

THE BEST OF

SLOVAKIA



EUROPEAN UNION



Spiš Castle



Interior of the Primate's Palace in Bratislava



Trenčín Castle

The primary superlative in Slovakia is the fact that it is a Little Big Country. That is because in a relatively small area the visitor can find almost everything - natural wealth, historical monuments, entertainment and leisure activities. With the exception of the sea - but this we have underground in the form of countless healing mineral springs. There are high mountains and broad lowlands, wetlands and desert, abundant sources of water in the form of rivers, waterfalls and lakes. Our 1000-year-old cultural heritage can be seen in the medieval towns, romantic castles and ruins, magnificent manor houses,





Piešťany

archeological sites, varied folk architecture, surviving folk traditions and living folklore. There are cities here with modern architecture and a modern lifestyle, but also captivating spots over which a spell seems to have been cast, as they are still unaffected by human civilisation. You, too, can experience the rapidly alternating images of the country. All you have to do is travel approximately 450 kilometres, for that is the length of Slovakia from the west to east.



Vodopády Studeného potoka ("The Cold Stream Waterfalls")



Grassalkovich Palace



The Primate's Palace



Slovak National Theatre

The best... of Bratislava

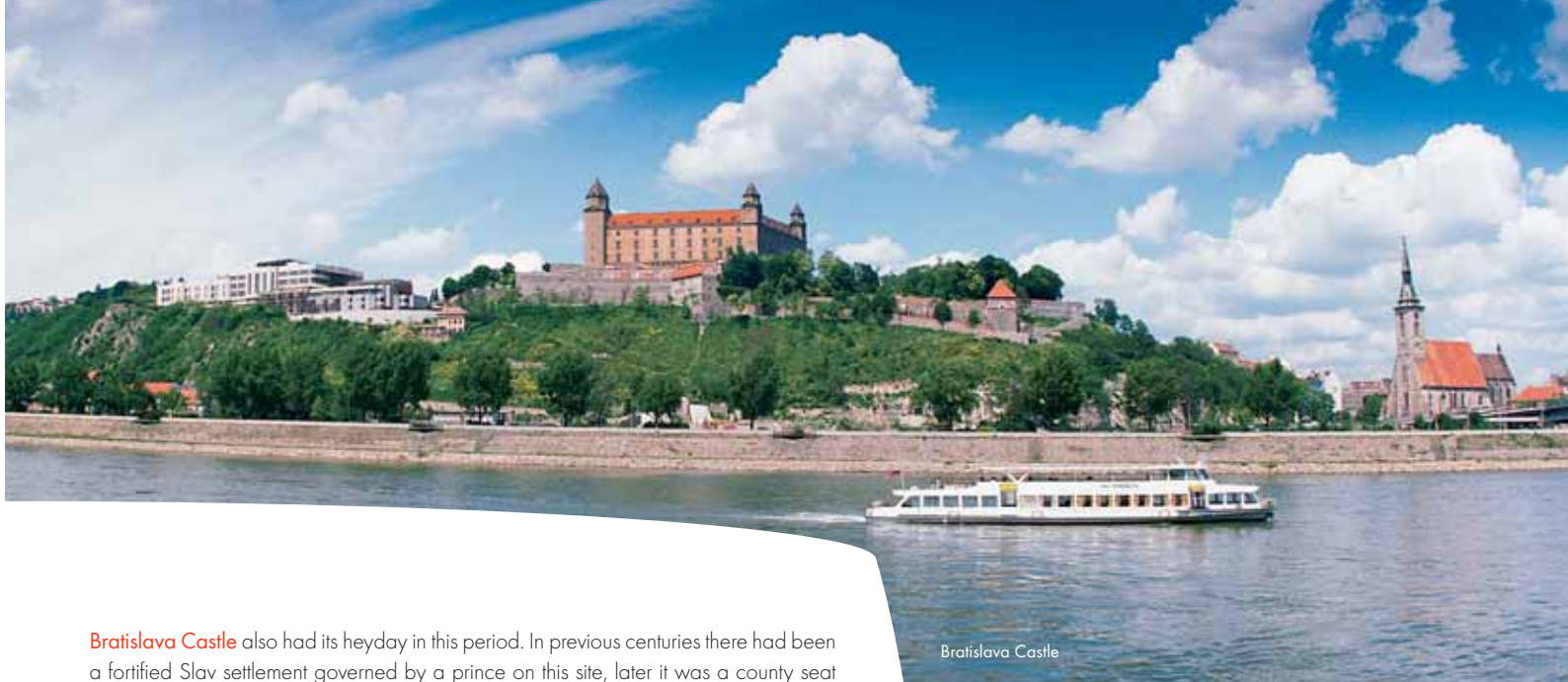
Bratislava is one of the **youngest capitals** in Europe. In 1993 it became the capital city of the independent Slovak Republic. It is at the same time the largest town in Slovakia, where almost 550 thousand inhabitants live in an area of 367.5 km². It stretches out on both banks of the River Danube, the river with the largest volume of water in Europe. Even though the town is mainly of a lowland character, a quarter of it lies on the forested slopes of the Lower Carpathians, which are the beginning of the huge Carpathian arc.

