

Welcome to Slovakia

Acknowledgement

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Other resources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovakia>

<http://portal.statistics.sk>

<http://www.slovakiasite.com/>

<http://www.slovakia.travel>

<http://www.sacr.sk>

<http://www.slovakia.culturalprofiles.net>

<http://www.slovak-republic.org>

<http://slovake.eu/en/>

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Our country will become your home during your exchange experience. We would like to provide you with some facts and give you suggestions and advice to make your stay over here rewarding and successful. We welcome you into the worldwide AFS community and sincerely hope you will have an interesting and challenging experience.

The Slovak Republic

Basic Facts

The Slovak Republic /short form Slovakia/ is a state in Central Europe. It has a population of over five million and an area of about 49,000 square kilometres /19,000 sq mi/. Slovakia is a landlocked country bordered by the Czech Republic and Austria to the west, Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east and Hungary to the south. The largest city is the capital, Bratislava, and the second largest is Košice. Slovakia is a member state of the European Union, NATO, United Nations, OECD and WTO among others. The official language is Slovak, a member of the Slavic language family.



Location: Central Europe
Capital City: Bratislava
Government: Parliamentary republic
Language: Slovak
Currency: Euro

Population: 5,4 million
Area: 49,035 sq km
Population density: 110 inhabitants/km²
Time Zone: CET
Country Code: +421



National flag and emblem of the Slovak Republic

Population

Slovakia has approximately 5.4 million inhabitants. The majority of the population is ethnically Slovak 85.8%, Hungarians are the largest ethnic minority 8.5%, other ethnic groups, include Roma, Czechs, Rusyns or Ukrainians and others. The capital of the Slovak Republic is Bratislava, with 500,000 inhabitants.

Slovaks abroad



According to the estimates of Slovak embassies and expatriate associations, there were approximately 2,016,000 Slovaks living abroad in 2001. These people identify themselves as having Slovak nationality, speak Slovak but usually have citizenship of the country in which they live.

The largest Slovak community is in the USA where there are estimated to be between 821,000 and 1.2 million. Most of these are descendants of Slovak emigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries. A number of famous personalities of Slovak origin spent a certain part of their life in the USA or were born to Slovak parents there. These include an inventor and wireless telecommunications pioneer Jozef Murgaš (1864-1929), who was the first person to transmit the spoken word, and a parachute inventor Štefan Banic (1870-1941). Eugene Cernan (1934), the last person to walk on the moon, came from a family of Czech and Slovak emigrants, famous Hollywood actor Steve McQueen (1930-1980) had Slovak roots and the parents of Pop Art king Andy Warhol (1928-1987) were of Rusyn nationality and came from the village of Miková in eastern Slovakia.

Other significant Slovak communities are in Canada, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Poland and other countries.

Language

The official language is Slovak, a member of the Slavic language family. Hungarian is widely spoken in the southern regions and Rusyn is used in some parts of the Northeast. A large proportion of the population speaks English, but you will meet a lot of people who speak only Slovak. It will therefore be one of your first tasks to learn it. Although the language can be a bit difficult at the beginning, we know from our experience that within three months you will be able to speak it! Once you know it, you can understand easily other Slavonic languages such as Czech, Polish and some Russian.

Religion

Slovaks identify themselves as Roman Catholics 62%, as nonreligious or atheist 13%, as Protestant 6%, as Eastern Orthodox 3,8%. Generally about one third of church members regularly attend church services. The pre-World War II population of the country included an estimated 90,000 Jews /1.6% of the population/. After the genocidal policies of the Nazi era, only about 2,300 Jews remain today /0.04% of the population/.

Currency

Slovakia adopted the Euro currency on 1 January 2009 as the 16th member of the Eurozone. There are following coins and banknotes:

Coins: 1 euro, 2 euros, 1 cent, 2 cent, 5 cent, 10 cent, 20 cent, 50 cent

Banknotes: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 euros

International Time

The Slovak Republic is located in the same time zone as continental Western Europe and much of Eastern Europe (Central European Time, i. e. GMT + 1 hour). Summer time starts the last Saturday in March and ends in late September (GMT + 2 hours).

System of Government

Slovakia is a parliamentary democratic republic with a multi-party system. The Slovak head of state is the president, currently Ivan Gašparovič, elected by direct popular vote for a five-year term. Most executive power lies with the head of government, the prime minister -

currently Róbert Fico, who is usually the leader of the winning party, but he/she needs to form a majority coalition in the parliament. The prime minister is appointed by the president. The remainder of the Cabinet is appointed by the president on the recommendation of the prime minister.

Slovakia's highest legislative body is the 150 - seat National Council of the Slovak Republic. Delegates are elected for a four-year term on the basis of proportional representation. Slovakia's highest judicial body is the Constitutional Court of Slovakia, which rules on constitutional issues. The 13 members of this court are appointed by the president from a slate of candidates nominated by parliament.

Slovakia has been a member state of the European Union and NATO since 2004. As a member of the United Nations (since 1993), Slovakia was, on October 10, 2005, elected to a two-year term on the UN Security Council from 2006 to 2007. Slovakia is also a member of WTO, OECD, OSCE, and other international organizations.

Economy

The Slovak economy is considered an advanced economy that was transformed from a centrally planned economy to a market-driven economy. Major privatizations are nearly complete, the banking sector is almost completely in private hands, and foreign investment has risen.

Although Slovakia's GDP comes mainly from the tertiary (services) sector, the industrial sector also plays an important role within its economy. The main industry sectors are car manufacturing and electrical engineering. Since 2007, Slovakia has been the world's largest producer of cars per capita. There are currently three automobile assembly plants: Volkswagen's in Bratislava, PSA Peugeot Citroen's in Trnava and Kia Motors' Žilina Plant.

Shopping

Most shops are open from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm (there may be a lunch break of 1 to 2 hours in smaller ones) from Monday to Friday. On Saturday, the usual opening hours are from 8.00 am to 12.00 am. Department stores are open until 7.00 or 8 pm every day. Some private shops open on Sunday. Shops and markets have fixed prices; it is not possible to bargain anywhere.

Transport

The Slovak Republic has a good system of public transport inside and also outside the cities. In all the bigger cities there is a working system of trams, buses or trolleys. Public transport follows fixed time tables. If you live nearby a bigger city and you are supposed to travel every morning by bus or train to school, please be always sure you come to the bus station on time! There is a student discount for transport (also on the intercity trains and buses) and you can ask your family to help you to orient yourself in this system. All the transport timetables are to be found on the internet.



Weather and Climate

Slovakia climate is moderate because Slovakia lies in northern moderate climatic zone. Geographical position in continental Europe, wind circulation from west and altitude are the key factors that influence its climate. There are four seasons in Slovakia.

Seasons in Slovakia

Spring, summer, autumn and winter are four seasons of the year peculiar to Slovakia climate, each lasting for three months.

Spring in Slovakia starts around 21st March and is at early stages characterized by chilly mornings, with average temperatures 9° C in April, 14° C in May and 17° C in June. Surely you need to count with changeable weather in spring.

Shifting into summer around 22nd June, this season of the year tends to be very hot, with tropical days, temperatures well above 30° C during the day, and warm nights. The hottest month is July and Slovakia summers can really earn heat wave, mainly in lowlands around Komárno, Hurbanovo or Štúrovo with 37° C.

Summers proceed to autumns on 23rd September and might be rainy, windy or shiny. Temperatures in autumn drop from 14° C in September to 3° C in November.

Final season of the year in Slovakia, winter, comes on 21st December. You can find snow especially in the mountains. In the lowlands, winters are often without or very little snow. Temperatures in winter go down to -5° C, extremely to -10° C or even more. In the mountains, winter is usually cold and snowy. Slovakia climate is featuring climatic inversions in the mountains when cold air drops down as fog down to the valleys while the tops of the surrounding mountain ranges bathe in sunshine.

However, some regularities in weather and climate are well tracked and many are known as proverbs, such as Medard's drop. For it drops forty days, it marks the rainy period in the end of June and the beginning of July. Next regularity is Indian summer that everyone enjoys by the end of September and beginning of October.

History

Pre - Historical Settlements and First Inhabitants in Slovakia Territory

The oldest signs of human settlement in today's territory of Slovakia date back to the Palaeolithic era. Historically relevant sources confirm that the Celts settled in our territory as early as at the end of the 3rd century B.C. The Celts were skilful craftsmen, mostly smiths and potters who used a potter's wheel and minted coins. The coins found in our area bore the inscriptions '*Biatec*' and '*Nonnos*'. The Celts built fortified settlements known as oppida. The remnants of oppida were found in Bratislava and Plavecký Štvrtok.

Later on the Celts were forced out by the Romans who penetrated inland to the western and southern Slovakia. The inscription '*Laugaritio*' on a rock in Trenčín is the most famous memorial from this era (179-180 A.D.). It commemorates the presence of the imperial army of the Caesar Marcus Aurelius and the Roman suppression of the Germanic tribes. The Romans also built their military camps in Devin, Rusovce (Gerulata), and Iža near Komárno (Brigetio). Clay dice, a very popular game among Roman soldiers, were found at this location.

Slavs (4th - 7th Century)

Slavic tribes first migrated into the Carpathian Basin during the Migration Period starting at the end of the 4th century. In the 6th century the Avars threatened the Slavs. The first political formation to be established in our territory was Samo's Empire (623-658 A.D.). Samo, a rich Frankish merchant, defeated a Frankish king Dagobert and thus established the Slavs' independence from the Frankish Empire. Samo's death marked the end of his realm. At the end of the 8th century the army of the Frankish king Charlemagne finally defeated the Avars.

Great Moravian Empire (833 - 907 A.D.)

The Great Moravian Empire was formed as a result of the unification of the Nitra and Moravian Principalities in 833 A.D. Established in the 8th century, Principality of Nitra was ruled by Prince Pribina at that time. In 828 A.D. Pribina authorized consecration of a Christian church in Nitra, the very first Christian



church in our territory. During this era the Frankish Empire was the most dangerous enemy of Great Moravia.

To resist Frankish influence in Great Moravia, Rastislav sought help from the Byzantine Emperor Michael III. Consequently, in 863 A.D. Michael III. commissioned the two missionaries - Cyril and Methodius to evangelize the people of Great Moravia. Cyril and Methodius spread Christianity in our territory by translating liturgical books and the Holy Bible (the translation was approved by the Pope Hadrian II. in 868 A.D.) into Old Church Slavonic. The brothers also laid the foundations of the Glagolitic alphabet and founded monasteries and schools.

