

# Contents

## Articles

Wikijunior:Europe	1
Geography of Europe	4
Language of Europe	5
People of Europe	7
EU	8
Albania	9
Andorra	12
Armenia	14
Austria	16
Azerbaijan	18
Belarus	20
Belgium	22
Bosnia Herzegovina	25
Bulgaria	28
Croatia	30
Cyprus	32
Czech Republic	33
Denmark	37
Estonia	38
Europe	40
Finland	42
France	43
Georgia	45
Germany	46
Greece	49
Holy See	55
Hungary	56
Iceland	59
Ireland	63
Italy	65
Kazakhstan	68
Latvia	69
Liechtenstein	71
Lithuania	73

Luxembourg	75
Macedonia	76
Malta	78
Moldova	79
Monaco	80
Montenegro	82
Netherlands	84
Norway	87
Poland	89
Portugal	91
Romania	93
Russia	95
San Marino	98
Serbia	100
Slovakia	102
Slovenia	104
Spain	106
Sweden	109
Switzerland	112
Turkey	114
Ukraine	117
United Kingdom	119
USSR	121

## References

Article Sources and Contributors	123
Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors	125

## Article Licenses

License	130
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# Wikijunior:Europe

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Europe is one of the world's smallest but richest continents. It's home to about 710 million people, hundreds of languages, a variety of climates and culture.

Wikijunior Europe is a book for kids about the countries of Europe. This book will give you the basic facts about the country, its people, its geography and its history and other useful facts. This book is currently being created so feel free to make an input. If you have any other ideas for this project then go ahead and do it or talk about it in the discussion page.

## Background

- Europe Introduction
- European Union
- Geography of Europe
- People of Europe
- Language of Europe
- Printable version of Wikijunior Europe

## Country Pages



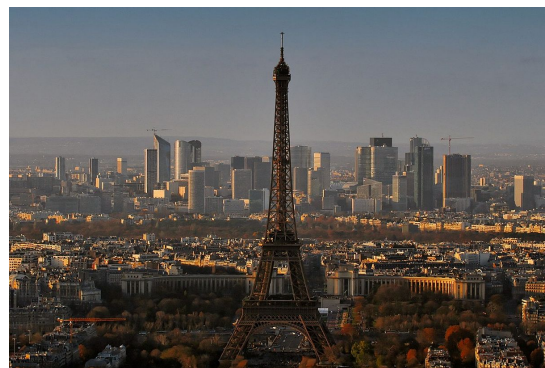
Parthenon, Athens Greece



Staré Město, Prague, Czech Republic



Naples and Mount Vesuvio, Italy



Eiffel Tower, Paris France



Stari Most, Mostar Bosnia & Herzegovina



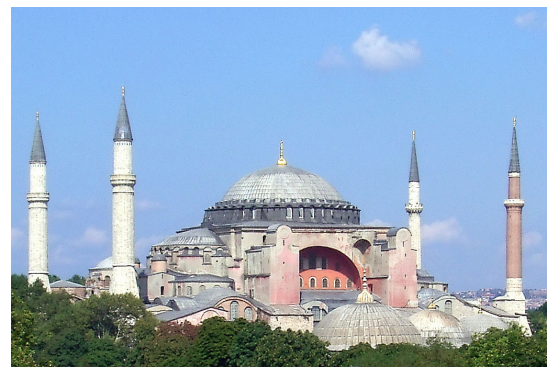
Jordaan, Amsterdam, Netherlands



Wrocławski ratusz, Wrocław, Poland



Bled Island, Bled, Slovenia



Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey





Guggenheim Museum, Bilbo / Bilbao Spain

## Western Europe

1. Andorra
2. Belgium<sup>1</sup>
3. Denmark<sup>1†</sup>
4. France<sup>1†</sup>
5. Iceland<sup>°</sup>
6. Ireland<sup>1</sup>
7. Liechtenstein
8. Luxembourg<sup>1</sup>
9. Netherlands<sup>1†</sup>
10. Norway
11. Portugal<sup>1†</sup>
12. Switzerland
13. United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

## Mediterranean Europe

1. Albania
2. Bosnia Herzegovina
3. Croatia<sup>°</sup>
4. Cyprus<sup>\*1</sup>
5. Greece<sup>1</sup>
6. Italy<sup>1†</sup>
7. Malta<sup>1</sup>
8. Monaco
9. Montenegro<sup>°</sup>
10. San Marino
11. Slovenia<sup>1</sup>
12. Spain<sup>1†</sup>
13. Vatican City

## Central Europe

1. Austria<sup>1</sup>
2. Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>
3. Estonia<sup>1</sup>
4. Finland<sup>1</sup>
5. Germany<sup>1</sup>
6. Hungary<sup>1</sup>
7. Latvia<sup>1</sup>
8. Lithuania<sup>1</sup>
9. Macedonia<sup>°</sup>
10. Poland<sup>1</sup>
11. Serbia
12. Slovakia<sup>1</sup>
13. Sweden<sup>1</sup>

## Eastern Europe

1. Armenia<sup>\*</sup>
2. Azerbaijan<sup>\*</sup>
3. Belarus
4. Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>
5. Georgia<sup>\*</sup>
6. Kazakhstan<sup>\*</sup>
7. Moldova
8. Romania<sup>1</sup>
9. Russia<sup>\*</sup>
10. Turkey<sup>\*°</sup>
11. Ukraine

\* indicates countries which are partially or entirely located in Asia but are often considered as European for socio-political reasons.

<sup>1</sup> indicates member of the European Union.

<sup>°</sup> indicates candidate country of the European Union.

<sup>†</sup> indicates countries located partly outside of Europe in continents besides Asia

*NB. entities which are dependent on another country or whose independence is not widely recognized are not listed above. The Turkish Republic of Cyprus is talked about on the Cyprus page. Similarly, Kosovo (a province of Serbia) is talked about on the Serbia page.*

## Former European Countries

1. Soviet Union (USSR)<sup>\*</sup> (until 1991)
2. Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany) (until 1990)
3. Yugoslavia (until 1992)

## Further Reading

This Wikijunior book is intended for kids but we hope it can be of use for anyone. If you want to read into these topics further visit the Europe and The EU pages on Wikipedia. Links for further reading should be added in the individual country pages so that readers can find out more about the capital cities, the language, etc.

Young learners can learn more about the following areas in Wikijunior:

- Languages of Europe and elsewhere: Wikijunior Languages (a featured book)
- Religions of the world: Wikijunior World Religions

- World Heritage Sites: Wikijunior World Heritage Sites
- Ancient Civilizations: Wikijunior Ancient Civilizations
- South America: Wikijunior South America
- Africa: Wikijunior Africa
- Wikijunior Europe (*in German*) Wikijunior Europa <sup>[1]</sup>
- Wikijunior Europe (*in Romanian*) Wikijunior Europa <sup>[2]</sup>

## Contributing to Wikijunior Europe

Notes for Editors - Information for prospective editors of this Wikijunior book.

## References

[1] [http://de.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikijunior\\_Europa](http://de.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikijunior_Europa)

[2] <http://ro.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikijunior:Europa>

# Geography of Europe

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Europe is a continent of over 50 countries with a border that is largely undefined (defining which countries are European and which aren't is argued a lot) and with many different landscapes, climates and wildlife.

## Islands of Europe

Europe has many thousands of islands and some of these are countries (../Iceland/ and ../Cyprus/, for example). The largest islands are Iceland, Great Britain, Ireland (includes the country called "Ireland" and Northern Ireland which is part of the UK), Sicily, Spitsbergen and Sardinia.

## Mountains of Europe

In the east of the continent are the Ural mountains (click the mountain links to read the article on Wikipedia) which separate Europe from Asia. North of the Mediterranean Sea are the Alps which run through ../France/, ../Switzerland/, ../Italy/, ../Germany/, ../Austria/ and ../Slovenia/. In the centre and south of the continent are the Carpathian Mountains.



Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco), the highest mountain in western Europe



Arctic conditions in Lapland, Finland

## Climate of Europe

The far north (Iceland, ..Norway/, ..Sweden/, ..Finland/ and ..Russia/) pass through the Arctic Circle which is the area near the North Pole where temperatures can be very low. Countries to the east and inland of Europe can have very cold winters but those in the west have milder winters because of warmth from the Gulf Stream which brings hotter temperatures. Southern areas around the Mediterranean Sea can have constantly hot summers and pleasant winters.

# Language of Europe

## Languages of Europe

Most languages spoken in Europe are **Indo-European languages** which are languages which originated between Europe and India. The Indo-European languages in Europe can be divided into different groups:

1. **Albanian** - spoken in Albania and Kosovo (Serbia)
2. **Armenian** - spoken in Armenia
3. **Baltic Languages** - Lithuanian and Latvian, spoken in Lithuania and Latvia
4. **Celtic Languages** - Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Cornish and Manx, all spoken in the United Kingdom or countries which depend on the UK. Also Irish and Breton, spoken in Ireland and France.
5. **Germanic Languages** - English (UK, Ireland and Malta), German (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), Dutch (Netherlands and Belgium), Danish (Denmark), Norwegian (Norway), Swedish (Sweden and Finland) and Icelandic (Iceland).
6. **Greek** - spoken in Greece and Cyprus.
7. **Romance Languages** - Catalan (Spain), French (France, Switzerland, Belgium), Italian (Italy and Slovenia), Portuguese (Portugal), Romanian (Romania and Moldova), Sardinian (Italy), Sicilian (Italy) and Spanish (Spain).
8. **Slavic Languages** - Russian (Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus), Ukrainian (Ukraine), Belarusian (Belarus), Czech (Czech Republic), Polish (Poland), Slovak (Slovakia), Bulgarian (Bulgaria), Macedonian (Macedonia), Slovene (Slovenia and Italy) and Serbian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Bosnian (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina)

There are a few languages spoken in Europe which are not Indo-European languages:

1. **Kartvelian Languages** - this group includes Georgian, spoken in Georgia.
2. **Uralic Languages** - this group includes Estonian (Estonia), Finnish (Finland) and Hungarian (Hungary and Serbia)

3. **Turkic Languages** - this group includes Turkish (Turkey and Cyprus), Azerbaijani (Azerbaijan) and Kazakh (Kazakhstan)
4. **Semitic Languages** - this group includes Maltese (Malta)

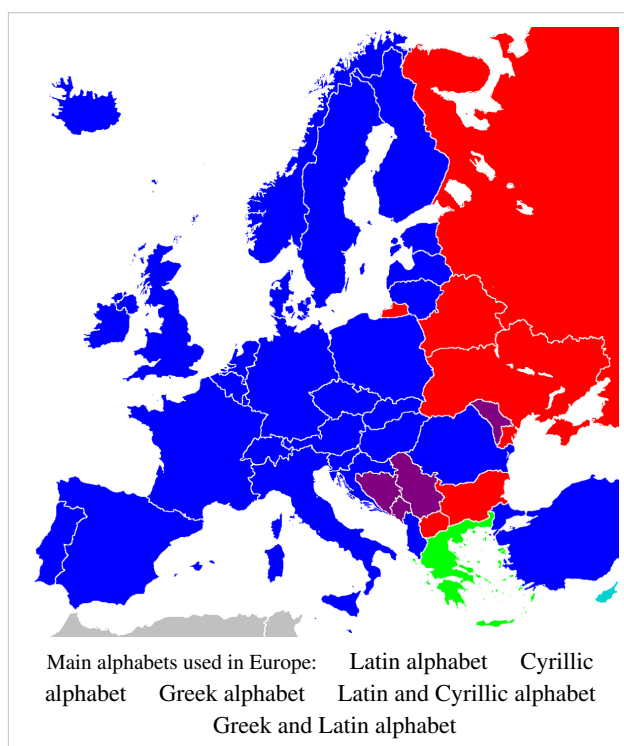
All of the languages above - those in the Indo-European Language group or those from other groups are all related in some way to other languages. There is one language spoken in Europe which has no relation to any other language in the world:

1. **Basque** - spoken in Spain and France.

You can read more about European languages and other world languages at [Wikijunior Languages](#)

## Alphabets of Europe

- The Latin alphabet is used in most of Europe. Most EU countries use this alphabet. The first letters of the Latin alphabet are: A, B, C
- The Cyrillic alphabet is used in some parts of Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe. At present, Bulgaria is the only EU country using this alphabet. Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia are noteworthy because both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets are regularly used in those countries. The first letters of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet are: а, б, в
- The Greek alphabet is used in Greece and Cyprus. The first letters of the Greek alphabet are: Α, Β, Γ
- The Georgian alphabet is used in Georgia. The first letters of the Georgian alphabet are: ა, ბ, გ



# People of Europe

## Europeans



**731 million people live in Europe.** The largest countries, by population, are Russia (143 million but many of these live in Asian parts of Russia) and Germany (80 million). The smallest countries, by population, are the Vatican City (1,000 inhabitants), Monaco, San Marino and Liechtenstein.

## Religion

**The major religion in Europe is Christianity.** Most countries in Europe have a majority of people who are Christian - generally Roman Catholic (most of southern Europe, central Europe and Ireland), Protestant varieties (the UK, Germany and parts of central Europe) and Orthodox (eastern and south-eastern Europe). Large minorities of Jews live in the UK and France (and Poland, Germany and central Europe in the past). Turkey, Albania, Kosovo (Serbia) and Azerbaijan

have majority Muslim populations with large numbers also in Bosnia Herzegovina and Russia.

## Languages

**Over 100 languages** are spoken today in Europe and many hundreds of others were spoken in the past. The European Union has 23 official languages although there are 27 countries in the EU. This is because some languages are spoken in more than one country. English is spoken in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Malta. German is an official language in Germany, Austria and parts of Belgium. Wikijunior:Languages/French is spoken in France and Belgium. Italian is spoken in Italy and also in parts of Slovenia.

The most spoken native EU language is German. English is spoken by more people as a second language than any other language in the EU.

There are many languages in Europe which don't have large numbers of native speakers like Manx and Kashubian.



# EU

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## What is the European Union?

The European Union is a supranational group of **27 countries** in Europe, and was initially formed in the 1950's. Originally it was called the Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the first countries were France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. In 1973 the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined followed by Greece in 1981. In 1986 Spain and Portugal joined and later Finland, Sweden and Austria in 1995. In May 2004, 10 countries joined at the same time: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus. The most recent new members were Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Croatia will join the EU soon, probably in 2013.

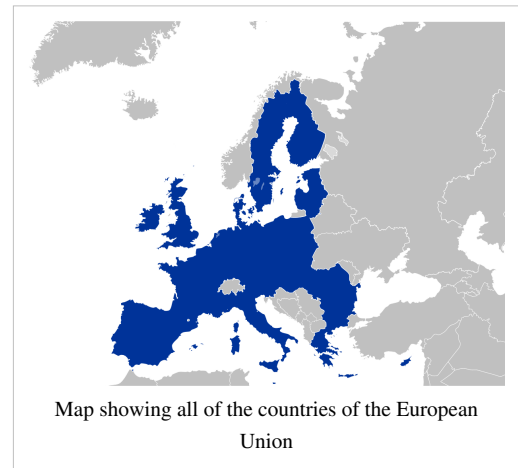
These countries trade with each other in a common market, meaning that goods can be sold and bought freely across the union. People can also live and work (with some restrictions) in any EU country if they are an EU citizen. Member countries also have some common laws derived from decisions made by the union. Each country in the EU also elects politicians to a European Parliament which helps make and decide what common goals the union should pursue. Fifteen countries in the European Union also share a common currency: the Euro.

## Which countries are in the EU?

There are 27 countries in the EU which has a population of around **500 million** and the largest economy in the world.

The members are (in order of when they joined): France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria.

Macedonia, Croatia, Turkey, Montenegro and Iceland are applicant countries who wish to join the European Union in the future. Croatia has been approved and will join soon.