The Slovak capital is situated in an exceptionally advantageous geographical position in central Europe. It is 65 km from Vienna and 180 km from Budapest. A motorway 330 km long connects it to Prague.

Archeological finds confirm that two thousand years ago there was already a Celtic oppidum - the first town-like settlement - in this area and in the first century AD a Roman military camp. Slavs made this place their permanent home in the 6th century. The first known name for the settlement around which the town arose comes from 907 AD. Two important milestones in the history of Bratislava were when it was given its charter in 1291, which raised it to the status of a free royal town and the period of 1563 - 1830, when it was the coronation city of the Hungarian monarchy. In the course of its history the old town centre with almost 300 unique historical buildings has witnessed many outstanding events.

We are reminded of the glorious times when it was a coronation city where 11 monarchs (including Maria Theresa) and eight royal wives were crowned by a list on the left side of the chancel in the magnificent Gothic coronation church, St. Martin's Cathedral, as well as by the coronation route leading through the little streets and squares of the historical centre, marked in the paving by 178 polished brass tablets representing a stylised royal crown. **St. Martin's Cathedral** was consecrated in 1452. Built into the wall surrounding the medieval town, the Gothic church with three naves is almost 70 m long, 22.85 m wide and 18.5 m high in the part containing the altar. On top of the cathedral's 85 m spire there is a gilt replica of the Hungarian royal crown lying on a gilt cushion 2x2 m and weighing as much as 300 kilograms! The church's five original bells were melted down during the First World War to make cannons. Only the oldest and largest two-tone bell has survived and in 2000 it was joined by another five. They were presented to Bratislava by the five countries neighbouring on Slovakia.

Bratislava enjoyed an architectural, social and cultural boom during the reign of Maria Theresa (1741 - 1780). The empress was fond of visiting this town, accompanied by a large retinue of nobles who had grand Rococo and Classical palaces built here. One of these was **Grassalkovich Palace**, now the residence of the President of the Slovak Republic.



Bratislava Castle

Bratislava Castle also had its heyday in this period. In previous centuries there had been a fortified Slav settlement governed by a prince on this site, later it was a county seat and finally the seat of the viceroy. The four-wing Gothic building (of which a number of architectonic details have been preserved, e.g. the window in the southern facade of the palace) was extended to include a splendid three-storey Rococo palace known as the Teresianum, a ceremonial courtyard, a riding school, a winter garden and a park in the style of French gardens. After the devastating fire in 1811, Bratislava Castle was reduced to a gigantic ruin. It took 150 years before large-scale renovation was begun. Now it houses the ceremonial halls of the Slovak National Council (the Parliament) and exhibitions of the Slovak National Museum, which are open to the public. The typical four-tower silhouette of the majestic castle, dating from 1635 - 1649, rises 85 metres above the surface of the River Danube. On the eastern terrace of the castle complex the foundations of a 9th century three-nave basilica have been uncovered, the largest Great Moravian building discovered in Slovakia. The castle hill affords a view over almost the whole of the city of Bratislava.

The Primate's Palace (Primaciálny palác), the seat of the archbishop, is the city's Classical gem. In 1805, following the Battle of Austerlitz (Slavkov), what is known as the Peace of Bratislava was signed in its Hall of Mirrors by representatives of Napoleon's France and Habsburg Austria. Now the palace contains the official rooms of the mayor of the capital city. Six precious English tapestries from the 17th century decorate its walls. An eye-catching feature above the main entrance to the palace is a cardinal's hat made of iron, 180 cm in diameter and weighing 150 kg!



St. Martin's Cathedral



Interior of St. Martin's Cathedral



Spiš Castle

The best.. on the UNESCO



St. Martin's Cathedral in Spišská Kapitula



Church of the Holy Spirit in Žehra

The UNESCO list of elite world cultural and natural heritage sites is growing every year and since 1993 it has been extended to include five Slovak localities.

The 400th site on the list is the picturesque mining town of Banská Štiavnica with all the various technical relics around it, not only of a mining character, but also the system of reservoirs and other technical facilities. On account of its prosperity and large-scale production, mainly of silver, **Banská Štiavnica** was also called the silver town. In 1740 alone nearly 23 000 kg of silver and 600 kg of gold were mined here. Evidence of the wealth of the town and its citizens can still be seen today in the 215 national cultural monuments and impressive architectural features, but also in the unusual presence of two castles within one town (Starý zámok and Nový zámok - the New and Old Castle) and two Late Romanesque churches only 500 metres apart. The advanced standard of mining in Banská Štiavnica, which in the 18th century was the third largest town in Hungary, is confirmed by the decision of Empress Maria Theresa to establish a Mining Academy there, the first technical university in the world. A splendid system making use of waterpower to drive the mining machinery was constructed in the period from the 16th to 18th centuries. Originally it consisted of a system of 60 artificial reservoirs known as "tajchy", ingeniously connected by ditches and pressure tunnels. Several kilometres of galleries (at seventeen levels) were dug out beneath the town, reaching to a depth of 900 metres. Nowadays mining is only a tourist attraction in Banská Štiavnica. Trails with information boards run along beside the surviving reservoirs in the picturesque hilly landscape of the Štiavnické vrchy. Hidden underground there is a labyrinth of mining galleries and shafts with mining equipment, while on the surface there are historical buildings and technical facilities. The Outdoor Mining Museum organises sightseeing trips down the pits. Around 40 thousand visitors come here every year.