The reign of Prince Svatopluk (870-894 A.D.) marks the most significant period of the Great Moravian Empire. Svatopluk consolidated the Great Moravian Empire and expanded its territory by annexing Bohemia, Silesia, Lusatia and Pannonia in 890. After his death in 894, King Svatopluk was succeeded by his son Mojmir II. In 895 Bohemia seceded from Great Moravia. Internal struggle for power among nobility and the frequent attacks of the Old Hungarians and the Franks threatened the existence of Great Moravia. Ultimately, the empire began to decline. Svatopluk II, the last monarch of Great Moravia, died in the battle against Hungarians near Tata in 906. Next year the Old Hungarians defeated the Bavarian army and settled in Pannonia. There is no mention of the Great Moravian Empire after the year of 907.

Slovakia as Part of Hungary (1000 - 1918)

After the fall of the Great Moravian Empire, Slovak territory had been annexed to the Hungarian Kingdom founded by Saint Stephen in 1000. King Stephen I. became an appanage Prince in 995. In 12th century the Diocese of Nitra (originally established in 880) had been re-established, and the first Catholic monastery in Slovak territory was built on the Zobor Hill in Nitra (the originals of the letters dating back to 1111-1113 had been found and preserved). The Benedictine monks Svorad Andrew and Benedict who lived at Zobor were canonized as the first Hungarian saints in 1083. In 1150 the first German colonists came to Slovakia and formed the settlements temporarily exempted from rents and taxes (lehota) in the sparsely inhabited regions of Spis, Banska Stiavnica, and Gelnica. The experienced Germans brought advanced mining techniques to the region and replaced surface mining with more efficient under ground mining. The second half of the 13th century marks the period of the internal struggle for power among magnates. Among the barons, the most prominent was Matthew Csak of Trencin. Since he took control of the majority of Slovakia, Csak was nicknamed "The Lord of the Vah River and Tatra Mountains."

The oldest written record of the word Slovak (slovensky) dates back to Matthew Csak's era (1294) and can be found in the letter of a church dignitary from Klastor under Zniev. At this period the original timber castles had been rebuilt and transformed into the stronger stone castles. Castles made with stone were harder to invade. They were built especially to withstand the attacks of the Tartars moving into our territory from the Asian Steppe in 1294. After the last member of the Arpad Dynasty Andrew III. died in 1301, various local dynasties ruled in Hungary. For example, King Louis I. of Anjou supported the development of towns, mining, and trade. In 1381 he granted the officials representing Slovaks in the municipal council of Zilina the same privileges as those granted to the local Germans (Privilegium pro Slavis). In 15th century Matthias Corvinus, the wealthiest magnate in the Hungarian Empire, succeeded Louis I. Corvinus temporarily defeated the Turks, reorganized the country, and granted privileges especially to the Vlach shepherds or "Wallachians" who migrated into Slovakia from Romania (our language had its domesticated vocabulary enriched by the Wallachian words such as bryndza-sheep's cheese, valaska-a light, thin axe, and baca-shepherd). He also patronized the mining towns. Importantly, in 1467 Matthias Corvinus founded the first university in our territory called Academia Istropolitana with its seat in Bratislava.

Turks in Slovakia (1526 - early 1700s)

When the Turks defeated the Hungarians in the Battle of Mohacs in 1526, the Royal Hungarian Army suffered enormous casualties. Even King Louis II of Hungary and Bohemia was killed in an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the battlefield. Ferdinand I of Habsburg succeeded Louis II in November 1526. The 150-year Turkish occupation of the territories in today's Slovakia began in 1530. Sadly, Turks plundered and destroyed the area, seized the cities, villages, and castles, and enslaved the native population. Nearly 80,000 Slovaks were abducted to become slaves in the Ottoman Empire. To protect towns and villages against Turkish savagery, the fire watchtowers were built in order to notify of the approaching Turkish invaders. Because of the Turkish raids, our ancestors were frequently forced to evacuate, thus continuously changing demographics of the area. Finally, Polish King Jan III Sobieski and Charles V, the Duke of Lorraine conquered the Turkish army led by Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa at the Battle of Vienna in 1683. The Treaty of Karlowitz signed in 1699 officially ended the Turkish occupation of Hungary.

Habsburg Empire (16th - 18th Century)

The Habsburg Dynasty began their reign in our territory in 1526. In the 15th and the 16th century a new philosophical orientation called humanism flourished in the Habsburg Empire. As a result, municipal schools, grammar schools, colleges, and academies were established. For example, in 1635 a Jesuit University opened in Trnava. Another university was founded in Kosice in 1660. Since the Catholic Habsburgs forced the Protestant residents and the nobility to convert to Catholicism, many anti-Habsburg uprisings arose as a reaction against recatholicization in the 16th and the 17th century. At the beginning of the 18th century, the Habsburgs finally defeated the Turks and centralized the power of the Dynasty.

In 1713 Emperor Charles VI issued the Pragmatic Sanction, the document that guaranteed the indivisibility of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his daughter's right to succeed him. Matej Bel (1684-1749), one of the greatest Slovak scholars of the 18th century, lived during this era. Born in Ocova, Bel was nicknamed the Great Ornament of Hungary for his work as polymath, historian, philosopher, and the member of the British Royal Society. His most famous work entitled *Notitia Hungariae Novae Historico Geographica* served as a guide to historical and geographical features in the Hungarian territory. Another famous Slovak scholar, a cartographer Samuel Mikoviny supplied Bel's project with a set of comprehensive maps.

Civil Reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II

The centralization of the Habsburg power reached its peak during the reign of Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and her son Joseph II (1780-1790). Both rulers reformed the school and judicial system as well as the economy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Empress Maria Theresa patronized manufactures in Slovakia and introduced new crops such as potatoes, corn, and tobacco. In the judicial system, she abolished the use of torture and the witch courts. Next, Maria Theresa instituted a peasant-friendly *urbarium* (or *urbar*)-a set of administrative rules and customs affecting relations between lord and peasant. In 1763 she opened the Mining Academy in Banská Štiavnica, the very first University in this field in Hungary. Joseph II succeeded his mother and continued with the civil reforms. In 1781 he issued the Edict of Tolerance, which proclaimed religious freedom to Protestants and later Jews. In 1785 Joseph II abolished serfdom (state of subjugation to a land owner) and reinforced the compulsory education.



Battle of Austerlitz (1805)

At the end of the 18th century, a French Emperor Napoleon I and the Napoleonic Wars had influenced much of the history of Europe. In the victorious Battle of Austerlitz (also known as

the Battle of the Three Emperors) in Moravia in December 1805, Napoleon defeated the Austro-Russian army and signed the Treaty of Pressburg with the Habsburgs in today's Bratislava. The Habsburgs were finally defeated in the Napoleonic War of 1809. During the same war the French bombardment reduced the Devin Castle to ruins.

Slovak National Aspirations (18th - 19th Century), Codification of the Slovak Language

The 18th century is in Slovak history characterized by the initial language codification efforts. An early pioneer of the Slovak language, linguist Anton Bernolák is credited with the first but unsuccessful attempt to codify national language in 1787. Only in 1843, an outstanding linguist Ľudovít Štúr and his group succeeded in codification of Slovak. The new codification was based on the "purest" central Slovak dialect. The Štúr group had also prepared and presented a national and political program called the Demands of the Slovak Nation on May 11, 1848. In the Demands the group requested equal status of Slovaks and Hungarians within Hungary. Štúr and his followers also joined in the Revolution of 1848. They organized



an army of volunteers and proclaimed the independence from the Hungarian government on September 19, 1848. On this day, during the gathering of Slovaks in Myjava, the utmost Slovak political body called the Slovak National Council was formed. Despite Štúr's emancipation initiatives and the wide national support, the group's requests had not been granted. In 1849 the Hungarians suffered defeat from Austrian troops in the Battle of Világos, but the Slovak national issues had not been solved. This period is called Magyarisation—an attempt to form a unified Hungarian nation.

After the fall of Bach Absolutism in 1861, a group of Slovak patriots led by the Catholic bishop Štefan Moyzes presented a petition called the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation directly to Emperor Franz Joseph. In the document Slovaks requested an autonomous Slovak territory (Okolie). On August 4, 1863 a cultural and educational institution-Matica slovenska was founded in Martin. Matica served as a defender of the Slovak national heritage, promoted edification, the amateur theater, and published calendars and Slovak books. The first Slovak grammar schools opened in Veľká Revúca (1862), Turčiansky Svätý Martin (1867), and Kľačany under Zniev (1869). Sadly, the Hungarian government closed all three grammar schools in 1874, as it did Matica slovenska in 1875.

The Austro - Hungarian Empire

In 1867 the Habsburg Monarchy was transformed into a dual state – Austria-Hungary. The newly founded states shared the ruler, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of War. Remaining political and economical departments were governed independently. Regional differences between Austria and Hungary deepened, as the 60% of Hungarian territories was mostly agricultural. For Slovaks the dual system meant nothing else than a period of national oppression and discrimination. The situation worsened in 1907 when the Apponyi's Educational Law imposed compulsory spoken and written Hungarian language on pupils in grades 1-4. Unfavorable political and socio-economic situation forced many Slovaks to emigrate and look for a job abroad. Approximately half a million of Slovaks emigrated before 1914. At the beginning of the 20th century, Slovak political aspirations revived. The most active was the Slovak National Party and then the Slovak People's Party led by Andrej Hlinka since 1913. In 1914 the Austro-Hungarian Empire had to face a serious event-World War I.

Slovakia and the World War I

The "Great War" grouped the rival countries into two major alliances: the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey) and the Entente Powers (England, France, and Russia). After the war began in 1914, Slovak politicians proclaimed so-called passive politics; nevertheless, Slovak soldiers were drafted to fight for the Emperor on the side of the Central

Powers. Heaviest casualties were reported at the Eastern Front in Halic and in southern Italy on Piava River, where almost 70, 000 Slovaks died in the battle. Fortunately, the war did not spread to the Slovak territories even though the Russian troops had seized the east of Slovakia (Bardejov, Zborov, Svidnik, Snina, Humenne, Medzilaborce) at the end of the year 1914. The Carpathian battles took place in winter 1914-1915. Slovak soldiers were humble but brave, modest and compliant; therefore, they were often deployed to the most hostile territories of the frontlines. They suffered from starvation and cold weather and often fell prey to bullying army officers.