## Which countries use the euro?

Seventeen of the twenty-seven EU member countries use the **euro** as their currency: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia and Estonia. All other members (except the United Kingdom and Denmark) are obliged by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty to adopt the euro at some point in the future.

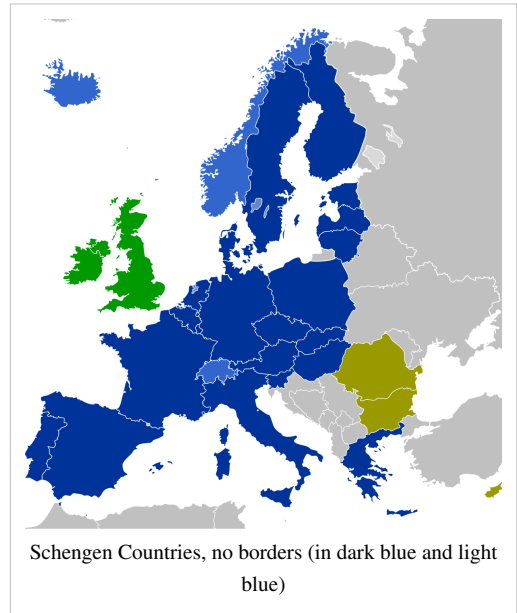
In addition, a few smaller countries which are not part of the EU also use the euro: Vatican City, San Marino, Monaco, Andorra, Montenegro and the province of Kosovo in Serbia.



## Which countries have "open borders"?

The **Schengen Agreement** was signed by many countries in Europe (including some which are not part of the EU). Countries which have signed up to this agreement have no border controls between similar countries. This means that you can travel from Portugal to Spain to France to Germany to Poland to Lithuania to Latvia to Estonia and Finland (several thousand kilometres) and you don't need to stop at borders, show passports.

The following countries have signed the agreement and removed border controls: Portugal, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Iceland (not part of the EU), Sweden, Norway (not part of the EU), Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland (not part of the EU), Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Hungary and Greece. Liechtenstein will join at the end of 2011. The only EU countries where passports are still needed are the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria.



## Albania

**Albania** is a small country in south-eastern Europe in the Balkan peninsula. It shares borders with Greece, Montenegro, Kosovo (Serbia), and Macedonia. The capital is Tirana. The currency of Albania is the Lek. Other large cities are Durrës and Elbasan. Albania isn't part of the European Union.





The flag of Albania

## Albania's History

During the fifteenth century Albania enjoyed a brief period of independence under the legendary hero, Skanderbeg. Aside from this exception, the country did not enjoy independence until the twentieth century. After five hundred years of Ottoman rule, an independent Albania was proclaimed in 1912. The country adopted a republican form of government in 1920. In 1939 the Italians invaded the country. Because of this event Albania was one of the first countries occupied by the Axis Powers in World War II.

After the war Albania became a communist state known as the **Socialist People's Republic of Albania** and was ruled by Enver Hoxha until 1985. Albania became a democratic country in 1991 but faced problems throughout the 1990s. In 1996 there were severe economic problems because of the failure of **Ponzi schemes** in the country. In 1997 there was an armed rebellion and hundreds of thousands of people emigrated to other parts of Europe and North America. In 1999 Albania faced an influx of refugees from Kosovo, Serbia during violence in that province.



**Ponzi scheme** — is a financial con where people who invest in the scheme make money from what future people invest in the scheme. Because of a limited population these schemes eventually run out of new investors and fall apart

## Albania's Geography

Albania has a total area of 28,750 square kilometers. Albania has coastline on the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea. Albania has a continental climate with hot summers and fairly cold temperatures. 70% of the country is mountainous with the highest mountain being Korab at 2,753 metres.

Albania has many fairly big lakes including one of central Europe's biggest lakes - Lake Shkodër - which is located partly in Albania and partly in neighbouring Montenegro.

## Albania's People

Albania has been populated since prehistoric times and in recent history the country has been home to large numbers of Catholic Christians and Jews but in the past few hundred years people have either converted to Islam or moved elsewhere. About 40% of the population are Muslim, 40% are Christian and 20% are Atheist (no religion). One of the most internationally famous Albanians was **Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu**, better known as **Mother Teresa** who was a Roman Catholic nun who worked with the poor around the world, especially India.

Between 1945 and 1992 Albania was a communist country but currently the country is hoping to join organizations like the European Union. The national language is Albanian. Many Albanians also speak English, Italian and Greek. A large number of Albanians also live in Macedonia, Greece, Italy and the Serbian region of Kosovo.

The literacy rate for the total population, age 9 or older, is about 94%. Elementary education is required for grades 1-9, but most students continue at least until a secondary education (grades 10-12). Students must successfully pass graduation exams at the end of the 9th grade and at the end of the 12th grade in order to continue their education. The school year begins in September and finishes in late May or early June.

The most popular sport in Albania is football and the most followed sports event is the World Cup. Other played sports include basketball, volleyball, and gymnastics.



Ksamil islets, Albania

## Albania's Sights



Ksamil islets, Albania

Today Albania is a popular destination for tourists from Europe and elsewhere. Tourists visit for the Greek, Roman and Ottoman archaeological buildings as well as some remnants from Communist times. The mountains and beaches in Albania are said to be as good, or better, than elsewhere in Europe but much less crowded. In 2011 Lonely Planet said that **Albania is the number 1 destination to visit** and most tourists who visit come from Kosovo (Serbia), Greece, Macedonia and Italy. Other visitors come from Poland, Czech Republic, France and Sweden.

There are **3 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Albania** including the Greek and

Roman city of *Butrint* and a medieval Ottoman town called *Gjirokastër*.

# Andorra

**Andorra** is a tiny country in south western Europe, located in the eastern Pyrenees mountains and bordered by Spain and France. Once isolated, it is currently a prosperous country mainly because of tourism and its status as a tax haven. The people of Andorra are currently listed as having the highest human life expectancies on Earth, at 83.52 years (2007 est). Andorra is 466 km<sup>2</sup> and their capital city is Andorra la Vella. Andorra is not part of the European Union but it uses the Euro as its currency.

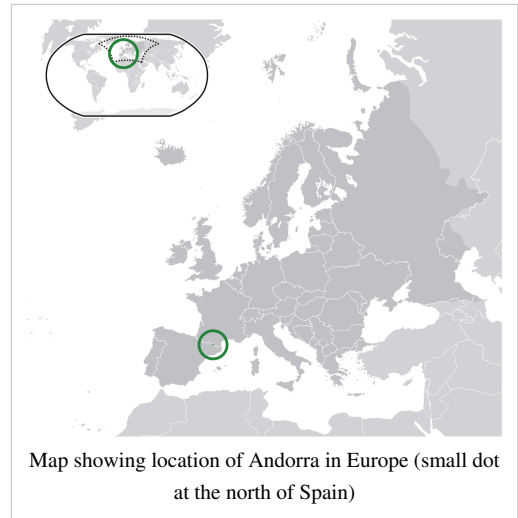
## Andorra's History

Tradition holds that Charles the Great (Charlemagne) granted a charter to Andorran people in return for their fighting the Moors. Overlordship of the territory passed to the local count of Urgell and eventually to the bishop of the diocese of Urgell. In the eleventh century a dispute arose between the bishop and his northern neighbour over Andorra.

The conflict was resolved in 1278 by the signing of a *paréage*, which provided that Andorra's sovereignty be shared between the count of Foix (whose title would ultimately transfer to the French head of state) and the bishop of La Seu d'Urgell, in Catalonia, Spain. This gave the small principality its territory and political form.

Andorra was briefly annexed to Aragon twice, in 1396 and 1512.

Over the years the title passed to the kings of Navarre. After Henry of Navarre became King Henry IV of France, he issued an edict (1607) that established the head of the French state and the Bishop of Urgell as co-princes of Andorra.



Map showing location of Andorra in Europe (small dot at the north of Spain)



The National Flag of Andorra



**Annex** — If a country is annexed it means that it becomes part of another country, usually against the will of the people

In the period 1812–13, the First French Empire annexed Catalonia and divided it in four *départements*. Andorra was also annexed and made part of the district of Puigcerdà (*département* of Sègre).

