

SLOVAKIA

GEOGRAPHY

The largest mountain range in Slovakia is the Low Tatras with the length of about 80km and the average width of 30km. The highest peaks here are Dumbier (2 043m) and Chopok (2 024m). It is a favourite tourist destination in all seasons. The oldest cave in Europe – Demänovská Ice Cave is also situated here.

Next mountain range, the High Tatras, is located in the northern part of Slovakia, on the border with Poland. In 1949 it was proclaimed as the first national park in Slovakia, called TANAP and in 1993 as a biosphere reservation by UNESCO. The highest peak here is Gerlach (2 654m). The most famous lake here is Štrbske Pleso (tarn).

National park the Slovak Raj (paradise) is located in the eastern Slovakia and is famous with the abundance of rock valleys, streams and amazing waterfalls which can be reached just by ladders. 436 caves can be found here. The most visited cave is Dobšinska Ice Cave. Not big territory of Slovakia contains almost 5 000 caves, which were discovered, however, only 11 of them are open to public. The longest one is Demänovska Ice Cave (35km). The most popular ice cave in the world is Dobšinska Ice Cave which has been on the list of World Natural Heritage since 2000. The average temperature here is about – 1°C.

HISTORY

Slovak history was complicated. From 833 till 907 Slovakia was a part of Great Moravian Empire. Then the territory was connected to Hungary and later it was a part of Austria-Hungary Monarchy. In 1918, after the monarchy break-up, Slovaks together with Czechs established their common state – the Czechoslovak Republic. On 1st January 1993 Slovaks separated and formed their own state – the Slovak Republic. Slovaks have common history with Hungarians, Austrians and Czechs, similar language with Czechs and Poles, as our languages belong to the group of western Slavonic languages.

Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, gained its present name in 1919. Before 1918 it was called in Slovak language Prešporok, in Hungarian Pozsony, in German Pressburg. Pozsony is still used in Hungarian language and in German they use either Pressburg or Bratislava. The city is also known as the Beauty on the Danube.

CULTURE

Traditional Slovak meal is bryndzové halušky (dumplings and sheep cheese). Dumplings are made of flour and grated potatoes, then boiled and mixed with creamed sheep cheese and fried pieces of bacon on the top. Slovaks try to keep traditions of their ancestors. Easter is a typical traditional holiday. A pagan custom to celebrate spring is connected with a Christian Crucifixion of Jesus. Girls decorate Easter eggs, boys wander from door to door to pour water on girls to make them healthy and to whip them with willow whips to make them beautiful. Easter and chocolate eggs are a kind of reward for them.

A Slovak national hero was Juraj Janosik who was a forest robbers' leader and who, according to legends, used to rob the rich and to award the poor. He protected poor women and children. Janosik was a brave hero. Bojnice Castle is one of the most romantic and most visited cultural and historical sightseeing in central Europe. It offers unconventional activities for the visitors, e.g. night sightseeing, or annual International Festival of Ghosts and Monsters in May. There is a beautiful zoo next to the castle.

SPORT

The most attractive sports for Slovaks are football, ice-hockey and tennis. Slovak sportsmen are the most successful in water slalom, shooting and speed canoeing.

Martina Moravcová is the most successful Slovak swimmer with 63 medals. She has broken 3 world records.

Peter Sagan is the most famous Slovak cyclist, one of the best world cyclists nowadays. He took part in Tour de France twice and won a green T-shirt for a winner.

Dominik Hrbatý, Daniela Hantuchová and Dominika Cibulková are brilliant tennis players.

Football fans definitely know such names as Marek Hamšík (FC Napoli), Martin Škrteľ (FC Liverpool) and Miroslav Stoch (FC Fenerbahçe), who are famous football players playing abroad.

According to the most popular sport Slovakia is well known as an Ice-hockey republic. The most important success was reached by the Slovak national team in 2002, when they became World Champions.

LITERATURE

Slovak folk fairytales belong to the oldest, most popular and most translated literature in Slovakia. Since 18th century they have been collected and recorded by many writers. The most famous are collections made by Pavol Dobšinský and Božena Němcová. We can find there all kinds of folk fairytales: **scary fairytales** with demons (Curse Wood) – originally meant for adult readers; **charming fairytales** with miraculous creatures (A Girl with Golden Hair); **animal fairytales** with animal heroes (Wandering Egg); **realistic fairytales** with poor ordinary people as heroes (About Three Coins).