Any anti-war protest had been suppressed. Many Slovak nationals who opposed the War faced imprisonment for their beliefs or were constantly monitored by the police. Women stayed at home and worked in fields or in factories. Some merchants sold merchandise for high prices; corrupted public notaries accepted bribes in return for a promise that a soldier would be temporarily released from the battle line. Thus a new social group of nouveau riche formed in Slovakia.

At that time Slovak activists abroad were determined to end Hungarian supremacy and create a centralized state of the Czechs and Slovaks. Thus on May 30, 1918 the Pittsburg Agreement was signed in the United States (agreement signed by the Czech and Slovak associations about the autonomy of Slovakia in the newly formed Czechoslovakia). The Czech and Slovak resistance movement abroad had its seat in France. Its main representatives and founders were T. G. Masaryk and Slovak M. R. Stefanik – a politician, an astronomer, and a pilot who organized the Czechoslovak legions (voluntary troops of almost 100,000 soldiers serving abroad but especially in Russia).



Slovakia as Part of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918 - 1938)

Czechoslovakia appeared on the map of Europe as an independent country after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. The newly formed state was founded on October 28, 1918 in Prague. Two days later, on October 30, 1918, Slovaks agreed to join the Czechs in a unified state in the Declaration of Turciansky Svätý Martin. The Declaration was promulgated at the meeting of the Slovak National Council. The Czechoslovak Republic became a parliamentary democracy. The first Czechoslovak president T.G. Masaryk was succeeded by Eduard Benes in 1935.

At the beginning both the Czechs and Slovaks seemed to benefit from the unification process. Later the differences in economic development proved the Czech territories to be culturally and economically more advanced. The integrity of Slovakia had been discussed at the after-war Paris Conference in 1919 - 1920 as it was jeopardized by Hungarian requisitions. The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 established the borders of Slovakia (Hungary pledged to honor the boundaries of Slovakia and its neighbouring countries). A special ministry of Slovak affairs was established in Prague with Vavro Srobar as its head. The regional government (Slovak Province) created in Slovakia in 1928 was recognized as an independent administrative unit without self-governing authorities. Sadly, the ideology of Czechoslovakism became the doctrine of the new republic (ideology of one Czechoslovak nation with two branches-Czech and Slovak, one Czechoslovak language, the dominant role of the Czechs, and the idea of centralized economy managed from Prague). The Slovak People's Party led by Andrej Hlinka and later the Slovak National Party both vigorously campaigned for the long-expected autonomy of Slovakia. In the years 1930-1935 the economic crisis in Slovakia prompted increased unemployment rates, demonstrations, and strikes organized by resentful public. Many left the country to find a job abroad, especially in the U.S.A., France, and Canada.

Despite unfavorable economic and social development in Slovakia, cultural affairs of our nation flourished. In 1919 the Matica slovenska (the first national cultural institution established in 1863 and closed by force in 1895) reopened and the Comenius University was

founded in Bratislava. In 1920 the Slovak National Theatre was built in Bratislava and the Slovak Radio launched the first daily broadcast in 1926. In 1921 two American Slovaks, brothers Jaroslav and Daniel Siakel produced the first Slovak movie Janosik. A prominent Czech director Karol Plicka directed several documentaries about Slovakia. His feature "The Singing Land" was awarded at the Venice Movie Festival in 1932. Among the most notable authors of Slovak literature from this period were Jozef Ciger-Hronsky, Jan Smrek, or Ludo Ondrejov. Painters and illustrators Martin Benka and Ludovit Fulla represented Slovak Modernism in art.

Slovakia and the World War II

On September 29, 1938 signatories of Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and France met in Munich to approve the annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland (border areas in the west Czechoslovakia inhabited by ethnic Germans) to Germany (Munich Agreement). On 2th of November 1938 the representatives of Italy and Germany met in Vienna to alter the frontiers between Slovakia and Hungary. As a result, in the Vienna Arbitral Award, Slovakia agreed to cede to Hungary the area of 10, 390 km with 854, 217 inhabitants. Also, Poland acquired the territory of Javorina and a part of Kysuce while Germany occupied Devin and Petrzalka area.

Nevertheless, politically weakened Slovakia pressed forward and on October 6, 1938 declared its autonomy within Czechoslovakia. The Prague parliament legally acknowledged Slovak autonomy on November 18, 1938. Dr. Jozef Tiso became the first Prime Minister of the autonomous government. The Slovak Assembly was established with Martin Sokol as the first Speaker.

In November 1938 Emil Hacha was elected the President of Czechoslovakia. Disputes arose between the Slovak and Czechoslovak government representatives and culminated upon the arrival of the Czech troops and police forces in Slovakia on March 10, 1938. The President dismissed the Prime Minister Tiso and the Czechoslovak government began persecutions and arrests of the Slovak officials. At the same time, Germany pressed Slovak leaders to proclaim independence from the Czechs. Hitler summoned Jozef Tiso and Ferdinand Durcansky to Vienna where he demanded Slovakia's independence. Compliant with Hitler's ultimatum, the Slovak parliament declared Slovak independence on March 14, 1939. Jozef Tiso was restored to his office as prime minister of now independent Slovakia. In fact though, Slovakia became a German satellite state. On July 21, 1939 the Slovak parliament approved the Slovak Constitution as well as the new name for the country-Slovak Republic. Dr. Jozef Tiso became the first Slovak president on October 26, 1939. Imprisoned regime opponents continued to criticize the Slovak and German politics; however, prisoners were not charged with treason. As a German protected state, Slovakia went to war with the Soviet Union on June 23, 1941. Slovak soldiers were deployed to the Eastern Front in Ukraine and Russia, reaching as far as the Caucasus Mountains and the Sea of Azov. Finally, the Slovak armed forces were withdrawn from the Eastern Front in 1943.

In the same year the government issued the Jewish Codex. According to the Codex, all Jews, except those with a special exemption, were placed in labour camps in Novaky, Sered, and Vyhne. Between March and October 1942, almost 70, 000 Jews were transported from Slovakia to the concentration camps. About 67, 000 of them did not survive. In the midst of the wartime, Slovakia's economy and cultural development prospered. Railroads, family houses, factories, even power plants on the Vah River, and the Orava water reservoir (Orava Dam) had been constructed. A new spa resort Sliac was also built near Zvolen city. Mandatory labour law eliminated unemployment. Germans controlled Slovak Arms industry. Guns and ammunition were produced and shipped to the battle lines from Povazska Bystrica and Nova Dubnica. Summer Time or Daylight saving Time was also implemented in Slovakia in 1940s.

Slovak National Uprising (1944)

At the end of the year 1943, Slovak resistance movement against Germany grew strong. A special military centre conducted the Slovak National Uprising on August 29, 1944 with the mission to liberate our territories from Germans and to reestablish Czechoslovakia. The town of Banska Bystrica was the centre of the Slovak National Uprising. Soldiers fighting in the Uprising were called partisans-Slovak citizens who joined the division of the Slovak Army opposing Germany's aggression. Approximately 60, 000 soldiers of the Slovak Army and 18, 000 partisans (many of them non-Slovaks) fought collectively against German oppressors. Initially partisans succeeded in the mountainous terrains; however, with no heavy weapons they were soon defeated by 45, 000 German troops who used cannons, tanks, and better strategy. The most difficult battles took place near Strecno, Hronska Dubrava, Telgart, and in the Rajec valley. Partisans made the use of the airports Tri Duby (Three Oaks) and Zolna. Help from the Soviet Union was eventually limited to the supplies of weapons, ammunition, and medicine. During the Slovak National Uprising both the Soviet Red Army and the First Independent Czechoslovak Regiment entered Slovakia's territory. The Red Army opened an offensive at the Dukla pass but only on October 6, 1944, after 80 days of heavy combats were they able to begin liberating operations in Slovakia. Germans, however, still occupied Slovakia. On October 27, 1944 the Slovak National Uprising was doomed as the German Army occupied the town of Banska Bystrica. Germans harshly punished Slovak resistance against the Reich. Those civilians who helped partisans were shot to death and their villages burnt to ashes. Today the villages Kaliste, Klak, Ostry Grun, Skycov or Tokajik remind us of the war atrocities.

On April 4, 1945 the Red Army marched into Bratislava and liberated the town from the German aggressors. Again Slovakia became a part of reestablished Czechoslovakia. Pressured by the allied armies, defeated Germany capitulated on May 8, 1945. The Second World War in Europe officially ended.

Slovakia After World War II

On April 5, 1945 the Kosice Government Program reconstituted the Czechoslovak Republic as a common state of two equal nations. The Slovak National Council became Slovakia's supreme body of state power. A centralized state model was rooted in the Constitution from May 9, 1945. On October 24, 1945 President Benes issued the Decrees about nationalization of key national industries and banks. Consequently, totalitarian regime was established shortly after the Communists under the leadership of Klement Gottwald seized the political power on February 25, 1948. Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia was characterized by merciless persecutions of the real or fabricated enemies of the regime, collectively called the Class Enemy. In the politically motivated trials, 232 prisoners received death penalty and 178 were prosecuted. The Communist "witch hunt" for the "enemy within" did not spare Church dignitaries either.

Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

The 1960 constitutional law declared socialism the economic system of the newly renamed Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Alexander Dubcek who advocated a reform programme called "Socialism With Human Face" led the new reformist wing in the leading Communist Party.

Occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact Troops

The attempt to liberate the country in the spirit of Dubcek's socialism was soon dismissed by the invasion of five member states of the Warsaw Pact (USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria). The armed forces entered our country on August 21, 1968 (approximately 500,000 soldiers, 2000 cannons, 800 air force planes, 6000 tanks, and special air force units). Reproachful public across the country greeted Warsaw Pact troops with demonstrations and arguments about absurdity of the Soviet invasion. By the end of September 1968, the Warsaw Pact soldiers killed a total of 94 people. Ultimately, the only

successful outcome of the political change initiatives was the constitutional law of federation from October 27, 1968. Political changes also affected the leadership of the dominant Communist Party when all reform-supporting representatives were removed from their offices and expelled from the Communist Party. On April 17, 1969, Gustav Husak became a first secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In the 1970s the process of Normalization began, and Husak was elected the President of Czechoslovakia in 1975. As a result of Normalization, more than 10, 000 citizens emigrated. To support the Slovaks living abroad, the Slovak World Congress was founded in the United States in 1970. Similarly, the Catholic Church opened the Slovak Institute of St. Cyril and Methodius in Rome.