Andorra declared war on Imperial Germany during World War I but did not actually take part in the fighting. It remained in an official state of belligerency until 1957 as it was not included in the Versailles Peace Treaty.

In 1933 France occupied Andorra as a result of social unrest before elections. On July 12, 1934, an adventurer named Boris Skossyreff issued a proclamation in Urgell, declaring himself Boris I, sovereign prince of Andorra, simultaneously declaring war on the bishop of Urgell. He was arrested by Spanish authorities on July 20 and



ultimately expelled from Spain. From 1936 to 1940, a French detachment was garrisoned in Andorra to prevent influences of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's Spain. Francoist troops reached the Andorran border in the later stages of the war.

During World War II, **Andorra remained neutral** and was an important smuggling route between Vichy France and Spain.

Given its relative isolation, Andorra has existed outside the mainstream of European history, with few ties to countries other than France and Spain. In recent times, however, its thriving tourist industry along with developments in transportation and communications have removed the country from its isolation. Its political system was thoroughly modernized in 1993, the year in which it became a member of the United Nations.

## Andorra's Geography

Andorra is in the Pyrenees mountain range. Andorra consists predominantly of rugged mountains of an average height of 1996 meters with the highest being the **Coma Pedrosa** at 2946 meters. These are dissected by three narrow valleys in a V shape that combine into one as the main stream, the Valira river, leaves the country for Spain (at Andorra's lowest point of 870 m). The Andorra surface is 468 km<sup>2</sup>.

Andorra's climate is similar to its neighbors' temperate climates, but its higher altitude means there is on average more snow in winter and it is slightly cooler in summer.

## Andorra's People

In Andorra there are **71,822 people**. The majority of the inhabitants of Andorra are foreign nationals, only 33% are actual Andorrans. The others are almost entirely from Spain and France. Even so, the only official language is Catalan, a language spoken in the north of Spain, and, like Spanish, English, and French, is of Latin Origin.

Andorra's long history has provided it with a rich folklore and an abundance of folk tales, with roots originating as far as Andalusia in the south and the Netherlands in the north. Today the majority of people in Andorra are Christian, mostly Roman Catholic.



Andorra's capital city, Andorra Valley

Andorran culture is Catalan in essence. It has given a significant and easily identifiable contribution to the conglomerate of Catalan culture.

Two writers renowned in Catalonia and the region, Michèle Gazier and Ramon Villeró, both come from Andorra.

Andorra is home to folk dances like the contrapàs and marratxa, which survive in Sant Julià de Lòria especially. Andorran folk music has similarities to all of its neighbors, but is especially Catalan in character, especially in the presence of dances like the sardana. Other Andorran folk dances include contrapàs in Andorra la Vella and Saint Anne's dance in Escaldes-Engordany.

## Andorra's Sights

Andorra is popular with tourists who visit during the winter for skiing holidays and all-year-round for shopping trips - popular because of the price and tax differences between Andorra and neighbouring Spain and France.

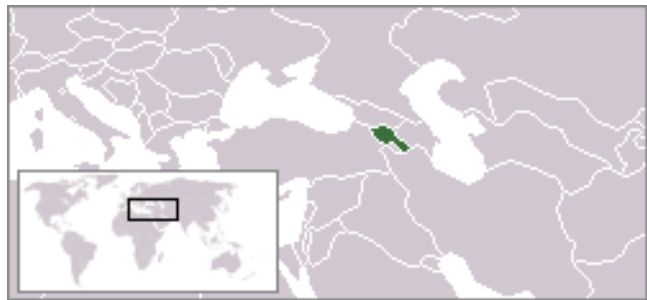
Andorra has one UNESCO World Heritage Site: **Madriu-Claror-Perafita Valley**.

# Armenia

**Armenia** is a small country located in eastern Europe and western Asia. Its neighbours are Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iran. The capital of Armenia is Yerevan. Other cities in Armenia are Gyumri and Vanadzor. The currency of Armenia is the Dram.

## Armenia's History

Armenia is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Over the centuries Armenia has been taken over by many people including Russia, Greeks, and the Romans. On September 23, 1991 Armenia finally claimed its independence from the Soviet Union.



Map showing location of Armenia in south east Europe and the Middle East



**Soviet Union** — The Soviet Union was a communist country which included 15 modern-day countries including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and many others

## Armenia's Geography

The total land area of Armenia is 11,506 sq mi (29,800 km<sup>2</sup>) and the population is 2,968,586.

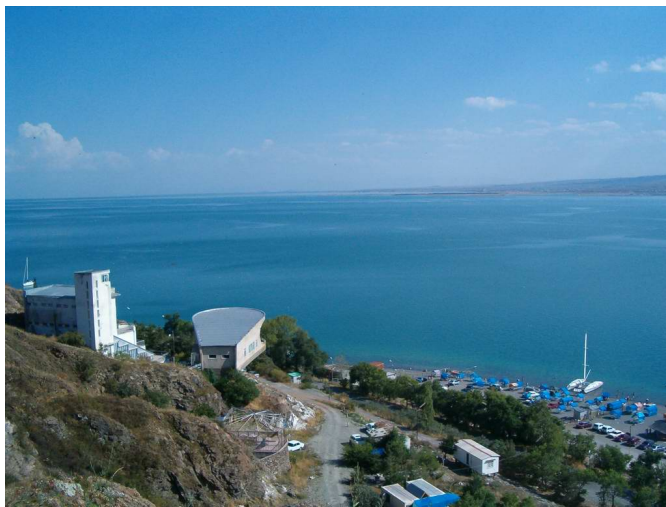
Armenia has many mountain lakes, the largest being Lake Sevan, which is located in the North-eastern part of the country. Lake Sevan is a popular resort area. The Aras river is the largest and longest river in Armenia. It starts off in the mountains of Turkey and flows along Armenia's border with Turkey and Iran.

The Climate of Armenia is mostly dry with long hot summers and average winters. The sun shines most of the time in Armenia which causes the dry climate but they do receive heavy rains. The heavy rains occur most often in Autumn or Fall.

## Armenia's People



The flag of Armenia.



Lake Sevan in Gegharkunik, Armenia

Sevan, shown in the picture to the left, is one of the sights that you can see when you go to Armenia. It is the largest lake in the country and that makes it a very popular tourist attraction. You can also visit the monasteries and churches, or some of its very old castles. Armenia has **4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** which include monasteries and churches.

Over half of Armenia's population live in cities or towns. You can find most of the population near the river valleys.

The Major Nationalities in Armenia are Armenian, Russian, and Kurds. Nearly 98 percent of the People in Armenia speak Armenian. The other spoken languages in the country are Russian and Yezidi. The Armenian's were converted to Christianity in the 4th century. Today Christianity is still the most practiced religion there. There are also Russian Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Muslims.

Most Armenian's can read and write. While Armenia was under the control of the Soviet Union the government in Moscow was in control of the educational system. They believed in free and universal education. Today primary and secondary education is required and are available for free. The country's largest university is Yerevan State University, founded in 1919 in Yerevan.

## Armenia's Sights

In the past 5 years tourism has become more important to the Armenian economy. Lake

# Austria

**Austria** is a country in Central Europe. It shares borders with Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy and Slovenia. The main language of Austria is German. The capital city is Vienna. Other big cities are Salzburg and Linz. Austria has been part of the European Union since 1995 and uses the Euro as its currency.



The mountains of Austria.

## Austria's History



The flag of Austria.

During history Austria has been part of Celtic, Roman, Bavarians, Slavs and Avar countries or empires. Between 1278 CE and 1914 Austria was ruled by the Habsburgs, the Austrian Royal family. The 19th century **Austrian-Hungarian Empire** was very powerful and covered all of today's Austria and Hungary as well as parts or all of Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, Italy and other countries. The huge number of ethnic groups in the empire created problems and in 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Bosnia-Serb in Sarajevo, the capital of present-day Bosnia (then part of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire) kicking off World War I.

