Czech History

In the 4th century BC Celtic tribes settled in the area (the Boii tribe gave the land its name: Bohemia) and later Germanic tribes and Slavic people. In the 7th century, the Frankish merchant Samo became the ruler of the first known Slavic state in Central Europe, which was partly situated in present-day Moravia. The importance of Moravia grew further, and in 833 Great Moravia was created. While Great Moravia declined towards the end of the 9th century, the Czech state was unified by the Přemyslids (who ruled the country until 1306) and prospered. During the Middle Ages, it played an important role in Europe and was part of the Holy Roman Empire during its entire existence. The Czech King Charles IV of the Luxembourg dynasty even became the Holy Roman Emperor in 1355. In the 16th century the country came under the Habsburg reign. Twice in its history, the country was devastated by major political-religious conflicts: After the religious leader Jan Hus (1371 - 1415) was burnt to death, the Hussite Wars started in the 15th century, and two centuries later the Thirty Years War (1618 - 1648) broke out. The latter had a devastating effect on the country and resulted in the persecution of non-Catholics and the strong Germanisation politics of the Habsburg emperors. The Czech language was slowly driven away from state administration, business, and schools, and was not spoken by the upper classes. This process was finally stopped by the Czech National Revival, a cultural movement taking place in the 18th and 19th centuries, which managed to revive the Czech language, culture and national identity. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of WWI, Czechs and Slovaks joined together and formed the independent Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. During WWII, Slovakia broke away and the Czech state was occupied by the Germans (the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia).

Charles IV (1316 - 1378) was one of the most important rulers of the country. He made Prague the imperial capital, encouraged new construction in the city (Charles Bridge) and in 1348 established Charles University, one of the oldest universities in Europe.

The Flag:
The Czech flag was first adopted in 1918 as the flag of the newly established Czechoslovakia. It consists of a horizontal white band above a red band (traditional colours of Bohemia and Moravia) and a blue triangle. The blue triangle originally represented Slovakia, but it was kept as a part of the Czech flag even after the split of Czechoslovakia.
After the war, Czechoslovakia was restored, but soon it fell under the rule of the communist party and the influence of the Soviet Union. In 1989, it gained freedom through a peaceful revolution and in 1993 it split into two independent states. In 2004, both the Czech Republic and Slovakia joined the European Union.

**CZECH PERSONALITIES**

**Sport**

Football is probably the most popular sport in the Czech Republic. Several top Czech footballers play in the most prestigious European clubs. Ice-hockey enjoys huge popularity too. Many excellent hockey players in NHL teams in the US and Canada are from the Czech Republic.

Among many, Jaromír Jágr (b. 1972) and goalkeeper Dominik Hašek (b. 1965) are the most famous at present. They helped the Czech team to get the Olympic Gold in Nagano in 1998.

The Czech tennis school has made many tennis players world-famous. Martina Navrátilová (b. 1956) has won Wimbledon nine times and in total she has won 164 titles in international tournaments.

In athletics, Czechs such as runners Emil Zátopek (1922 - 2000) and Jarmila Kratochvílová (b. 1951) and javelin-throwers Dana Zátopková (b. 1922) and Jan Železný (b. 1966) have made a great impression.

Václav Havel (b. 1936) was one of the first spokesmen for Charter 77 and a leading figure of the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Then he became president and stayed in the presidential office until 2003.

Decathlete Tomáš Dvořák (b. 1972) won the Olympics and world championships. Roman Sebrle (b. 1974) was the first decathlete ever to break the magical number of 9,000 points.

There is one sport particular to the Czech Republic - nohejbal. It is similar to volleyball, but players kick the ball over a low net with their feet.

**Art**

A brilliant novelist, journalist, and playwright, Karel Čapek (1890 - 1938), coined the word robot in his play R.U.R. Milan Kundera (b. 1929), the contemporary author, reached international fame with his novels *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1985) and *Immortality* (1990).

Many excellent composers were born in the Czech Republic. Antonín Dvořák (1841 - 1904), the author of *Slavonic Dances* and the symphony *From the New World*, gained worldwide recognition for his work, while Bedřich Smetana (1824 - 1884) is well known for his symphonic poem *Vltava* (*The Moldau*) from the cycle *My Country*.

A leader of the “new wave” of Czechoslovak cinema in the 1960s, Miloš Forman (b. 1932) is considered one of the most important film directors in the world today. He received Oscars for his films *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Amadeus*. He also directed a film version of the musical *Hair*.

**Vocabulary**

- *split* [splít] - rozdělení, rozpad
- *tribe* [træib] - kmen
- *settle* [sɛt(ə)l] - usadit se
- *merchandise* [mərˈʃændɪs] - kupec
- *rule* [rʊl] - vláda
- *further* [ˈfɔːðə] - dále
- *decline* [dɪklaɪn] - upadat
- *unify* [juːˈnɪfaɪ] - sjednotit
- *Middle Ages* - středověk
- *reign* [rɛɪn] - vláda
- *the latter* [ˈlɛtə] - ta druhá
- *resulted in the persecution* [rɪˈzʌltɪd fə ˈsɪŋkjuˈkɪn] - vyvolat v pronásledování
- *to drive away* - vyústívat
- *revival* [rɪˈvɪvl] - obrození
- *to break away* - odbahnout se
- *to restore* [rɪˈstreɪst] - obnovit
- *fell under the rule... and the influence* [rɪˈlʌŋkwəns] - dostalo se pod vládu... a vliv
- *to split...* - rozdělit se na
- *decathlete* [dɪkˈæθləti] - desetibojec
- *to break* - překonat
- *particular to* [pɑːˈtɪkjələr tu] - specificky pro
- *to coln* [kʌln] - vynést
- *gained worldwide recognition* [rɪˈɡænd wiərəˌwaːld rɪˈkənɪʒən] - si získal celosvětový věhlas
- *branch of electrochemistry* [ˈbrɑːnt[ə]llɪkˈtriːkoʊ kəˈmɑːstrɪ] - odvětví elektrochemie
- *cultural heritage* [ˈkərəl ˈhɛritɪ] - kulturní dědictví