Velvet Revolution (1989)

Various environmental and religious movements arose during the 1980s as a result of the political changes in the USSR under the leadership of Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachyov. On March 25, 1988, the "Candle Manifestation" at Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava was quickly suppressed when the police used truncheons and water canons to disperse the peaceful protesters who demanded religious freedom. In November 1989 the police again brutally repressed student manifestations in Bratislava and in Prague: on November 16, 1989 the Slovak university students demanded civil rights and civil liberties as well as the release of political prisoners and one day later, on November 17, 1989 the police clashed with the protesters in Prague. The November events triggered a series of events that foreshadowed the end of the totalitarian regime and the fall of the "Iron Curtain" dividing the East from the West. Universities went on strike and soon the actors, artists, and dissidents followed. The opposition in the Czech Republic formed the Civic Forum while the Public Against Violence was created in Slovakia. On November 27, 1989 a nationwide general strike was held, and two days later, on November 29, 1989, President Gustav Husak signed the law that abolished the Article 4 of the constitution about the supremacy of the Communist Party in the society. A playwright and dissident Vaclav Havel became a new president of Czechoslovakia. At the beginning of December 1989, the borders between the East and the West opened and the infamous "Iron Curtain" fell.

Czech and Slovak Federative Republic

In 1990 the Federal Assembly acknowledged the name of the country as the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. In the first democratic elections held on June 8-9, 1990, the Public Against Violence emerged a clear winner in Slovakia. The pressing need for a change in economy resulted in economic reforms and privatization. On July 17, 1992, the Slovak National Council declared the independence of the Slovak Republic (Declaration of the Independence of the Slovak Republic). On September 1, 1992, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic was adopted, and on November 25, 1992 the Federal Assembly passed a constitutional act that officially terminated the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.

Slovak Republic as an Independent State

The Slovak Republic was officially recognized as an independent state on January 1, 1993 with Michal Kovac as its president. On January 19, 1993 Slovakia became a United Nations member state and on June 30, 1993 it joined the European Council. President Rudolf Suster succeeded Michal Kovac in 1999. The current president of the Slovak Republic is Ivan Gasparovic.

One of the most important events in history of an independent Slovakia was the Pope John Paul's II visit to our country in 1995.

Slovakia is a member of many international organizations - the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, UNESCO, and European Council. On May 1, 1004 Slovak Republic joined the European Union. It has been the NATO member since March 29, 2004. On December 21, 2007 the Slovak Republic became a party to the Schengen Agreement.

Geography

Slovak Republic is a central European country with vast forest areas extending on two fifths of its territory. Its total area of 18,932 sq mi (49,035 sq km) does not rank Slovakia among large countries. Slovakian westernmost and easternmost points are separated only by 266.5 mi (429 km). Slovak Republic is bordered on the north by Poland; on the south by Hungary; on the west by Czech Republic and its eastern border is formed by Ukraine.



The country features a diverse mixture of lowlands and mountain ranges interrupted by picturesque valleys. The surface elevation rises from the south to the north from the Podunajská nížina (the largest lowland at 10,000 km²) and the Záhorská nížina in the south west and the Východoslovenská nížina in the east. The majority of the territory of Slovakia is covered by the Western Carpathian Mountains, which stretch from the south west along the western and northern border all the way to the east. They

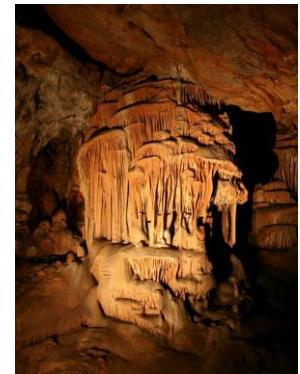
include the Small Carpathians, White Carpathians, Javorníky, Malá and Velká Fatra and the Low and High Tatras.

The High Tatras form the smallest European high mountain range (260 km² in Slovakia and 81 km² in Poland). They are characterised by broken relief and an extremely high concentration of natural beauty. In comparison with the Alps, they lack glaciers. Admirers fondly refer to them as the 'miniature Alps'. The highest peak of the High Tatras and in the entire country is Gerlachovský štít (2,655 metres above sea level). The highest situated municipality in Slovakia - Štrbské Pleso (1,350 metres above sea level) is also located in the High Tatras.

The lowest point of the country is Klin nad Bodrogom in eastern Slovakia (94 metres above sea level), on the border with Hungary.

Some mountain ranges (Štiavnické vrchy, Vtáčnik, Poľana in central Slovakia, Vihorlat and Slanské vrchy in the east of the country) are of volcanic origin. Slovakia's more than 1,200 caves are hidden in the mountains and foothills. Many of them have gorgeous karst formations, and 14 caves are open to the general public.

The Demänovský jaskynný systém (system of caves) in the Low Tatras, that stretches more than 30 kilometres, is the longest cave. Demänovská ľadová jaskyňa and Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa have ice formations. Ochtinská aragonitová jaskyňa (aragonite cave) is truly unique; it is one of only three aragonite caves in the world open to the general public. It constitutes a part of the caves of Slovenský kras (the Slovak Carst), which forms one unit with the caves of the Aggtelek Carst in Hungary and are enlisted in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. The Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa (cave) is also on this list.



More than 40 per cent of the territory of Slovakia is situated between the heights of 300 metres up to 750 metres above sea level and another approximately 40 per cent is situated in a height up to 300 metres above sea level. Almost half of the territory of Slovakia (24,300 km²) is made up of agricultural soil, 14,300 km² are arable soil. The following crops are cultivated here: grain, fodder crops, sugar beet, vegetables and fruits. Forests rich in game

cover approximately 20,000 km², i.e., approximately 40 per cent of the territory. Their overall area has grown by one tenth in the past 45 years.



Nine national parks are situated especially in the mountain and foothill areas. The Tatra National Park (738 km²) and the National Park Low Tatras (728 km²) are the largest. The Bukovské Virgin Forest in the eastern Carpathians, which is part of the Poloniny National Park, is also on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. (Another four Slovak locations of cultural significance are also found on this list). In addition to national parks, there are 35 protected areas in Slovakia.

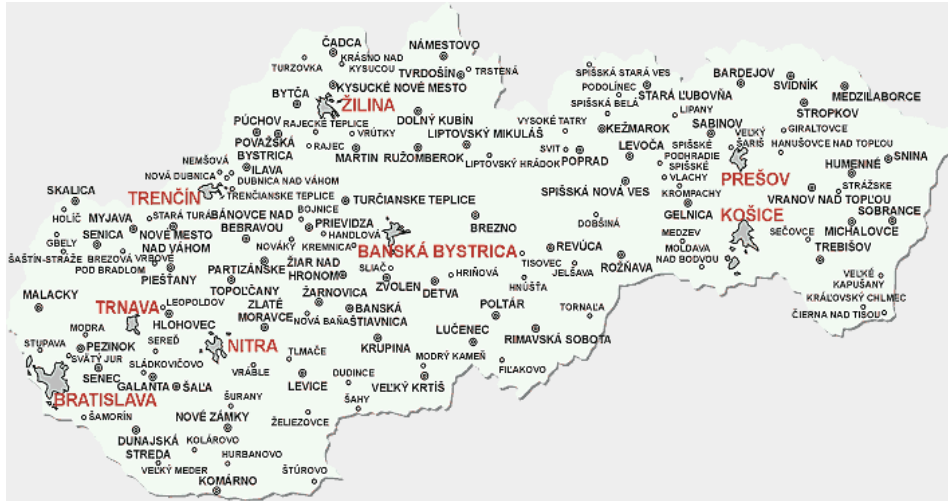
Northern Slovakia forms the border of the European watershed between the Baltic and the Black Sea. The vast majority of water is drained by the Slovak rivers into the Danube River, the largest Central European River, which flows through 153 kilometres of southwest Slovakia and for the most part forms the borderline with Hungary. The eastern Slovak streams supply the Tisza River in Hungarian territory, which disembogues into the Danube in Serbia. The Váh (406 km), the Hron (298 km) and the Nitra (193 km) are the longest Slovak rivers.

Most of Slovakia's lakes are of glacial origin. The majority (up to 105) are situated in the High Tatras; Great Hincovo Pleso with an area of 20.08 hectares and a depth of 53 metres is the largest one. Lakes can also be found in the volcanic mountain ranges; Morské oko (Sea Eye) in the Vihorlat mountain range is the largest one. Its area is 13 hectares and is 26 metres at its deepest.

Several artificial bodies used for energy production and water-management were created in the second half of the 20th century in Slovakia. The Liptovská Mara (360 million cubic metres of water), Oravská priehrada (346 million cubic metres of water) and Zemplínska Šírava (334 million cubic metres of water) reservoirs are the largest ones. The tank systems of various areas (so called tajchy), built from the 16th to the 18th centuries in the surroundings of Banská Štiavnica for the operation of mining equipment, are a rarity among the artificial lakes.

There are more than one thousand springs of mineral and thermal mineral waters with various compositions throughout the country. Several of them are therapeutic and have been used for these purposes for several centuries. Seventeen locations with therapeutic waters, high quality medical care and international clientele are officially acknowledged by the state as spa facilities. Some of the most significant are found in the towns of Piešťany, Trenčianske Teplice, Rajecké Teplice and Bardejov. Another four locations are official climatic spas.

Slovak cities



Slovakia is administratively divided into eight self-governing regions. Bratislava is the capital. Almost 60 per cent of the population live in 138 towns and cities. The rest live in 2,883 municipalities.



Do you know that...

- Slovakia **the second country in the middle Europe with the largest amount of forests** is after Austria? Almost 40% of its territory is covered with forest, while in Austria it is only 6% more.
- Bratislava and Vienna are **two closest located capitals in Europe**? There is only fewer than 60 km between them.
- According to some sources, the **European geographical central point** is considered to be near the Roman - Catholic church of St. John the Baptist above the village of Kremnické Bane? You can read it out from an information table/panel situated on a boulder near the church.
- "Bryndza" stands for a traditional Slovak speciality made of sheep cheese? Within the European Union it can only be produced in Slovakia and is distributed under the name „**Slovenská bryndza**“. It is made of non-pasteurized sheep milk from the sheep kept in the middle, northern and eastern Slovakia.