After World War I the empire split up. Austria's size was reduced to more-or-less today's size and the country was forbidden to unite with Germany. Economic and political problems continued during the 1920s and 1930s and in 1938 Austria became part of Adolf Hitler's **Third Reich**. World War II crippled Austria resulting in 260,000 military deaths, 65,000 Austrian Jews killed in the Holocaust and 140,000 other Jews fled the country. Austria was officially neutral in the years after the end of the war. Since that time Austria has become a very peaceful and economically successful country and joined the European Union in 1995.



## Austria's Geography

The population of Austria is 8,205,533. The total area of Austria is 32,382 sq mi (83,870 km<sup>2</sup>).

About 3/4 of Austria is covered with mountains and because of this the climate varies greatly from one place to another. Some of Europe's highest mountains, part of **the Alps**, are located in Austria. The highest mountain in Austria is Großglockner at 3,797 metres. In Eastern Austria the climate is average with cold winters and warm summers. The Western part of Austria's climate changes depending on the conditions of the Atlantic Ocean. Austria is one of the countries in Europe that have the most forest land. 42 percent of the land is covered with forests. Because of this Austria has a wide variety of trees but the wildlife in Austria is scarce. Chamois, deer, and marmot are still present but the bears which used to have a large population are almost gone. Hunting is regulated to protect the remaining animals they have in the country.

## Austria's People

The official Language of Austria is German. Other popular languages are Slovene, Croatian, and Hungarian. Most of the population's religion is Roman Catholic. Before World War II Austria had a very large Jewish population.

In Austria you are required to go to school from the ages of 6-15. After that you have a few choices for secondary school. You can choose to go to a school that prepares you to go to a technical college for specialized training in certain areas or you can go to a general high school and receive an education which allows you to continue on to a University.



Schopperndorf during an Austrian summer

## Sights of the Country



Historical centre of Salzburg, a World Heritage Site

Austria is one of the world's top tourist destinations. Austria is a **great winter sports area**, and has many summer music festivals and lake resorts. One of the largest tourist attractions of Austria are the Alps. Most of the tourism that comes to Austria comes from Germany. 9% of Austria's money comes from tourism and it's the 9th biggest country for tourism in the world. The cities of Vienna and Salzburg are popular with cultural visitors.

There are **9 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Austria** including one which is shared with other countries. These world

important sites include the historical centres of Vienna, Salzburg, Graz and Schloss Eggenberg and Lake Neusiedl in the south-east of the country.

# Azerbaijan

**Azerbaijan** is a medium-sized country in the South Caucasus region of Europe. Until 1991, Azerbaijan was a part of the Soviet Union (USSR). The capital city is Baku and the country shares borders with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Turkey. Azerbaijan is not part of the European Union and uses the *Manat* as its currency.



Map showing location of Azerbaijan in the Caucasus region of Europe and Asia

## Azerbaijan's History

The area of present-day Azerbaijan was settled beginning in about the 8th century BC by the Medes, an ancient Aryan tribe. It became part of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BC. Between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD, the Romans conquered the area of present-day Azerbaijan. Christianity began to spread there in the 3rd century. In 1920 the Azerbaijanis were taken over by the Soviet Union or the USSR. In 1991 Azerbaijan became independent from the Soviet Union. After becoming independent, Azerbaijan and Armenia

fought a war called the **Nagorno-Karabakh War** which killed more than 30,000 people on both sides. Since the 1990s Azerbaijan has become more prosperous, mostly because of large amounts of oil.



The flag of Azerbaijan.



Walled City, Baku



**Soviet Union** — The Soviet Union was a communist country which included 15 modern-day countries including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and many others

## Azerbaijan's Geography

Azerbaijan covers an area of about 86,600 km<sup>2</sup> (about 33,400 sq mi). That's about the size of Portugal or the state of Maine in the United States. Azerbaijan borders the **Caspian Sea** to the east, Georgia and Russia to the north, Iran to the south, and Armenia to the south-west and west. The capital of Azerbaijan is the ancient city of Baku, which has the largest and best harbour on the Caspian Sea.

Azerbaijan is located in both Europe and Asia. The highest mountain in the country is Bazardüzü which is 4466 metres above sea level. Another interesting feature of Azerbaijan are the mud volcanoes - half of all mud volcanoes in the world are situated in Azerbaijan.

## Azerbaijan's People

The population of Azerbaijan is around 18,120,000. Azerbaijani, Russian, Lezgin, and Talysh are the languages that are spoken by the people who live in the country. The national language is Azerbaijani or Azeri and almost 93 percent of the population speak it.

People from Azerbaijan are called Azerbaijani or Azeris, Dagestanis and Russians are the largest minority groups in Azerbaijan, followed by Armenians. The majority of people in the country are Muslim but there are also small numbers of Orthodox Christians.

Most adults in Azerbaijan can read and write. Education is required for the first eight years, but many children continue their education.

## Azerbaijan's Sights



Petroglyphs in Gobustan, Azerbaijan, dating back to 10,000 BC

Azerbaijan has two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: **The Walled City of Baku** (and Shirvanshahs' Palace and the Maiden Tower) all in the capital, Baku and **Gobustan Rock Art** - a site full of ancient art from 4,000 to 40,000 years ago.

Tourism was extremely popular during the 1980s but because of wars in the 1990s tourists went elsewhere. Tourism has only recently become important again in Azerbaijan. Religious, spa and health care tourism is becoming more and more popular every year. Castles, national parks, two Heritage Sites, skiing in the winter and swimming in the summer are activities that tourists can do while visiting Azerbaijan.

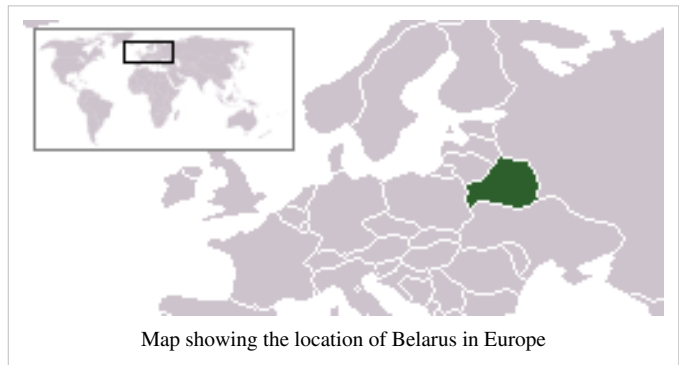
## Belarus

**Belarus** is a large country in north eastern Europe. It shares borders with Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine and Poland. The capital city is Minsk. Other big cities in Belarus are Brest and Homyel. Belarus is not part of the European Union. Its currency is the **Belarusian ruble**.

### Belarus's History

The region that is now modern-day Belarus was first settled by Slavic tribes in the 6th century. Belarus first declared independence on March 25, 1918, forming the Belarusian People's Republic. The Soviet Union (also known as the USSR) took control of Belarus almost a year later and Belarus became a member of the union in 1922.

Belarus became an independent country again on 27 July 1990. **Alexander Lukashenko** became the country's first and only president since independence. He *won* elections in 1994, 2001, 2006 and 2010 although organizations from around the world don't believe that the elections were fair and Belarus is considered to be Europe's only dictatorship.



Map showing the location of Belarus in Europe



**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991



## Belarus's Geography



House of Government in Minsk, with a statue of Vladimir Lenin



The flag of Belarus.

Belarus is a landlocked country (it has no coastline) and is mostly flat. Belarus's highest point is Dzyarzhynskaya Hara at 345 metres. Belarus is bordered by Latvia on the north, Lithuania to the north west, Poland to the west, Russia to the north and east and Ukraine to the south.

There are many lakes and rivers across the country and 34% of the country is covered by forests. 20% of the southern part of Belarus is uninhabitable because of the affects of the Chernobyl (Ukraine) nuclear power plant accident in 1986. During winter Belarus can be very cold with average temperatures in January of only  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  but summers are usually as warm as other parts of northern Europe.

A significant part of the south-east of the country is off-limits as an exclusion zone because of the 1986 **explosion at Chernobyl power plant** across the border in Ukraine.