Another locality on the UNESCO List is a splendid set of historical buildings - Spiš Castle (Spišský hrad), one of the largest castle ruins in central Europe, and its associated cultural monuments - Spišské Podhradie, Spišská Kapitula and the Church of the Holy Spirit (Kostol sv. Ducha) in Žehra. It really is rare for such a group, consisting of an important feudal administrative centre with a little town in the valley below it and opposite it a fortified seat of church administration to have survived in such an integrated form. This complex is to be found in the east of Slovakia, 19 km from Levoča. The castle can be reached from Hodkovce, near the village of Žehra. Spišská Kapitula is 6 km away.

The silhouette of **Spiš Castle** on its travertine rock is visible from a great distance. Covering an area of over 4 hectares, there are five courtyards with ruins of buildings from the 12th to 18th centuries. Some of the oldest and most interesting parts of the upper castle are the cylindrical central keep, 19 m high and 23 m wide, and the Romanesque grand palace, with 15th and 16th century Gothic alterations. In 1780 it was burned down and has been falling into disrepair ever since. Parts of the castle complex now house exhibitions of the Spiš Museum.



Bardejov



One of the winged altars in the church in Bardejov

World Heritage List

Spišská Kapitula originated in the 13th century as the fortified seat of ecclesiastical administration, the seat of the provost. Later an independent Spiš bishopric was established here. The massive walls of the tiny ecclesiastical town protect 30 houses for canons, a bishop's palace and a seminary building from the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque periods. All these line a single street. The dominating feature of Spišská Kapitula is the Late Romanesque Cathedral of St. Martin with its twin towers. Here you can find the oldest Romanesque sculpture in Slovakia - the White Lion - Leo albus.

The **Early Gothic Church of the Holy Spirit in Žehra** was built after 1245 using Spiš travertine. Although it has undergone alterations, these have not disturbed its original medieval character. The walls of the church are decorated with exceptional Gothic frescoes on a variety of themes, dating from the 13th to 15th centuries, the most striking of which is the "Arbor vitae" - the tree of life, from the first half of the 15th century, iconographically illustrating salvation and damnation.

The **Vlkolínec** heritage reserve of folk architecture is seemingly a tiny Liptov village near the town of Ružomberok. The little settlement in the Veľká Fatra mountains, nestling under the steep rocky slopes of Sidorovo peak, has somehow resisted not only time, but also all the changes that have caused similar hamlets to fall into oblivion. The unique group of over 45 original log homesteads perched on stone foundations, with clay-plastered walls and shingle roofs is proof of this. Vlkolínec is not a museum, but a living, authentic village. Its historical centre is dominated by a wooden belfry from 1770 and the log well dating from 1860 is also a rarity. The access road to the mountain village leads from Biely Potok, 3 km from Ružomberok in the direction of Banská Bystrica.

At the end of 2000 the historical town centre of **Bardejov** was added to the list of elite localities in the world. The 14th century St. Giles' Church (Chrám sv. Egídia) reminds us of the town's golden age lasting from the 14th to 15th century. The triple-nave basilica hides a European rarity - 11 Late Gothic wing altars with panel paintings, still installed in their original positions. The church is situated on the northern side of the central, rectangular square, which is lined with restored burgher houses with characteristic high gabled roofs, pointing to their origins in the Middle Ages. The focal point of the square is the town hall from the 16th century. It has Gothic foundations, an upper floor with elements of Italian Renaissance and an interesting oriel staircase. The historical centre of the town, with its 131 national cultural monuments, is enclosed by exceptionally well preserved city fortifications. In 1986 Bardejov was the first town in former Czechoslovakia to win a European prize - UNESCO's ICOMOS Gold Medal for rescuing and restoring cultural heritage.