- One of the most popular sports in Slovakia is **ice-hockey**? The golden medal from the World Championship in Goeteborg, Sweden, in 2002, as well as many Slovaks playing in the world best teams prove that Slovakia is a country of real professionals. You can find out more about the history and the present of this sport in Slovakia by visiting the „Hockey Hall of Fame“ in the Bratislava castle.
- That **the inventor of the parachute** is the Slovak Štefan Banič? He lived in the years 1870 - 1941 and worked also in the USA. Exactly there in 1914 he tested his invention in front of the patent committee by jumping from a high building. The parachute later belonged to the standard equipment of the US Army during World War I.

People and Manners

Should you take your shoes off or not when visiting friends? Should you say hello to people in lifts? These might not seem the most obvious things to ask about when considering dos and don'ts in your own country, but of course things which you don't even think about at home can be a big issue elsewhere. Here is a list of the most common pitfalls to be aware of.

Greetings

One of the things you'll immediately notice in the Slovak Republic is that people say hello and goodbye to complete strangers in various situations, and if you come from an English-speaking country this can take a little getting used to. For example, if you enter or leave a shop you should say Dobrý deň (Good day) or Dovidenia (Goodbye) respectively. Obviously in larger shops such as hypermarkets you don't need to greet people as you enter, but you should certainly acknowledge the person at the counter. The same goes for lifts, and also compartments in trains. In the mornings when you come to school, don't forget to greet the teachers you meet on the corridors.

The idea behind all this is that you've acknowledged somebody's presence in an enclosed space, and it's quite polite when you think about it. Although it will feel strange at the beginning, soon it becomes a reflex, and when you go back to your home country you'll find you'll have to stop yourself doing it automatically when entering a shop, lift etc.

When it comes to physical contact you'll notice that Slovaks tend to shake hands a lot, but usually not much more than this. Shaking hands is a standard form of greeting. It's also usual when saying goodbye.

There are two types of The informal one friends and family ráno/Dobrý deň/Dobrý evening) you say to other authorities.



greeting – formal and informal. Ahoj/Čau (Hello) you say to your members. The formal one Dobré veče (Good morning/ afternoon/ unknown people, teachers and

The footwear question

You should take off your outdoor shoes when entering a Slovak flat or house. The same goes for when entering a school. Usually at school there is a special place called „šatňa“ where you change your outdoor shoes for slippers and hang your coat.

This special habit is important especially during winter, when the boots we wear can be dirty from snow and mud.

Your Slovak host family will have rows of indoor footwear arranged near the front door or in a box for shoes called botník. The first space at the entrance door is called predsieň and it is used to change shoes and hang coats.

Sniffing

Sniffing is considered extremely bad manners, and so people blow their noses and carry tissues at all times. It is normal to blow one's nose in public places. People consider it much more polite than sniffing.

Punctuality

When you are meeting a friend it is quite common to come 5 or 10 minutes late, not more. You have to be very punctual when meeting an older person or when going to school. If you arrive late to school, it is sometimes marked as an absence or you will be not allowed to come inside till the break starts! Punctuality should also be observed when arriving at official events.

Food

Slovak cuisine is unique. True Slovak food and recipes are really only available in Slovakia itself, all other versions are not really authentic. Slovak cuisine was greatly influenced by the food of two neighbouring countries - Hungary and Austria and to add to the spice of life, the dishes vary from one region to the next. Typical Slovak dishes are rather heavy and do not include enough vegetables and fruit. Nowadays the situation is slowly changing for the better.

Raňajky (breakfast) is generally eaten around 7 am depending on family habits. Most often the mother prepares it for everybody or you take a snack by yourself. We regularly eat bread with jam, cheese or ham and tea. During the school day there is usually a longer break around 10 o'clock when most students have a snack. The host mother will prepare it for you or you will do so yourself.

Obed (lunch) is served at school during week days; you eat with your schoolmates. Don't expect a lot of vegetables or fruits - the meals are mainly composed of meat with sauce and potatoes, rice, pasta or dumplings. Together with the main meal you will have soup and dessert. During the weekends it is usually the mother who prepares lunch for all family members (the children often help her) and they all eat together. If you take the initiative from time to time and offer to cook something from your local cuisine, they will be more than glad! The Slovaks are usually quite open to trying new recipes.

Večera (dinner) can also be a main meal similar to lunch. Sometimes the family doesn't have a "big meal", but only bread with cheese or ham. Dinner is typically eaten between 6 and 7 o'clock, and is often a unique opportunity to meet all the family members and talk. Take advantage of this and try to be there even if you are not hungry.

The Slovak dishes use items such as pork, poultry, cabbage, wheat and potato flour, cheese from cows and sheep, potatoes, onions and garlic. Although rice does not grow in Slovakia, it is widely-used and incorporated in Slovak homes and restaurants. Beans, corn on the cob, lentils, parsley, carrots and other vegetables are often used to create soup dishes and other dishes in all Slovakia. Fruit like apples, plums, apricots, peaches and cherries are offered as a side dish alongside the main meal in Slovakia.

The Slovak national meal is bryndzové halušky, which means for the Slovaks the same as sushi for the Japanese or pizza for the Italians. This Slovak national meal consists of dumplings made of potato dough mixed with a special kind of soft and salty sheep curd. Fried bacon chopped in tiny pieces is added to the ready meal, which makes it especially



tasty. The traditional beverage to accompany the meal is sour milk or whey. One can especially enjoy bryndzové halušky in a typical Slovak “koliba” restaurant or “salaš”. Some other unique cheese product from Slaš are: parenica, oštiepok and korbáčik.

Among the traditional domestic dishes are various meals prepared of potatoes such as Zemiakové placky - potato pancakes fried in oil with garlic and flour, Lokše - potato pancake, Granadír - pasta with potato. Popular dish is also Vyprážený syr - Fried cheese - cheese fried in bread crumbs, or Vyprážený rezeň - Wiener schnitzel.

A good Slovak dinner consists of a soup - kapustnica (made of cabbage), garlic (in some places it is served in a bread loaf), a bean soup with a frankfurter or the beef or chicken consommé.

There are many sweet dishes served as a main course, too: Pancakes, Dolky - smaller and thicker variety of pancake Ryzový náčyp - sweet baked rise cake, Zemlovka - white bread baked with fruit and eggs, Parene buchty - steamed dumplings filled with jam with sweet topping, Siroké rezance - pasta, Perky - Jam-filled pasta with a sweet topping, Sisky - fried dumplings

Traditional desserts are **pastries of risen dough** filled with marmalade, curd, nuts or poppy seeds. Štedrák is the typical Christmas pastry and in Shrovetide the sweet aroma of šišky with marmalade hovers around. From the Slovak region of Záhorie comes an interesting pastry called Skalický trdelník in shape of a roll with a hole inside. Wine or beer is usually accompanied by **salted cookies** (kapustník, pagáč).



Typical Slovak soft beverage is Vinea, made from grape juice with no aromatic or synthetic colouring additives, stabilized by pasteurization and Kofola,

traditional cola drink. Slovakia is rich in mineral water springs. There are a lot of mineral water springs in Slovakia. Bottled mineral water is sold in different bottle sizes; available sparkling or non sparkling mineral water. Mineral water is a popular soft drink in Slovakia.

Coffee is also a very popular drink in Slovakia. Slovak people drink different types of coffee including Turkish style coffee, Nescafé, espresso or cappuccino. Drinking coffee is also a cultural event. Slovak people go out for coffee just as they go out for beer.

Vietnamese

Vietnamese immigrants began settling in the former Czechoslovakia during the Communist period, when they were invited as guest workers by the Czechoslovak government. Migration was encouraged by the Vietnamese authorities, with the intention that the migrants would return with skills and training.

Following the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia, many Vietnamese as well as other migrants from the post-communist countries decided to remain in the country rather than return home. This first generation of immigrants has traditionally made a living as vendors in street markets or stalls. In recent years, however, a significant number have moved towards establishing their own businesses and integrated more broadly into society, similar to the experience of other overseas Vietnamese in Western countries. The small business sector still remains the key economic domain of first-generation Vietnamese people in the Slovak Republic.

Generally, it is very hard for Slovaks to recognize the different Asian nationalities. People from East and Southeast Asia (Thailand, Japan, China and Vietnam) all look similar to many Slovaks, as contact with these nations is rare. Don't be thus surprised and get insulted that people you meet will not be able to recognize where you are from if you are from an Asian country. It might be the same that people in your country cannot recognize from which country European people come from. As the result, they might presume you are Vietnamese, because it is the only nation we are in close contact with. The relation between Slovaks and Vietnamese is slowly improving, as many people go shopping to Vietnamese shops for their good quality of fruits and vegetable and very convenient opening hours. Most Slovaks respect Vietnamese. However, there still can be cases when Vietnamese are laughed at, especially because of their different Slovak accent and constant smile. Keep in mind that those people might not have any contacts with people from other countries at all that is why they laugh at such things openly on the street without realizing that it might insult someone.

Slovak character



Slovak people can be often perceived as "cold" at first. However, when you get to know them closer, you discover they are very open in sharing their feelings and thoughts with their friends and have very warm relationship with their closest friends and relatives. As we are also very open about our negative emotions and you might think from this that Slovaks as negativistic. The simple reason is perhaps that in your country you are not used to share negative emotions with people about you.

This approach is present also in education – if you don't like something you say it (the same goes for parents as children). Sometimes, to speak only about the positive is perceived as hypocrisy, because life is not always only positive. It can be difficult, but try to be open in your emotions! For the family it is very important to receive feedback from you. If you don't share it with them they may think that you are keeping your distance.

The Slovaks are not very self-confident. It is difficult for us to talk about our qualities and success. We are too modest to do that; always mindful that there may be somebody who is better than us. On the other hand we like very much to celebrate the success of others (closest friends and relatives).

