

# THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic seldom makes headlines, but this year's Czech presidency of the EU might increase awareness of this medium-sized state in Central Europe. Prague is usually the first thing that comes to mind, as the birthplace of Kafka or the picturesque backdrop to the Velvet Revolution. But the Czech State has more in store.



**Area:** 78,866 square metres (comparable to Ireland)

**Population:** 10,287,189 inhabitants

Member of NATO since 1999  
Member of EU since 2004



## BRIEF HISTORY

The historical roots of the Czech state can be traced back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the region was ruled by the Přemyslid dynasty. In 935, Duke Václav was killed by his brother Boleslav in fight for power. This violent act gave rise to the Wenceslas cult and St. Wenceslas is also the patron saint of the Czech Republic. The Czech kingdom expanded and experienced booms during the reign of Přemysl Otakar II (13<sup>th</sup> century) and Charles IV (14<sup>th</sup> century). Later on, the kingdom was absorbed into Habsburg Empire.

A state in the modern sense of the word was established as a union of Czechs and Slovaks, called Czechoslovakia, in 1918 after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On January 1, 1993, the two nations went their separate ways.

The Czech Republic comprises three lands: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, and 14 regions. The biggest one is the Central Bohemia region.

## POLITICS

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy. The Parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Deputies (200 members) and the Senate (81 members). The Senate is a relatively new institution, re-introduced in 1996, to balance the power of the House. The executive branch is represented by the government and the president. After parliamentary election the president appoints the prime minister, usually from a winning party, to form a government. The MPs are elected for a four-year-term and senators for six years.

## NATURE

Mountains form natural boundaries in the north (Krkonoše), south (Šumava) and west (Krušné Mountains). The highest peak is Sněžka (1,602 m) in the Krkonoše mountain range. The major European river the Elbe rises in Krkonoše too.

# THE 12 WONDERS ON THE UNESCO LIST

Because of the state's long and eventful history, there are numerous castles, palaces and places of interest presenting different architectural styles. Some of them have been listed as UNESCO sights and are under the protection of this international organisation.

## 1. The Historical Centre of Prague (listed in 1992)

The top Czech destination, Prague, leads the list with monuments such as Prague Castle, St. Vitus Cathedral and Charles Bridge.

## 2. The Historical Centre of Český Krumlov (1992)

This popular tourist attraction boasts a castle and chateaux complex and a well-preserved historical centre. The aristocratic families of Vítkovci and Rožmberkové are connected to the town's history and its Renaissance look. The town is also known as a place where Egon Schiele, an expressionist painter of European renown, created many of his works.

## 3. The Historical Centre of Telč (1992)

The town's square offers a unique combination of Renaissance and Baroque houses with characteristic arcades and sgrafitti design. There is also a chateau in the town.

## 4. The Pilgrimage Church of Jan Nepomuk in Zelená Hora, close to Žďár nad Sázavou (1994)

The interior is more of a plain, broken by small hills, rivers and streams. The Moravian landscape has lowlands in the south as well as mountains such as Jeseníky in the north and Beskydy in the east. Natural beauty spots include national parks in mountains such

The star shaped pilgrimage church built by Santini-Aichl, a Czech Baroque builder of Italian origin, is characteristic of Baroque-Gothic style. The building includes a lot of complex symbolism based on the number five.

## 5. Kutná Hora (1995)

A medieval mining town, which became rich because of its silver deposits, is famous for its historical centre and the Church of St. Barbara. This eye-catching piece of Gothic architecture was begun in 1388 but wasn't completed until 1905. The construction was often interrupted as the town suffered from wars, flood and financial collapse following the closure of the mines.

## 6. Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape (1996)

As every Czech knows, 'lednice' means 'refrigerator' but this chateaux complex in South Moravia is unlikely to leave you feeling frosty. This impressive combination of Baroque and Neo-Gothic styles stands in the largest park in the CR (200 km<sup>2</sup>) and is an important example of English Romantic landscape design.

as Krkonoše, Šumava (with the remains of primeval forests), Czech Paradise (sandstone rock formations in the north) and Moravian Karst (a series of caves and the gorge Macocha).  
**Ryan Scott (Australia),  
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