Banská Štiavnica

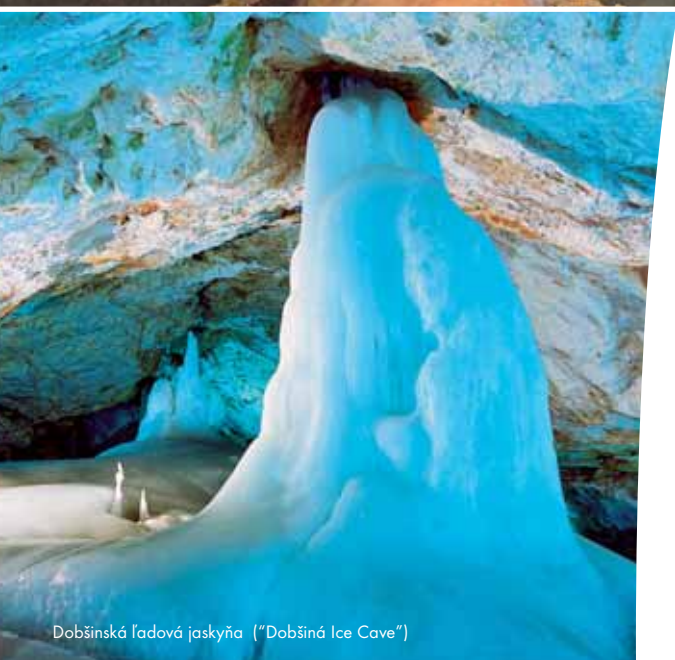


Vlkolínec

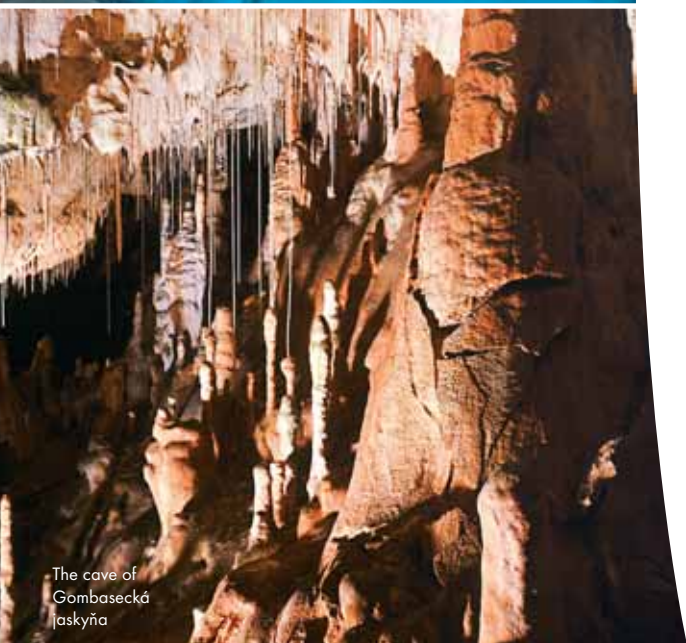


Demänovská jaskyňa slobody ("Demänová Freedom Cave")

The best...



Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa ("Dobšiná Ice Cave")



The cave of Gombasecká jaskyňa

The world considers Slovak caves to be unique. Few other countries can pride themselves on such a large number of different karst formations. So far Slovakia has 12 caves open to the public, which are visited by as many as 650 thousand tourists every year. In 1995 twelve typical caves and abysses in the Slovak karst region were included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Another Slovak locality – Dobšiná Ice Cave (Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa) – was added in the year 2000.

The intricate system with 400 caves in the Slovak Karst National Park stretches over the largest karst area in central Europe. Some of the best-known caves open to the public are Domica, Jasovská jaskyňa, Ochtinská aragonitová jaskyňa and Gombasecká jaskyňa. **Krásnohorská jaskyňa** can only be visited in the company of an expert guide. Its unique attractions include a monumental sinter column 32.6 m high, the largest of its kind in the world and entered in the Guinness Book of Records.

So far as we know, **Domica** is the largest cave in the Slovak karst region. It lies not far from the little town of Plešivec and has 5 kilometres of underground tunnels. Under the name of Baradla it continues into the territory of Hungary, as part of the Aggtelek National Park. People lived in Stará Domica as long as 35 thousand years ago. In 1932 1315 metres of the cave were opened to the public. The cave was washed out by the waters of the subterranean River Styx and Domica. When the water in the Styx is sufficiently deep, it is possible to travel a distance of 140 metres by boat and admire the peak, drum and onion-shaped stalactites and the pagoda-like stalagmites typical of the cave.

By world standards the aragonite cave known as **Ochtinská aragonitová jaskyňa** is a unique natural phenomenon. It is one of the three most beautiful aragonite caves in the world. It is to be found between Jelšava and Šitník, near the village of Ochtiná. The decoration of the cave is made up of aragonite spirals and needle-shaped crystals, in places formed in such a way as to seem like fragile corals and elegant sea anemones floating in the vaults of the cave above the heads of the visitors. They were formed in special climatic conditions, through the chemical crystallisation of calcium carbonate. The abundance of shapes and colours (from milk white through to brown) was created 138 thousand years ago and in the case of the needle-shaped forms, 13 thousand years ago. The aragonite cave was discovered in 1954 and in 1972 a section 230 m long was opened to the public.