Visitors at home

Most families like to receive visitors. However, it is usually an activity which is well planned in advance by the family. It is not very common to bring your friends home when the parents don't know about that. Slovak families are used to keep their privacy, so normally "a visit" means hours of cleaning, shopping and preparing food – don't let your host parents become nervous about unexpected visitors. Don't forget to consult the visits of your guests with the family.

Your experience

As you will spend more time in the Slovak Republic, you will observe many differences in custom and practice. Be sure to pay attention to these differences, and don't be afraid to ask questions. The more attention you pay to the way the things are done, the more you will learn about the Slovak culture, and the more successfully you will be able to adapt to Slovak way of living.

Traditions and national public holidays

- **1.1. New Year (public holiday)**

Day of the Establishment of the Slovak Republic. In 1993 after the decision of political leaders, Czechoslovakia split into Czech Republic and Slovakia, but there was no conflict between the two regions. Since then, Slovakia as an independent and democratic state has a new flag with all its national symbols.

- **6.1. Epiphany(public holiday)**

Epiphany used to be the ending of Christmas time. The customs connected to this day show how the old Slavonic customs, enriched by the elements of the Roman culture, overlap with Christian rites.

Among the best known customs is the tradition of the boys, dressed in long white shirts with crowns on their heads, going round the houses. They perform **the Epiphany play** - a paraphrase of the New Testament story telling how the Magi came to visit the baby Jesus Christ.

Another typical element is **koleda** (the carol), when the priest visits houses with a procession and writes the last two figures of the date and the initials of the Magi - G.M.B. standing for Gaspar, Melcher, Balthazar above the door.

- **Fašiangy, Carnival**

Fašiangy is the period of balls, dances, and parades that lasts from the end of Christmas season to the beginning of Lent, 40 days before Easter. At this time cities, towns, villages, schools, and other institutions hold masquerade balls. On Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, it is a tradition to bury a contrabass. This ceremony symbolizes the end of festivities. Dances, weddings, and other festivities will resume after Easter.

- **Burning of Morena (two weeks before Easter)**

This custom has its roots in the pre-Christian era people believed that the nature is controlled by supernatural forces whose activities could be influenced. The changing of the seasons was also associated with these forces.

Morena symbolised the winter and so when people wanted the spring to come, they had to kill drown her in a stream or burn her. She was presented as an effigy made of straw clothed in womens dress. Young girls carried her singing towards a stream. When they arrived at the bank,

Morena was undressed, set on fire and thrown into the waters of the defrosting stream.



when

her,

- **Easter - Good Friday and Easter Monday (public holiday)**

Easter is the most significant Christian holiday. Because it is a moveable holiday, its date changes every year. Christians begin Easter celebration on Holy Thursday. Good Friday is a public holiday in Slovakia. While many people usually do not go to work, stores and supermarkets are usually open. On Good Friday, the day of abstinence, Christians commemorate the death of Jesus Christ. Then on Easter Sunday then celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; however, not only Christians celebrate Easter. Easter preparations begin days before Easter. To be ready for the feast, people bake pastries, cookies, and do extensive grocery shopping. Easter dinner menu is always festive: potato salad with mayonnaise, cooked ham, cold cuts, and sandwiches are served on Easter Sunday as well as on Easter Monday. Cookies and pastries cannot be excluded from the Easter menu.

“Oblievačka” (water pouring) is a typical Easter Monday custom in Slovakia. The character of oblievačka slightly varies from region to region. On this day men visit their female relatives and friends and pour water on them or spray them with perfume, and whip them gently with special whips made of braided willow rods. According to tradition, pouring water on women will guarantee their beauty and good health throughout the year. Recently oblievačka and šibačka (whipping) have not been as intense as they used to be in the past decades. In many regions, water buckets have been replaced with perfumes, a small syringe filled with water, a water cup, or a water pistol. However, in some villages you may still see young men, sometimes riding on the horses or dressed in traditional folk costumes, who come with rattles and braided whips decorated with colorful ribbons. They may take females out of the houses and douse them with a bucket or buckets filled with cold water. During this tradition men may sing songs and play the accordion. After oblievačka and šibačka, women reward men with sweets, fruit, money, or painted Easter eggs. Easter eggs or kraslice are quite popular in Slovak tradition. Kraslice are painted, dyed, or otherwise decorated blown eggs. Many decorate kraslice at home or buy them at market or at the craft store. While it is not required to give Easter eggs to visiting males on Easter Monday, only a few men will leave the house without a drink or small refreshment.

- **1.5. Labor Day (public holiday)**

It was declared as a public holiday after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1919. Celebrations are to honour the spirit of the fight against unemployment and deterioration of the status quo for workers. In 1933 – 1938 the celebrations also reflected a protest against fascism and war.

In general, the month of May is considered to be the time of love and new life. The May verdure used to be the symbol of energy and good growth. The most important place among plants belonged to the tree which in these circumstances was called the maypole. The maypole was usually put up by a young man for the girl he loved. The custom has been preserved till nowadays, though it is modified a little. Usually only one decorated tree is put up in the middle of the village or the main square.

- **8.5. Freedom from Fascism (public holiday)**

Celebration of the end of WWII in Europe.

- **Mother's Day**

Mother's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday of May. Towns and villages host cultural events with the shows performed by children or different artists.

- **1.6. Children's Day**

On June 1 Slovaks celebrate the Children's Day. Regular classes are typically not held for students; instead, the schools entertain children with contests, theatre shows, or sports activities, and reward them with treats. Cities, villages, shopping centre, and parks also organize various activities for children on this day.

- **Midsummer Night's Bonfires (23rd – 24th June night)**

The Midsummer Day is the longest day of the year. Fire, especially bonfire, belonged among the basic elements of the solstice customs and the adults as well as the young went singing and dancing around it.

On this day, people picked medicinal herbs and they looked for treasures with the help of the so called fern flower which was to blossom during the Midsummer Night.

Most attention was paid to fire. One of the traditions was making huge bonfires on a place clearly seen from the village, launching fire wheels, tossing burning torches, singing, dancing and jumping over the bonfire.

- **5.7. Memory of St. Cyril and St. Methodius (public holiday)**
Brothers Cyril and Methodius compiled the Slavic alphabet and translated it into liturgical and biblical texts. They established several schools and training centers. One of the universities in Slovakia, in Trnava, is called Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda (University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius).
- **29.8. Slovak National Uprising –(public holiday)**
In 1944, it was the day when the Slovak National Uprising began. The uprising was organized by the Slovak resistance movement during World War 2. Its main goal was to defend the country against German occupation, but it was also an offense for the Jozef Tiso government.
- **1.9. (1992) Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (public holiday)**
The constitution of (future) independent Slovakia has been adopted in Bratislava.
- **15.9. Day of Blessed Virgin Mary, patron saint of Slovakia (public holiday)**
It is celebrated by Slovaks and the Catholic Church. In 1727, Pope Benedict XIII declared Our Lady of Sorrows to be respected by the Church and its members as a Patron of Slovakia and later in 1966 was declared by Pope Paul VI as the main Patron.
- **1.11. All Saints' Day (public holiday)**
It is a holiday of the Roman Catholic Church where there is a feast for the impossibility of celebrating the saints every day. Therefore, Pope Gregory III, and later Pope Gregory IV, declared 1st of November as a holiday for the consecration of the Roman Pantheon into the Christian church, as a dedication to all the saints. Cemeteries are visited on or around this day.
- **17.11. Day of democracy and freedom (public holiday)**
On November 17, 1939, a student demonstration against the Nazi occupation was organized, during which one student, Jan Opletal, was dead. Right after that, universities were closed and Nazis persecuted and executed more students. In 1989, a students' memorial gathering of this incident was permitted by the communist authorities and this event turned into an open anti-communist demonstration on the National Avenue in Prague, which was the beginning of the Velvet Revolution. It is one the most important days in modern Slovak history. It symbolizes the beginning of the radical transformation in each of the spheres of Slovak society.
- **6.12. Saint Nicholas Day**
On St. Nicholas Day volunteers dress up in a red or white bishop's robe similar to the one of Santa Claus and give the goody bags to children in schools, cultural centre, or in churches. At night parents stuff their children's shoes and boots with goodybags filled with sweets or just give it to them and tell them the treats came from St. Nicholas. On this day, children in



Pre-schools, Kindergartens, and elementary schools participate in song singing and poetry recitals.

- **13.12. Lucia Day**

Lucy - in Slovak "Lucia" (13th December), in contradiction with the Christian tradition, was presented in the folk tales as the greatest of witches. People believed that they could see witches on this day.

Foretelling of the future and various love wishes were also popular. According to the best-known of them, girls prepared 13 pieces of paper. They wrote different male names on twelve of them while the thirteenth one was left blank. The pieces of paper were then folded and every day one of them was burnt. The one before the last one was burnt on Christmas Eve in the morning and the last one was opened on the same day in the evening. The name on the last piece of paper was to be the name of the future husband. The girl, whose last piece of paper was blank, was not to be married the following year.

The most typical custom associated with this day is marching of Lucias, i.e. disguised women, in some regions also men. The most frequent clothing of a Lucy is a white dress or a white blanket.

- **24.12. Christmas Day and Evening**

Christmas is a significant holiday in Slovakia and its celebration is accompanied by many regional traditions. Cities, towns, villages, and stores boast in beautiful Christmas decorations, Christmas trees, and Christmas lights weeks before Christmas. Decorated store windows draw customers and invite them to do Christmas shopping. A few days before Christmas, cities and towns hold Christmas markets where you can buy traditional Christmas wafers, drinks such as mead, Christmas ornaments, knickknacks, and various homemade products. Houses and apartments are decorated with real or artificial Christmas trees and Christmas decorations. People can buy real Christmas trees such as fir, spruce, or pine trees at local Christmas markets. People start decorating Christmas trees with sweets, ornaments, and Christmas lights several days before Christmas Eve. Hardly will you find a home without a Christmas tree at this time of the year. Slovaks always celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve, December 24. Throughout the day kitchens are filled with aroma of baked goodies and Christmas dishes, and the last ornaments are being hung on the Christmas tree. In the evening, families gather around the Christmas table for dinner, the hallmark of the day.