## Belarus's People

The population of Belarus is 9,724,723. Native people from Belarus, called **Belarusians**, make up about 81 percent of

the population. Other ethnic groups include Russians, Poles, and Ukrainians.

Belarus's two official languages are Belarusian and Russian. Other languages spoken in the country include Polish, Ukrainian, and Eastern Yiddish.

Belarus has no official religion. Many people in Belarus practice or are a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, with minorities practicing Catholicism, Judaism, and other religions.

Education in Belarus is free for all levels and children are required to go to school between the ages of 6 to 15. After finishing basic education, each student is given a certificate by the state and is able to enter the workforce or serve in the military. Students do have the option of going for a higher education or train in a vocational school; the length of the schooling depends on what the student has chosen. The literacy rate is 100 percent.

## Belarus's Sights

Presently few tourists visit Belarus because it is one of Europe's poorest countries and because many don't consider the country to be democratic. Tourism can be difficult for Religious, political and journalistic activity so religious pilgrims, political activists and journalists may be refused entry to Belarus. Most visitors require a visa except for those from former Soviet union countries (but not Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). Visitors should expect a thorough search of their bags when they arrive at Customs.

The capital city Minsk is popular with foreigners because of its churches. The city offers an insight into life in the old Soviet Union with many buildings and shops not renovated since independence. The **KGB Museum** presents a look at the Soviet Union's national security agency which investigated, spied and even tortured criminals and political dissidents in the past.

There are **4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Belarus** including Mir Castle Complex and the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park which forms part of Belarus's border with Poland.

## Belgium

**Belgium** is a small country in northern and western Europe. It shares borders with France, the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg. The capital city is Brussels. Other big cities are Antwerp and Liège. Belgium has been part of the European Union (EU) since the organization started in the 1950s and uses the *Euro* as its currency. Many of the main government buildings of the European Union are based in Brussels.



Map showing location of Belgium in Europe



**EU Capital** — There is no official capital of the European Union but the main government buildings and parliamentary offices are in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg in France.

## Belgium's History

Belgium became independent in 1830. Before that date the country was a part of the "Low Countries", an historical region corresponding to the modern states of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. This group of states is now called **Benelux**. The "Low Countries" used to be a set of feudal states between the Holy German Empire and France with different degrees of autonomy. At the end of the Middle Ages, the region was economically and culturally flourishing. However several wars between the Dutch, the Spaniards, the English, the French, the Germans and the Austrians plundered the country.

After independence the country became a center of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and participated in the colonization of Africa. During the first half of the twentieth century the country became prosperous again. However the oil crisis of the seventies put the country (and in particular its southern part Wallonia) into an enduring economic crisis.

## Belgium's Geography

Belgium is one of the smallest countries in Europe. The country is about 280 km (about 175 miles) long and about 145 km (about 90 miles) wide. Belgium's winters are mild with cool, windy summers.

## Belgium's People

The population of Belgium is about 10 million. Belgium is divided into three different regions: **Flanders**, **Wallonia**, and **Brussels**. In Flanders most people speak Dutch. In Wallonia most people speak French. In Brussels the people speak both languages. About 80 percent of the Belgian population is Roman Catholic. Other religions practiced within the country include Islam and Judaism.

## Education

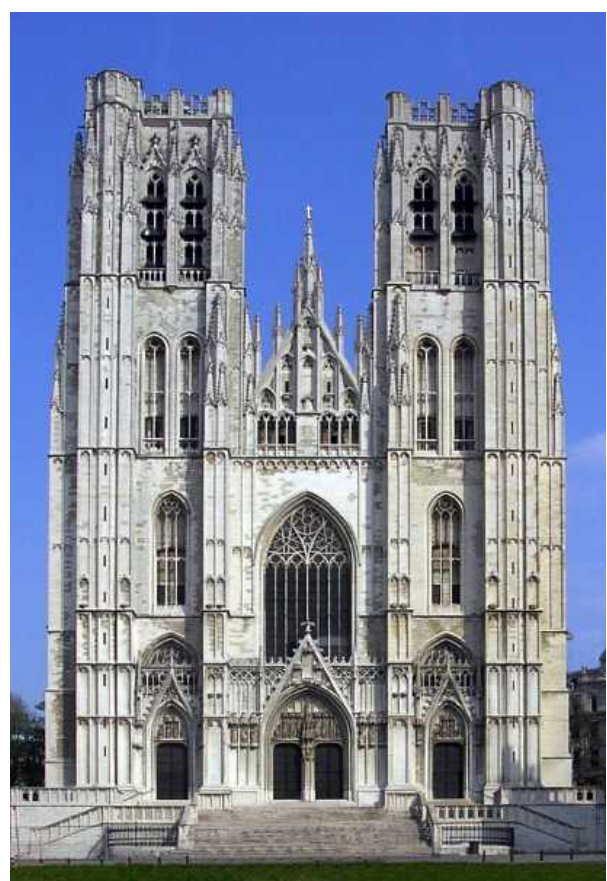
Education is required from six to eighteen for Belgians, but many continue to study until around the age of 23.

Free pre-primary schooling (Dutch: kleuteronderwijs; French: enseignement maternel; German: Kindergarten) is provided to every child from the age

of 2 years 6 months. In most schools the child can start in school as soon as they reach this age, so class size for the



Flag of Belgium



St. Michael and Gudula Cathedral in Brussels, Belgium.

youngest children grows during the year. In the Flemish region, start dates are limited to 6 per year, after a school holiday period and the first school day in February. There are no formal lessons or assessments, and everything is done in a playful way. Although it is not required, more than 90% of all children in the age category attend pre-school. Most pre-schools are attached to a particular primary school. Pre- and primary schools often share buildings and other facilities. Some schools offer special pre-primary education for children with disabilities or other special needs.

Primary school (Dutch: *lager onderwijs*; French: *enseignement primaire*; German: *Grundschule*) consists of six years and the subjects given are generally the same at all schools. Primary schooling is free and age is the only entrance requirement.

When graduating from primary school around the age of 12, students enter secondary education. Here they have to choose a direction that they want to follow, depending on their skill level and interests.

## Sports

The **1920 Summer Olympics** were held in Antwerp, Belgium. Football (soccer) and cycling are especially popular. Jean-Marie Pfaff, a former Belgian goalie, is considered one of the greatest goalkeepers in the history of the game. With five victories in the Tour de France and many other cycling records, Belgian Eddy Merckx ranks high in the list of great cyclists. His hour speed record (set in 1972) stood for twelve years. Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin, two Belgian tennis champions, were highly ranked players.

## Belgium's Sights

Tourists come to Belgium to see the cities and visit the museums and try out the food. Belgian chocolates are internationally known. Ostende is the most popular beach resort in Belgium.

Belgium has ten UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the *Historical Centre of Bruges* and *La Grand-Place* in Brussels.

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# Bosnia Herzegovina

**Bosnia Herzegovina** (also known as Bosnia & Herzegovina) is a country in southern Europe. It shares borders with Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Bosnia Herzegovina consists of two geographic regions - Bosnia (in the north, east and centre) and Herzegovina (in the south west). Bosnia Herzegovina is divided into two political states - the **Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina** and **Republika Srpska**. People who live in Bosnia Herzegovina are called Bosniak (or Bosnian), Croatian or Serbian. The capital city is Sarajevo (capital of the whole country and the capital of the federation). Banja Luka is the capital of the Republika Srpska state. Other big cities in B&H are Mostar, Tuzla and Doboј. Bosnia Herzegovina is best known for the brutal conflict in the 1990s and its stunning scenery, cities and mix of different cultures. Bosnia Herzegovina is not part of the European Union and it uses the *Convertible Mark* as its currency.



Map showing the location of B&H in Europe

## History of Bosnia Herzegovina

Between 1918 and 1992 Bosnia Herzegovina was part of **Yugoslavia** and received investment from richer parts of the country like Slovenia and Croatia. In 1991 Slovenia and Croatia both became independent. The Muslim (**Bosniak**)-majority government of Bosnia Herzegovina also declared independence but this was complicated because **Bosnian Serbs** wanted to remain part of Yugoslavia and so created the *Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Similarly, **Bosnian Croats** wished to become part of newly-independent Croatia and created the *Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia*. War soon followed.

The Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995 killed around 110,000 people and devastated historic cities like Sarajevo and Mostar and continues to disrupt normal life today because of land mines and ruined houses which pose a hazard to citizens. After the war ended in 1995 the country was divided into two political parts: *Republika Srpska* - about 50% of the territory and mostly Bosnian Serbs and *Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina* - about 50% of the territory and a mix of Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats. Neither part is independent but they have separate governments, elections, schools and alphabets (Republika Srpska uses the Cyrillic alphabet). The country remains divided today.



Mostar's Old Bridge, destroyed during the war but rebuilt recently



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia

## Geography of Bosnia Herzegovina

The country's name comes from the two regions Bosnia and Herzegovina, which have a very vaguely defined border between them. Bosnia occupies the northern areas which are roughly four fifths of the entire country, while Herzegovina occupies the rest in the south part of the country.

The region of Bosnia is the largest geographic region with moderate continental climate, marked by hot summers and cold, snowy winters. Smaller Herzegovina is the southern tip of the country, with Mediterranean climate and very hot summers that can reach 45 C (around 115 F). Bosnia and Herzegovina has many natural resources. The name of Herzegovina was forced upon Bosnia by Otto Von Bismarck during the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Central Bosnia is the most mountainous part of Bosnia featuring predominate mountains Vlašić, Čvrtnica, and Prenj. Eastern Bosnia also features mountains like Trebević, Jahorina, Igman, Bjelašnica and Treskavica. It was here that the **1984 Winter Olympics** were held. Its mascot was Vučko.

## People of Bosnia Herzegovina

Due to the conflicts in the 1990s, the Bosnian people can be nationalistic and often claim to be Bosniak, Croatian or Serbian. The term 'Bosnian' usually describes people who are Bosniak (Muslim).

Bosnia Herzegovina has 3 major religions. Islam is practiced by around 40-45% of the population, mainly Sunni Islam. Christianity is practiced by around 50% of population: Christian Orthodox is practiced by around 30% of the population and by the majority living in Republika Srpska, while Catholicism is practiced by around 20% of the population of Bosnia Herzegovina - mainly by Croats, and it is the main Christian denomination in west Herzegovina.



Tsar's Mosque, Sarajevo

## Sights of Bosnia Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a top performer in recent years in terms of tourism development; tourist arrivals have grown by an average of 24% annually from 1995 to 2000. Some of the tourist attractions in Bosnia and Herzegovina include:

- Sarajevo - often described as Europe's Jerusalem because of the mix of churches, synagogues and mosques.
  - Banja Luka, the "Green City"
  - Bihać and the Una River
  - Doboj and its 13th century fortress
  - Jajce and its waterfall
- 
- Mount Bjelašnica and Jahorina, sites of the XIV Olympic Winter Games.
  - Neum on the coast
  - Stolac, the Begovina neighborhood and Radimlja tombstones
  - Višegrad and its old bridge (a UNESCO World Heritage Sites)
  - Visoko, site of the alleged Bosnian pyramids
  - Mostar and the re-built bridge (also a UNESCO World Heritage Site)
  - Tešanj, one of the oldest cities in Bosnia with its old town.
- In the past few years, Lonely Planet rated Sarajevo as #43 in the list of **Best Cities in the World**, ahead of other famous cities like Dubrovnik (#59), Ljubljana, Slovenia (#84), Bled, Slovenia (#90) and Belgrade (#113)

# Bulgaria

**Bulgaria** is a country in south eastern Europe. It shares borders with Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Romania. The capital city is Sofia. Other big cities are Plovdiv and Varna. Bulgaria joined the European Union on January 1st, 2007. The currency of Bulgaria is the Lev.

## Bulgaria's History

In 1912 and 1913, Bulgaria became involved in the Balkan Wars, first entering into conflict alongside Greece, Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottoman Empire. The First Balkan War (1912-1913) proved a success for the Bulgarian army. The Second Balkan War (1913) put Bulgaria against Greece and Serbia, joined by Romania and Turkey. After its defeat in the Second Balkan War, Bulgaria lost a large amount of the territory that they had conquered in the first war.



Map showing the location of Bulgaria in Europe

During World War I, Bulgaria found itself fighting on the losing side as a result of its alliance with the Central Powers. Bulgaria became allied with the Axis Powers, although no Bulgarian soldiers participated in the war against the USSR. During World War II Nazi Germany allowed Bulgaria to occupy parts of Greece and of Yugoslavia. Bulgaria became one of only three countries (along with Finland and Denmark) that saved its entire Jewish population (around 50,000 people) from the Nazi camps by refusing to comply with an August 31, 1943 resolution.

In September 1944, the Soviet army entered Bulgaria, enabling the Bulgarian Communists (the Bulgarian Workers Party) to seize power and establish a communist state. In 1944, Bulgaria's forces turned against the country's former ally, Germany. Communism ended in Bulgaria in 1989 and since then the country has been democratic and capitalist. Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007.



**Fall of Communism** — In 1989 communism ended in many countries including Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and others because of mass protests

## Bulgaria's Geography

The area of Bulgaria is 110,994 km<sup>2</sup> (42,855 sq mi). It borders five other countries: Romania to the north (mostly along the River Danube), Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia to the west, and Greece and Turkey to the south. The Black Sea runs along most of the country to the east. It is a land of mountains, rivers, and rolling plains. More than two-thirds of the country is plains, plateaus, or hilly land.

The coastal climate is moderated by the Black Sea, but strong winds and violent local storms are common during the winter.

Winters along the Danube River are bitterly cold. Most of Bulgaria has a temperate climate, with cool and damp winters, very hot and dry summers. Average precipitation in Bulgaria is about 630 millimeters per year. Bulgaria is likely to experience earthquakes and landslides. Bulgaria is currently facing some environmental issues including water pollution, air pollution, and forest pollution in the form of acid rain.



The flag of Bulgaria.

## Bulgaria's People

The population of Bulgaria is 7,640,238. The official language is Bulgarian. More than 90 percent of the population speak it. Turkish is the largest minority language. Education is free and required for children from the ages of 7 through 14. Most of Bulgaria's people belong to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Other religions that are practiced include Islam and Judaism.

Football has become by far the most popular sport in Bulgaria. Many Bulgarian fans closely follow the top Bulgarian league, the Bulgarian "A" Professional Football Group; as well as the leagues of other European countries.



Winter at Shipka Pass, Bulgaria.

## Bulgaria's Sights

Bulgaria, a country with a historical and cultural heritage, and attractive natural landscapes, is one of the most visited tourist destinations in Europe. The country has historical cities and towns, summer beaches, and mountain ski resorts. In the northern-hemisphere winter, Samokov, Borovets, Bansko and Pamporovo become well-attended ski-resorts. Summer resorts exist on the Black Sea at Sozopol, Nessebur, Golden Sands, Sunny Beach, Sveti Vlas, Albena, Saints Constantine and Helena and many others. Spa resorts such as Bankya, Hisarya, Sandanski, Velingrad, Varshets and

many others attract visitors throughout the year.

Bulgaria has started to become an attractive tourist destination because of the quality of the resorts and prices below those found in Western Europe. Beach-resorts attract tourists from Germany, Russia, Scandinavia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The ski-resorts have become a favorite destination for British and Irish tourists.



# Croatia



Map showing the location of Croatia in Europe

**Croatia** is a country in southern Europe. It shares borders with Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Montenegro. The capital city is Zagreb. Other big cities are Split, Rijeka and Dubrovnik. The currency of Croatia is the *kuna*. Croatia is expected to be a member of the European Union in the next few years.



The Flag of Croatia.

## Croatia's History



A church in the old city of Dubrovnik.

The name Croat dates back to 6th and 7th centuries, when the Croats came from the Carpathian Mountains to the today's Croatia. From the early 20th century Croatia was part of Yugoslavia. In 1991, Croatia proclaimed independence by holding the first democratic elections in the country. The complicated situation meant that it was forced to fight a **brutal war** took place that devastated many parts of Croatia and other parts of Yugoslavia.