The oldest inscription on a cave wall in Slovakia, dating from 1452, was found in **Jasovská jaskyňa**. This cave lies near a village of the same name (Jasov), which has become well known thanks to its magnificent late Baroque monastery complex. For a length of 2811 metres the cave was washed out by a subterranean stream, the little River Bodva, and it was discovered in the first half of the 13th century. Access to its beautiful sinter decorations in the form of "curls" (twisting needle-like stalactites), drums, shields and waterfalls was made possible in 1846 and again in 1924 after reconstruction work. The sightseeing tour covers 550 metres and takes 45 minutes, but the visitor must be prepared to climb 314 steps to overcome the 360-metre difference in elevation.



Ochtinská aragonitová jaskyňa
("Ochtiná Aragonite Cave")



Jasovská jaskyňa ("Jasov Cave")

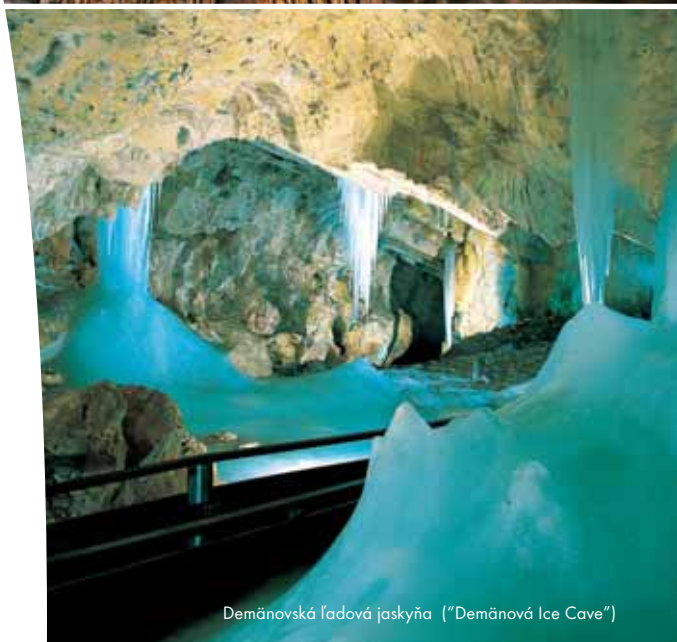
caves

The last gem in the Slovak Karst's cave system that is open to the public is **Gombasecká jaskyňa**. This subterranean temple-like cave with several breathtaking halls can be found not far from the town of Rožňava. Its rare features include thin sinter "curls" as much as three metres long in places. In addition to these, the cave is rich in other bizarre forms of stalactites and stalagmites. It is renowned for its "mushroom cloud", its large karst formations in the shape of Chinese pagodas, as well as brownish-red ones resembling curtains fringed with shiny "curls." Gombasecká jaskyňa was discovered by cavers in 1951 and they soon made a 285-metre section accessible to the public. It was the first cave in Slovakia to make use of speleotherapy.

The oldest and at the same time largest ice cave we know of in Europe is **Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa**. It lies 20 km north of Dobšiná within the Slovenský raj ("Slovak Paradise") National Park. Discovered in 1870, it was one of the first caves to have electricity installed - in 1887. The layer of ice has a volume of 110 thousand cubic metres, in many places reaching a thickness of 26.5 m. Apart from an ice floor, this huge underground glacier has enchanting waterfalls, stalagmites and columns of ice. Until 1946 the general public were allowed to skate in it throughout the year. Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa is part of a cave system stretching for 21 kilometres. It measures 1232 metres, of which a 475-metre stretch is open to the public. The sightseeing tour takes about 30 minutes.

In addition to the caves registered on the UNESCO Heritage List, we should mention the largest cave system in Slovakia. It lies within the Low Tatra (Nízke Tatry) National Park, in the valley of Demänovská dolina. This intricate underground labyrinth is over 30 kilometres long. It is made up of more than 170 caves formed by river erosion and it is on nine different levels, with an elevation difference of 173 metres. Nine of these caves are joined to each other and two of them are open to the public. **Demänovská jaskyňa slobody** ("Demänova Freedom Cave") is one of the most beautiful karst caves in Europe. Huge sinter waterfalls, rare sinter water lilies and remarkable stalagmites decorate the 8126 metres of underground tunnels opening out into impressive halls and cathedral-like spaces. The sightseeing tour covers a length of 1800 metres. The cave was discovered in 1921 and subsequently made open to the public.

Only three kilometres away is another ice cave, **Demänovská ľadová jaskyňa**, which people knew about even in the Middle Ages. The inscriptions on the walls are evidence of this. The bones of bears that lived here over 15 thousand years ago have also been found here. The cave was opened to the public in the 1880's. Of the 1750 metres of passageways in the cave, 650 metres are accessible to sightseers. The ice layer forming the floor, columns, stalactites and stalagmites is situated in the lower regions. In the upper part of the cave the temperature is around 5°C, while in the lowest spaces it falls below freezing point.



Demänovská ľadová jaskyňa ("Demänová Ice Cave")



Domica cave



Krásna Hôrka Castle

The best..