At dinnertime, Christian families might say grace or sing carols. Christmas dinner varies according to the region of Slovakia. Typically a thin wafer (oplatka) with honey and sometimes garlic is served as a Christmas appetizer to secure good health of all family members throughout the upcoming year. It is also a custom to cut a piece of fruit, usually an apple, into as many pieces as there are family members. This custom is a symbol of family unity. The next course is soup- split pea soup, sauerkraut soup, mushroom soup, bean soup, lentil soup, or bean and lentil combo, according to the region. The main course consists of fried or baked fish-usually carp or trout- or fish fillet served with potato salad with mayonnaise. It is a tradition to buy a live carp, which can be purchased at stores only at Christmas time. After the main course opekance or pupaciky are served with poppy seed or farmer's cheese. After dinner the family members exchange their gifts under the Christmas tree. For children this is the most favorite part of Christmas. Younger children believe it is Baby Jesus who brings them Christmas gifts. When they get older, they learn it is their parents and grandparents who buy them gifts. Nevertheless, you can still see a twinkle in their eyes when they

unwrap their gifts. After dinner when all the gifts are open, families enjoy their time together and eat traditional desserts such as fruit, Christmas cookies, and various types of Christmas pastries.

- **25. - 26.12. Christmas (public holiday)**

Catholics start religious celebration of Christmas by attending Midnight Mass or they can attend mass the following day, which is called a Christmas Day. In Slovakia Christmas Day is also called the First Day of Christmas. The Second Day of Christmas is St. Stephen's Day. On the First and the Second Day of Christmas, families relax and enjoy their time together and visit relatives and friends. Students are on Christmas break at this time. Young and old also like watching Christmas shows and movies, especially fairy tales. Many Slovaks spend Christmas and the period between Christmas and New Year's Day at mountain resorts.

- **31.12. Silvester, New Years Eve**

The last day of December is called Silvester in Slovak calendar. It is because this day is the name day of those men named Silvester. Slovaks like to celebrate the New Year's Eve usually in a hotel, in the mountains, or at home with their relatives or friends and by watching TV shows. They also attend Silvester dances or go and welcome a New Year by watching fireworks and making a toast to the New Year in the city or town squares. Slovakia follows the Gregorian calendar with January 1 as the first official day of the new calendar year.

- **Name days**

Every day of the year is someone's name day (meniny). It is a reason to celebrate, wish the person a Happy Name Day, and buy a little present, like flowers and a box of chocolates. Remember: Never give anyone an even number of flowers (2, 4, 6...). Such bouquets are used at funerals. The number should be odd (1, 3, 5...).

Find out if your name has an equivalent in Slovak and what its diminutive version would be. Learn on which days your friends' or family members' names fall and how to wish them a Happy Name Day in Slovak!

Slovak families

Where will you live?

AFS students are placed in small towns or villages close to towns. Most students are placed in traditional families; a one-parent host family is rather an exception. Predominantly, the AFS students have counterparts in their host families whom they go to school with. The way to school takes from 10 minutes to 40 minutes. It depends on suitable school near your place. Also the Slovak students are used to travel to school by bus, or tram (in Bratislava).



What are the Slovak families like!

Slovak families are usually very hospitable, friendly and eager to help the student in all ways. Sometimes they have a tendency to treat the AFS student as a guest, and thus it is up to the student to try to take part in the host family life and thus become a real member of the family. This will enable the student to fully absorb our culture and lifestyle.

Slovak families are mostly rather strict with their children, and will try to act the same towards the AFS student. They are this way

because they feel a great responsibility for his/her welfare.



Daily schedule

On the whole, a Slovak family is a rather self-contained unit, with a regular daily schedule. In most cases both father and mother are fully employed, so they get up early in the morning (6 or 7 am), return home between 5 and 6 p.m., and have dinner at 6 or 7 p.m. They go to sleep around 10 or 11 pm.

The social life of a Slovak family is not very extensive because of a great amount of work and other duties. However, they are rather keen on visiting and having visits from their relatives and friends, mainly over the weekends.

Traditional family

A traditional Slovak family has two children and lives in a rather small flat in a city, however, it is more and more common to live in a small house with a garden outside the city and go to the city just for work, study or special afternoon activities. They use the car often as the main means of transport, but also the urban transport works very well and it is easy to get around on your own. When the family lives in a city flat, it is quite common that the siblings share one room and it can also happen that you will share a room with your host brother or sister.

The model of a Slovak traditional family (where the father was the sole person responsible for the family's income and the mother took care of the children and household) has changed a lot in recent years and it is not easy to specify the gender roles. Both parents take part in important decisions; if possible they also ask the opinion of their children (they especially discuss questions related to free time activities with the children).

Housework

Practically no family employs servants, so household chores, minor repairs and a gardening (if there is one), are carried out by the family. Each family member is expected to do his/her share by helping whenever necessary, and so will you. The usual types of housework are: setting the table, washing the dishes, cleaning your own room, sweeping the floor, vacuuming, light shopping, taking out rubbish, etc. Most families have pets at home (dog, cat, etc.)

Communication

Not all Slovak families speak foreign languages and in that case the initial communication with host parents is via the host brother or sister who studies foreign languages - especially English. Though seemingly difficult at the beginning, it helps you a great deal in acquiring the Slovak language quickly.

Free time

Slovak families often spend their free time doing various sports. The most popular winter sport is skiing; in summer hiking, biking and swimming as well as visiting various cultural events, such as theatre, art galleries, and making excursions to historical castles and sites.

Most families have an Internet connection at home and a computer free to use, however, it is important to reach an agreement with your family regarding the amount of time you can spend on the Internet, as it can be a problem when they feel you are more in contact with your friends abroad than with your new Slovak family. Often the computer is shared also with the other children.

Important to remember

- Your host family decided to host AFS student. They are not paid for hosting.

- Your host family wants you to live with you. They want to learn from you about your country and show you their way of life.
- Your host family expects you to accept their daily schedule.
- Your host family wants to help you while you are in the Slovak Republic. They want you to be a true family member.
- You have to change your shoes when entering the house, and some families are also accustomed to changing into more comfortable indoor clothes.
- Your host family expects you to accept their hygienic norms. (Ask them about the frequency and duration of showering they are used to and about the housework you are supposed to help with!)
- Your host family takes responsibility for you, that's why they will always ask you where you are going and with whom, to be sure that you are safe during your entire stay in our country.

Your school and free time

System of education

Primary school starts at the age of 6 and lasts 9 years. Secondary school lasts 4 years and it usually includes:

General secondary schools (gymnázium) - highly competitive secondary schools specialized in teaching modern languages, natural sciences or specialized in physical training disciplines. This type of school usually leads to a higher level of education.



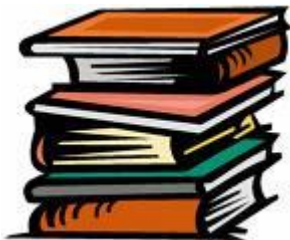
Vocational schools (business, nursing, industrial, music and art academies)

Apprentice schools, attached to industries and services, related to practical life, teaching various trades.

Most Slovak schools are public schools, though since 1990 new private schools have been established, especially on secondary level, and their numbers have been steadily growing. There are 400-500 students in a school and 20-30 per class.

Students do not wear uniforms at schools. It is usual to change shoes to slippers when entering school.

Schedule



School schedules start at 8:00 am and finish at around 2:00.

The average weekly school curriculum (*gymnázium*) is as follows:

Slovak language and literature - 3 lessons

German or other languages - 3, English - 3, History - 2, Geography - 2, Physics - 3, Math - 4, Chemistry - 3, Biology - 3, Physical Education - 2

Clasification

Students' knowledge is tested by oral and written exams, which are classified on a scale of 1 to 5. The students can receive also a written evaluation, which replaces or supplements the marks.

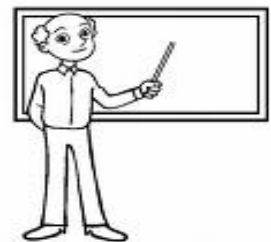
- 1 = Outstanding
- 2 = Very Good

- 3 = Good
- 4 = Poor
- 5 = Failing

Parents are informed constantly about their children's study results through the "Pupil's Record Book" and at regular meetings when they are also forewarned about possible failures or more serious disciplinary problems. At the end of the semester and at the end of the school year students receive report cards/certificates.

Schools the AFS students attend

- The AFS program
The AFS SVK Academic Program is designed to provide students with a wonderful opportunity to live with a Slovak host family, be part of a Slovak community and attend a Slovak secondary school. Along with this opportunity responsibility comes. You should understand that this is an academic program and even if you have "already graduated" or are not depending on credits from this year to count towards your graduation in your home country, you have to attend the school lessons regularly and make an effort to perform well. Schools also expect that the students they agree to host are coming on this program to study and to become full members of their school community. Most schools are hoping that the Slovak students in the school will learn as much as you through their interaction on a daily basis in classes, in school clubs and activities. You are expected to attend school on a regular basis, to complete all work assigned both in and outside class and show continuous effort throughout the year, working to your fullest potential. Be aware that you are representative of your country and AFS and your behaviour will be judged by the school community as a representative of other AFS students and people from your country.
- Your school
The AFS students are mostly placed at secondary schools of very good academic standing (gymnázium). Where appropriate, students can be also placed in other types of secondary schools, for example business schools, that are similar to the previous academic institution of the student. The schools may be either state or private. Most of the students are placed at state schools, which is the most common way for Slovak students too.
- Attendance and schedule
School attendance is compulsory. If absent, the student must inform the teacher within a day (usually a written letter explaining the absence from the parents).
- Classification
AFS students are usually not graded but verbally evaluated. They do not receive the same certificate as the Slovak students. However, they can receive a certificate of school attendance.
The first few months will be probably difficult whilst you are learning Slovak but you will no doubt find that school is a perfect environment for learning about our culture and our people. It is there where you make most of your friends.
- School expenses
Things that will be arranged at no extra cost to you are:



- School fees if necessary
- School textbooks
- Transportation to and from school - the train, tram or public bus

The AFS student must pay for:

- School supplies (as pencils, copy-books)
- School trips – schools usually organize a one-week mountain trip during winter and sometimes day trips during the summer. These trips are not compulsory. However, it provides a great opportunity to meet with the students and teachers informally.

- Extracurricular activities



Not all schools offer these activities. They may have some special interest clubs (computer, drama, sports); however, AFS students as well as the Slovak students mostly join sports clubs or pursue other types of out-of-school activities (e.g. dance classes, pottery, choir) organized by various youth or other organizations. Most of the Slovak students have one or two extra-curricular activities they attend regularly one or twice a week. Some of these classes must be paid for.

