries like automotive, high-tech, glass and ceramic production, metal and electronics. Its main agricultural products are potatoes, wheat and hops.

## History

- In ancient times, the area of today's CR was inhabited by celtic tribes.
- In the 6<sup>th</sup> century Slavic tribes came from the East and in the 9<sup>th</sup> formed the Great Moravian Empire.
- Until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the native Přemyslid dynasty ruled the Czech lands.
- Under Charles IV Prague became the political and cultural centre of Europe.
- In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Hussite movement replaced the years of prosperity.
- During the reign of Habsburgs and especially after the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 (Bohemian protestant army defeated by Catholic armies), the Czech lands experienced a long period of political, religious, and cultural oppression.
- After the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of WWI, the Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed on October 29, 1918.
- During WWII, the country, occupied by Nazi Germany, was called the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.
- After the war, the communists took power in 1948 which was the beginning of a 40 year period of totalitarian regime.
- The dramatic events of November 1989, known as Velvet Revolution, brought democracy back to Czechoslovakia.
- The Czech Republic, as it is now, came into existence in 1993 after the peaceful split-up of the former Czechoslovakia.
- In 1999, the Czech Republic became a member of NATO and in 2004, we entered the European Union.

## Famous personalities

**Charles IV** was the king who established the New Town of Prague and founded the University of Prague.

**Jan Amos Comenius** was the father of modern education who advocated practical education.

**Antonín Dvořák** was a composer who became famous for his symphony "From the New World", which he wrote in New York.

**Karel Čapek** was a writer some of whose works reflected his anti-Nazi attitude and who gave the world the word "robot".

Professor **Jaroslav Heyrovský**, was a scientist awarded the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1959 for the invention and development of the polarographic method.

**Jaroslav Seifert** was a poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984.

**Václav Havel** was a playwright and a former president who significantly contributed to the end of communism.