Červený Kameň Castle

Historical sources state that in the past Slovakia had about 300 castles. Nowadays 168 are marked on modern maps of the country, of which 109 are registered as national cultural monuments. Our castles and castle ruins offer visitors not only forgotten, yet interesting history, but also attractive programmes - festivals, various games, competitions, knightly contests, fairs, night tours, theatre performances and concerts, as well as romantic wedding ceremonies.

One of the largest castle complexes in Slovakia is Trenčiansky hrad - **Trenčín Castle**. It is the dominant landmark of the town of Trenčín and the whole of the River Váh Valley. It was built in the 11th century on the site of a Great Moravian hill fort. It acquired its characteristic silhouette in the 13th century, during the reign of Matúš Čák, known as "the Lord of the Váh and the Tatras". In 1790 a fire spread through the town, which also engulfed the castle. After the fire the buildings in the lower castle were partially rebuilt, but extensive reconstruction and conservation works were begun on the castle only at the end of the 1950's. The grounds of the castle contain a group of palaces (Zápoľský's, Barbora's, Ľudovít's) and a striking tower 39 metres high, known as Matúšova veža, whose ground plan covers 12x12 m and the thickness of the wall at the foundations is as much as 4 metres. An interesting feature of the castle is the Roman inscription from 179 AD, cut into the rock on which the castle stands. It states that the troops of the 11nd Roman legion spent the winter here. The visitors' attention is also drawn to the castle well, which, according to the legend, was dug out by a young Turk, in order that the lord of Trenčín would free his beloved one. The castle houses exhibitions of Trenčín Museum and there is an interesting family gallery of the Illésházy family, former owners of the castle.

Gigantic underground spaces, their size and architecture making them unique in central Europe, are the attraction of one of the best-preserved Renaissance fortified buildings in Slovakia, **Červený Kameň**. The largest of them is 70 m long and 9 m high and it could be divided into several floors! Shaped like an irregular quadrangle, the castle stands out in the picturesque hills of the Little Carpathians beyond Častá and above the village of Píla (northeast of Bratislava). The most important period for the castle was in the 16th century, when it passed into the hands of the Thurzo family and later the Fuggers, who rebuilt it as a Renaissance fortress with gigantic underground storerooms. In 1588 it became the property of the Pálffy family. Thanks to them, Červený Kameň took on the form of a modern Renaissance and Baroque residence. A rarity to be found in the monumental castle is a 17th century pharmacy called Zlatý orol (Golden Eagle), which was in use until the 19th century, and a picture gallery with portraits of Maria Theresa, Francis of Lorraine and other members of renowned aristocratic families. What is untraditional is the positioning of a beautiful *salla terrena* dated 1656 facing the inner courtyard and not opening into the park. After demanding and costly repairs the castle is now once more open to the public. Its interiors house several interesting thematic exhibitions belong to the Slovak National Museum, a rare collection of historical furniture, pictures, oriental carpets, ceramics, porcelain, faïence and arms.



Salla terrena



Trenčín Castle



Orava Castle

castles and manors

The greatest tourist attraction in Orava is [Orava Castle](#) (Oravský hrad). Overlooking the town of Oravský Podzámok, it is situated in northwest Slovakia on the important long-distance route from Poland through Slovakia to Austria and Hungary. This masterpiece by medieval builders is amazingly perched on a steep rocky limestone cliff rising almost vertically for 112 metres above the River Orava. The castle was built on the high terraces of the castle rock from the top downwards from the middle of the 13th to the beginning of the 17th century, but the main construction work was begun in the mid 16th century by the Thurzo family. They reconstructed the neglected upper castle and built what is known as the Thurzo Renaissance palace onto the west bastion of the medieval castle. In 1800 the castle was gutted by fire. It took on its present appearance at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when Count Jozef Pálffy had it reconstructed in a romantic style. The extensive alterations to the castle that took place between 1953-1968 have partially continued to the present day. Orava Castle is visited by as many as 200 thousand tourists a year. Exhibitions of the Orava Museum, one of the oldest museums in Slovakia, established in 1868, guide visitors through the history of the castle and the Orava region.

The Slovak castle with the largest number of visitors is [Bojnický zámok](#). It is considered to be one of the most beautiful of the Slovak castles. Every year 215 thousand people pass through the gates of this national cultural monument. The castle's fairytale silhouette of steep roofed towers and palaces is the crown of the upper Nitra valley. The present impressive romantic castle stands on the site of a 12th century medieval castle. In 1889-1910 its last aristocratic owner, a great art lover and collector of antiques, Count Ján František Pálffy, had it reconstructed as a splendid romantic residence on the model of the French Gothic chateaux in the valley of the River Loire. He did not live to see the work completed.