School and these courses are places where the teenagers develop friendships with each other.

- Teachers and students

The teachers are always treated with respect, there is quite a social distance between a teacher and student, the teacher is perceived as an authority. The school has a strict order which is necessary to follow. If not, you can be expelled. The lessons are mainly theoretical, not very interactive or practical and the teachers are very demanding.

The Slovak students always use part of the afternoon for doing homework or studying for the exams. The exams are done throughout the whole school year, depending on teacher's decision. Slovak students are not very open at first: some of them are shy about speaking English, and some of them have just a small group of schoolmates they speak with. Try to approach them actively, invite them to go out with you, show them your interests and you will find friends that will be interested in joining you and you will discover how friendly, enthusiastic can the Slovaks be. ☺

Before leaving...

Program schedule

AFS Intercultura Slovakia will prepare some obligatory activities for you, the purpose of which is to help you with the new cultural background you will encounter. These activities, called Orientation, will give you the chance to meet all the other AFS students staying in the Slovak Republic. The Orientations will be held in English.

Orientations



Upon arrival to the Slovak Republic you will take part in the Survival Orientation for two days. Please do remember to bring all necessities with you for these days (slippers, etc.). During this Orientation Camp you will receive much information about our country, everyday life, school, shops, and transport and also some hints about how to behave properly. At the end of this camp your host family meets you and takes you to your new home. After your arrival we will inform the AFS office in your home country that you have arrived safely and they will pass this information to your parents. It may happen that during the orientation there might be no mobile phone coverage or access to phone line. Please, inform your parents about that and be prepared for that.

Cultural Orientation takes place 6 weeks after your arrival. It offers you time to speak about the first cultural differences and similarities you have met, problems you have and ways to deal with them.

A Mid-stay Orientation is usually planned around Christmas time or mid-January.

The End-of-stay evaluation is usually organized at the beginning of February (for Semester Program) and June (for Year Program).

Activities organised by volunteers

AFS INTERCULTURA SLOVAKIA offers lots of activities organized by volunteers (such as picnics, sightseeing, ski trips, typical Slovak barbecues, etc.) This is optional and if you want to participate in them you have to pay for the journey and cover the necessary expenses yourself. Volunteers, young returnees and staff provide support through the whole year.



How to prepare for your stay

- Language

Students will be provided with some materials before their arrival. **Please, start studying Slovak language soon!** Go through the materials you will receive and try to learn the basics.

Learning Slovak very fast is the key to a rewarding experience in our country. It will help you a lot once you arrive. To say few basic words in Slovak will make a

very good impression on the family and also at school! Once you come to the Slovak Republic, you will receive another study book – geography and history, which you can use during the whole stay. Don't hesitate to ask your host family for help when you need it! They will be very glad that you are interested in our language and that you are making an effort to learn. It is the first and most important thing the people around will consider that you try to be really part of the Slovak community. For non-English speakers we also strongly recommend learning English before departure to be sure you can communicate with the people around.



- Information about your home country
As you will be asked to provide information about your home country, we suggest you to bring along some material about your country, town, and pictures of your home, parents, friends, and school. You should be prepared to speak about the standard of living in your country, history, geography, political system, etc. Your family, school, and friends will greatly appreciate it as it will broaden their knowledge and enhance intercultural learning. Also bringing along some little souvenirs from your country/state as gifts for your host family and people you meet during your stay is a good idea. It may happen that not only your host family and friends will ask you about your home country, but that you will have the opportunity to do school presentations also for other students.
- Information about Slovak culture
Try to learn as much as you can also about the Slovak Republic. There are many Internet pages where you can find interesting information about our country and local culture. Try to find some similarities or differences with your own culture, identify things that you are looking for or which may be difficult for you.
<http://www.slovakiasite.com/>
<http://www.slovakia.travel>
<http://www.slovakia.culturalprofiles.net>
<http://www.slovak-republic.org>
<http://slovaque.eu/en/>
- Contact your host family
Write to your host family as soon as you can. Don't be shy. They will be very anxious to learn about you. Your parents could also write to your host family. If you were about to receive a teenager from another country, you know how much it would mean to get a letter from the parents saying "Thank you" and "We trust you". If English is a problem a short note or translation would be fine.
- Find out about AFS
This will also help you. Get to know AFS in your own country as we share the same ideals everywhere, the only difference is that each country has its own unique customs.

Health

So far no specific vaccination certificates have been required - but if you suffer from a chronic disease or allergy, or if you use a particular medicine, we suggest you to bring enough for the entire period of your stay if possible. It is rather difficult to have them sent afterwards, and some medicines might be rather difficult to obtain in the Slovak Republic.



Medical insurance

AFS provides medical insurance which is valid for the whole world –the AFS office at your home country should give your parents details about the insurance. When you need to go to the doctor here, the usual procedure is that you pay smaller amounts with your own money directly and then you send the tax certificate and medical claim to the Slovak AFS office and we give you the money back. If the medical examination is more expensive, you (or your family) ask the doctor to write an invoice to the AFS office. Some of the doctors already speak English. However, it is much better if you have some knowledge of the Slovak “medical” vocabulary.

Pocket money

Credit cards are the easiest to use. You can find cash machines almost everywhere (except small villages) and they accept all types of credit cards (Visa, Visa Electron, Master card, American Express, Dinner's club) There is also a possibility to open a new Slovak bank account with a support of your host family. You can also have your allowance in travel checks (e.g. American Express) which are easy to cash all over the world. Do not take any personal checks - it takes a very long time to cash them. You will need approximately 1200 USD for the Year Program and 600 USD for the Semester Program. We advise you to have some small cash with you in case you want to buy something during your journey. Upon arrival you can change it into Slovak currency - EUR. Here you have some price examples:

Lunch in a restaurant	5 – 10 EUR
Orange Juice (1 liter)	1 – 2 EUR)
0.5 l Coca-Cola	1 – 2 EUR
Cinema	3 - 7 EUR
City bus/tram	0,3 - 1 EUR
Brand Jeans	50 EUR
CD	20 EUR



Calling home

Be sure you do not forget to ask your host family about phone calls in your host community, within the Slovak Republic and abroad. The rates are very high and Slovak families are usually very careful about spending money on phones. Therefore we advise you to call your home country from the post office or Internet cafes which allow international phone calls and are the cheapest, or make a collect call using a phone card. Be aware that even though modern means of communication allow you to phone whenever you want for free, it is always good to know what the host family sees as normal behaviour. It could be a problem when the host parents have a feeling you speak with your parents more than with them and could feel abused and not accepted – they offer you your home and they expect you to become part of their family during your stay.



Clothes

Be well prepared for the winter time. The temperature can be often below zero. There are always heaters at home, school, and in public transport. However when you are outside it is necessary to have warm boots, a warm waterproof jacket, warm sweater, mittens, socks and winter coat. Good clothes are expensive here and to have them sent from your home country costs a lot of money. During summer you will need some light clothes; the temperature can be around 30 degrees. Young Slovak dress rather casually and comfortably. They wear blue jeans, T-shirts and sweaters. We suggest you also bring a pair of good comfortable walking shoes and as you already know, you will need also slippers for home and school. Also, you

should bring a nice dress or suit for special occasions (Christmas, theatre, balls etc.) and shoes to match.



Electricity

If you take any electric appliances, be sure they can be used over here (220 V/ 50 Hz and plugs have different shape from Asian or American standard)

Conclusion

The value of your experience in the Slovak Republic will depend upon you. Here there is some important advice which will help you get the most out of your time here!

It will be very important to come with an open mind and willingness to learn about our country and our culture.

You should always remember that you have come to the Slovak Republic to learn. While you are here, be sure to listen and observe carefully everything that is going on around you. Make an effort not to judge the people too quickly and don't be afraid to ask questions about what you see and hear!

Remember that the AFS experience is not an easy one. Much work will be demanded of you. As in all experiences, there will be good moments and bad moments, ups and downs, during your AFS stay in the Slovak Republic.

It will be very important for you to communicate about how you feel and what you think with your host family and to your new friends. By communication you will reach deeper levels of understanding and affection with them, and you will avoid possible misunderstandings.

Do not forget to maintain a sense of humour. You will be in a new culture and you are going to make mistakes. If you are able to laugh at yourself, it is always better!

Remember, your attitude will be the key to your AFS experience. We sincerely hope that you come to us with the desire to learn, an enthusiasm to try new things, and an openness to communicate.

If you need more information about anything connected with the Program in the Slovak Republic, please, contact national AFS office in your country or write directly to:

Our address:
AFS Intercultura Slovakia, o.z.
Vinohradnícka 40
94901 Nitra
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

tel.: (421) 948 676 766
tel.: (421) 948 676 866
tel.: (421) 948 676 966
web: <http://www.afsslovakia.sk>
mail: info@afsslovakia.sk

We believe your stay in our country, however challenging it may be, will bring you a lifelong, unforgettable and rewarding experience and we are looking forward to meeting you and having you with us in our country. The Slovak AFS community will be happy to share your experience and learn from you.

Basic survival vocabulary

Pomóc!	Help!
Nerozumiem	I don't understand.
Hovoríte po anglicky?	Do you speak English?
Áno	Yes.
Nie	No.
Dobrý deň (formal expression)	Good morning, Good afternoon
Čau, Ahoj	Hi, hello
Dovidenia	Goodbye.
Dobrá noc	Good night.
Volám sa ...	My name is ...
Som z Ameriky	I come from America.
Prosím si niečo na pitie	I'd like to drink something.
Som smädný	I am thirsty.
Som hladný	I am hungry.
Ďakujem	Thank you.
Prosím	You're welcome/please.
Prepáčte	Excuse me.
Koľko to stojí?	How much is it?
Koľko je hodín?	What time is it?
Kde budem spať?	Where shall I sleep?
Tu	Here.
Tam	There.
Je horúco	It is hot.
Je zima	It is cold.
Kde je toaleta?	Where is the toilet?

Dear student, Slovak is not as difficult as it seems. Keep in mind that the first syllable always bears the stress. A line above a vowel lengthens it. Each syllable is pronounced clearly, it is not swallowed as in English. It's a challenge; however, we are sure you'll manage it.

Good luck!