The ceiling in the castle's Golden Salon (a copy of the ceiling in the Academia di Belle Arte in Venice) is magnificent, as are the Turkish leather wall coverings in the Oriental Salon and the castle chapel with its beautiful stucco vaulting and frescoes from 1662. There are also an attractive underground cave and a mysterious sarcophagus of the last count. One of the most precious items at the castle is the Bojnice altar by the Italian master Nardo di Cione from the mid 14th century, which has only recently been returned from abroad to its original site.

One of the best-preserved medieval castles in Slovakia is to be found above the village of Krásnohorské Podhradie. A noble family, the Bebeks, began to build it around 1320. In the 16th century it took on the appearance of a Renaissance fortress. After a devastating fire in 1817 it was partially repaired by the Andrassy family and a family museum was installed here, which was opened to the public in 1906. The restoration of the castle was completed in 1992. In 1961 [Krásna Hôrka](#) was classified as part of Slovakia's national cultural heritage. Interesting features of the museum are the interior of the castle's kitchens, a collection of arms and above all the glass coffin of mummified Žofia Serédy, the wife of one of those who inherited the castle. The large bronze cannons in front of the castle gateway also belong to the original inventory.



Bojnice



The precious Bojnice altar



Piešťany

The best..

What Slovakia came to be known for in the world even in the past was its mineral springs and thermal water. More and more foreign guests are coming to our healing spas in search of health and beauty. The offer of health-restoring and recreational stays or “wellness treatment” is really wide.

The Slovak spa town best known in the world is **Piešťany**. This, the sunniest spa in Slovakia is situated in a wide valley on the left bank of the River Váh, on the Spa Island. The first written mention of warm waters bubbling up on the bank of the river and their curative effects dates from 1549, but it is said, and we believe it to be true, that as long as two thousand years ago Roman soldiers from the nearby camp in Trenčín took advantage of the beneficial effects of Piešťany’s water. Several decades later people already knew of the healing

effect of mud on sciatica. Periods of stay for the purpose of curative treatment took place here only after the construction of the brick Classical building with tub baths in 1822. This is now called Napoleonské kúpele. Piešťany earned its reputation as an international spa town only in the 20th century, when a luxury Art Nouveau hotel was built - Thermia Palace, with the Irma baths and the Pro Patria thermal treatment complex. Piešťany was granted the statute of a spa town in 1965. Subsequently a modern spa complex known as the Balnea Centre was built on the Spa Island. The symbol of the spa is a man breaking a crutch, which indicates that the spa focuses on the treatment of motor system diseases, arthritis, inflammatory diseases of the central nervous system, treatment after injuries and orthopaedic operations. The thermal water here is taken from 12 springs. It is hot, hypotonic water with a medium mineral content, which gushes up from faults in the Earth’s crust at a depth of about 2000 metres. The temperature of the water in the spring is 67-69°C. Piešťany’s sulphur mud is one of the best quality peloids in the world.



Piešťany



Bardejovské Kúpele

spas

The oldest spa in Slovakia is **Bardejovské Kúpele**. A written record that has survived from 1247 already mentions Bardejov's curative water and from 1505 we know that 6 bathing cubicles were erected beside the mineral springs. The oldest spa building we know of was built in 1777 and Bardejov can pride itself on having the oldest spa park, covering 300 hectares, whose picturesque nooks merge into wooded parkland and forests mainly of pine trees. In spite of the fact that the spa did not have hot springs, it was visited by monarchs and members of the aristocracy. The emperor's daughter, Mária Luisa, was here for treatment in 1821, also the Russian tsar Alexander and empress Elizabeth, wife of Francis Joseph I, who spent a whole month in Bardejov in 1895. We are reminded of her visit not only by the spring named after her, but also by a statue in front of the sanatorium bearing her name. In the second half of the 19th century Bardejov is mentioned as the most beautiful climatic spa with mineral water. In the same period they also built the largest spa hotel, the neo-Classical Astoria with its rich Art Nouveau decoration and 60 rooms. Modernisation and new buildings came to Bardejov spa in the nineteen sixties, when the monumental colonnade, balneotherapy centre with a polyclinic and an indoor pool, new sanatoriums and hotels appeared. Ten cold hypotonic healing springs are used for drinking cures, inhalations, compresses and hydrotherapy to cure disorders of the digestive system, metabolism, glands with internal secretion, kidneys and urinary tract.

The youngest spa town in Slovakia is **Dudince**. In the southern part of central Slovakia, at the bottom of the Krupinská kotlina basin, it is one of the warmest parts of the country. Although reports from 1549 of the amazing waters in the Hungarian kingdom already mention Dudince, and written documents from the period describe the place where the springs are to be found as a meadow quite covered with mineral water rising from travertine heaps, Dudince's acidulous water was first used more for drinking than for bathing cures. The first sanatorium with tub baths was built here in 1951. Since 1983, when Dudince was granted its statute as a spa, it has begun to operate at full capacity in two complex balneo-centres, Rubín and Smaragd, while these were later joined by Krištál and Diamant and the reconstructed spa guest house Achát. Cold and lukewarm mineral water with a temperature of up to 30°C is used in Dudince for the treatment of diseases of the motor system, rheumatic diseases, Bekhterev's disease, nervous disorders and diseases of the heart and blood vessels. Experts compare the unique chemical composition of Dudince's water and its beneficial effects on people's health to those to be found in the French spa of Vichy.



Dudince spa

www.kupelepiestany.sk, www.kupele-bj.sk, www.dudince.sk



The peak Lomnický štít



A ridge tour in the Low Tatra mountains

The best... of our



Vodopády Studeného potoka
("The Cold Stream Waterfalls")



Velké Hincovo pleso - the largest Tatra tarn

When people say the High Tatras (Vysoké Tatry) are the smallest high mountains in the world and the concentration of natural beauty to be found in a relatively small area is unique in Europe, it is indeed true.

The highest peak both in the High Tatras and in the Carpathians as a whole is **Gerlachovský štít** (2654 m). This and a further 25 Tatra peaks reach a height of over 2500 metres above sea level. On account of its accessibility and the beauty of the panorama it affords, it is one of the most frequently visited alpine summits. Nowadays, those who wish to climb Gerlachovský štít do so in the company of an experienced mountain guide.

The best-known Tatra peak, attracting the largest number of tourists, is **Lomnický štít** (2634 m). A cabin cableway taking people to the summit from Tatranská Lomnica has been in operation since 1940. On account of repair work being carried out on this cableway at present, the peak is reached by means of a four-seater gondola from Tatranská Lomnica to Skalnaté Pleso, where visitors transfer to a cabin cableway with a capacity of 15, which takes them to the upper station. On the summit of Lomnický štít there is a meteorological station, the highest-located workplace in Slovakia. When visibility is good, it is possible to see a large part of Slovakia from the top of the mountain.

In the High Tatras there is the highest concentration of natural lakes in Slovakia. These were left behind from the Ice Age. There are now about a hundred of them, covering an area of cca 3 km² and with a volume of about 10 million m³. The limpid water of many of the tarns reaches a depth of as much as 12 metres. The largest and deepest lake is **Velké Hincovo pleso** (1945 metres above sea level). It covers 20.08 hectares, reaches a depth of 53 metres and holds almost 1800 thousand cubic metres of water. It lies at the end of Mengusovská dolina, which is the valley most popular with tourists.

The lake situated at the highest altitude is **Modré pleso** (2192 m), in the valley of Malá Studená dolina. The shadow cast by the surrounding peaks makes the water in the tarn look a dark blue colour. The best way to reach it is from Skalnaté Pleso or from Hrebienok, a tourist centre above Starý Smokovec.

The Tatra valleys are also an attraction on account of their cascading waterfalls. One of the most visited is **Vodopády Studeného potoka**. The best known are Obrovský vodopád (1330m), which falls 20 m, Malý (1247m) and Veľký vodopád (1226 m) with its 13 m cascade and finally Dlhý vodopád (1160 m), which ends opposite a mountain hut, Bilíková chata. Vodopády Studeného potoka in Malá Studená dolina and Veľká Studená dolina (Small and Big Cold Valley) can be reached from Tatranská Lomnica, or from the other side, from Hrebienok in the direction of Skalnaté pleso. Veľká Studená dolina is in one more way exceptional. It hides the largest number of mountain tarns (22) of all the Tatra valleys.

Wild rivers and streams have cut out deep gorges and rocky ravines in the karst plateaux of Slovakia, and this is the typical landscape of the Slovenský raj ("Slovak Paradise") National Park.

www.tanap.sk, www.napant.sk, www.slovensky-raj.sk



On the highest peak - Gerlachovský štít

natural wealth

One of the most popular ravines in the national park is **Suchá Belá**, which lies in its northwest part. It was formed by a stream of the same name. It is 4 km long and with the help of cascades and waterfalls the water drops as much as 400 metres. Nature has created a variety of formations here, rock windows, steps, and gigantic cauldrons. The difficult sections, often in close proximity to waterfalls, can be reached with the help of wooden or iron ladders and footbridges. The ravine is entered from the tourist centre of Podlesok near Hrabušice.

In area the largest mountain range in Slovakia, the **Low Tatras** (Nízke Tatry) offer magnificent hikes for almost 100 km along the main ridge. This is made up of 27 summits over 1700 metres and 18 over 1800 metres. Ten peaks reach an altitude of over 1900 metres. Strenuous mountain treks taking the whole day with a considerable difference in elevation can be made, as well as hikes of medium difficulty with few ups and downs. The ridge tour through the Nízke Tatry National Park can be done in five phases - from Donovaly (980 m) to the hut under Sedlo Ďurková (1750m), from there to a mountain chalet, Chata gen.M.R.Štefánika (1728 m) then to the Ramža hut (1300 m), from there to another shelter under Andrejcová peak (1410 m), with the final stretch to the village of Telgárt (881 m).



The Suchá Belá ravine



The peak Lomnický štít

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