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia

Croatia was recognized as an independent country on January 15, 1992 by the European Union and the United Nations. The first country to recognize Croatia was Iceland on December 19, 1991.

## Croatia's Geography

Croatia is famous for its diverse geography. Although it is a small country, Croatia has **thousands of kilometres of coastline** and more than thousand islands. Inland the government has set aside large parts of the country as national parks and forests.

The largest island is *Cres* which is 405km<sup>2</sup>. The highest mountain in Croatia is *Dinara* at 1,830 metres.



Suncana Uvala bay in Mali Losinj, Croatia

## Croatia's People



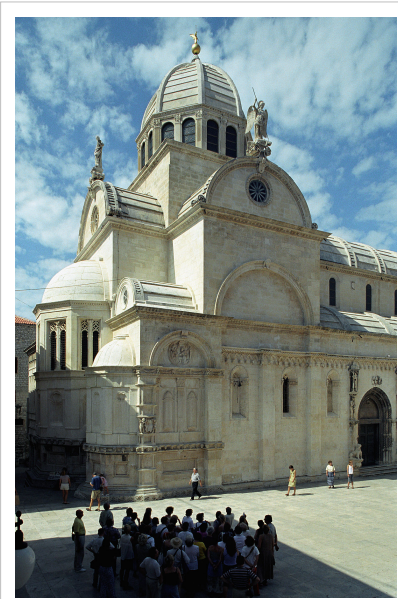
The National Theatre of Croatia in Zagreb.

The majority of people in Croatia are Croats but there are also large minorities of Serbs. In addition there are small minorities of Hungarians, Italians and Bosnians. The language of Croatia is Croatian which was previously known as Serbo-Croat. The majority of Croats are Catholic but there are also many Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Small numbers of Italian speakers live in Istria in the north-west of the country.

## Croatia's Sights

Croatia is **one of the most popular holiday destinations in the world**. It is famous for its thousands of kilometres of indented coast line and islands. It is home to many national parks, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and historical cities. The city of Dubrovnik in southern Croatia is considered to be one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Other places popular with tourists include the Istrian peninsula (and its cities of Pula and Rovinj), the capital Zagreb, Split and Zadar.

More than 12 million tourists visit Croatia every year. The country has seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites including: *Plitvice Lakes National Park*, an area full of lakes, caves and forests and the **Old City of Dubrovnik**, consistently rated as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Before the wars in the 1990s ten million tourists visited the country every year. During the Yugoslavian wars tourists disappeared and the number of tourists didn't reach pre-war levels again until 2006. Now more tourists visit the country than ever before.



Šibenik Cathedral, UNESCO World Heritage Site.

## Cyprus

**Cyprus** is an island nation in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Technically Cyprus is located in Asia but it is often considered to be culturally and politically a part of Europe and it has been in the European Union since 2004. Cyprus is a divided island but only the Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognized. The northern part of Cyprus is known as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and is only recognized by Turkey. As the division is not internationally recognized this means that all citizens of the island of Cyprus are members of the European Union. The capital city is Nicosia and the unrecognised capital of northern Cyprus is also Nicosia (known as Lefkoşa in Turkish). The currency of Cyprus is the Euro.

### History of Cyprus

A former British colony, it gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 and became a Commonwealth republic in 1961. The Republic of Cyprus is a developed country and has been a member of the European Union since May 1, 2004.

### Geography of Cyprus

The total area of Cyprus is 9,251 km<sup>2</sup> (3,572 sq mi). Cyprus has a typical Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and a cool, rainy season that extends from October to March.



The flag of Cyprus.



## People of Cyprus

The combined population of the Greek and Turkish sectors is 788,457. Greek and Turkish are both official languages. English is widely spoken in the main towns. The majority of people living in the southern part of Cyprus speak Greek. The majority of those living in the northern, Turkish-controlled part, speak Turkish. Most of the people in Cyprus belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. Muslim is also a common practiced religion.

Primary school and secondary school are provided. School attendance is required between the ages of 6 and 14. The literacy rate for Cyprus is high.



Kyrenia castle in Cyprus.

## Sights of Cyprus

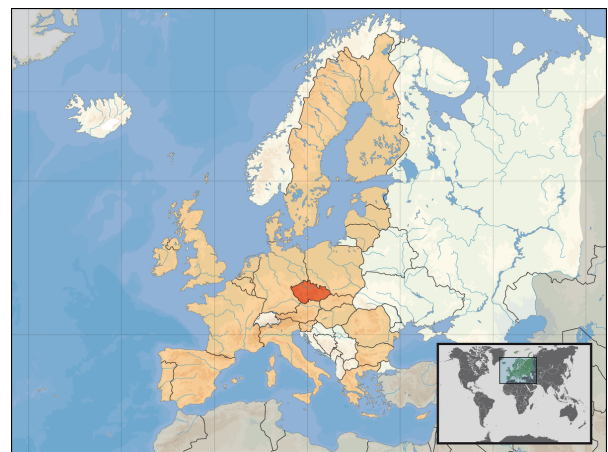
Cyprus gets a lot of tourism. Tourism is mostly centered around Cyprus' clean beaches. Recently Cyprus has provided activities to motivate people into coming for winter and all year round tourism such as in the form of nature, golf and activity holidays. Marinas and casinos are being considered to add to the tourist attractions of the island.

## Czech Republic

**Czech Republic** is a small country in central Europe. It shares borders with Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Poland. The capital city is Prague. Other big cities are Ostrava and Brno. The Czech Republic has been part of the European Union since 2004 and uses the Koruna as its currency.

### Czech Republic's History

The Czech Republic was founded in 1993, after **Czechoslovakia** split to form both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. But the country has a longer history.



Map showing location of the Czech Republic



**Czechoslovakia** — Until 1993 Czech Republic and Slovakia were united as one country

## Early History

The Czech nation has not always been the same size and area that it is today, and throughout history it has been ruled by many different kings and the kingdom size has changed over time.

The Slavs, ancestors of the modern Czechs, settled on the hills in the area for safety in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD. After this, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century the Czech kingdom was founded by Duke Bořivoj, a member of Přemyslid family, who became a Christian during his rule. The original foundations of Prague castle were also built at this time.

## Wenceslas Dynasty

Bořivoj's grandson, Prince Wenceslas I (Vacláv) built a church to St. Vitus at Prague Castle. However, Wenceslas was murdered by his younger brother Boleslav who then took the throne. Wenceslas was sainted (and is now the patron saint of the Czech Republic) and Boleslav ruled as king. Despite the murder, he kept power and ruled as a strong king of Bohemia for nearly 50 years.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Břetislav I, Boleslav's great-grandson extended the kingdom into Moravia and made the Přemyslid dynasty more powerful. His son, Vratislav II became friends with the German Emperor and this friendship allowed Germans and Czechs to exchange ideas.

A succession of kings from 1230 to 1306 led to a strong kingdom, with the discovery of silver mines helping to make the Czechs powerful. Prague became a famous capital city and many Germans and other nationalities immigrated there. However, the young king Wenceslas III was murdered and he was the last Přemyslid king.

## Charles the Great (1342-1378)

Charles was originally called Wenceslas IV, but he changed his name. He had a good education in Paris and this helped him to be a wise and good king. He ruled for 36 years and left a legacy on the country and the city of Prague.

As a religious man, Charles improved the existing St. Vitus Church (Katedrála Sv. Vita) and made it into a cathedral that still stands to this day, next to Prague Castle (Pražský Hrad). He built the first university in Europe in Prague and he also constructed the famous Charles Bridge (Karlův Most), which is still standing today at 650 years old!

Outside of Prague Charles built Karlštejn Castle, superbly hidden between two hills so that armies could not see it. Charles used it to hide all his treasure and a special 'golden room' in the centre of the main tower held crown jewels, holy relics and state records. Although the castle was attacked, the invaders were never able to steal the treasure because it was too well protected. Even the Swedish cannons could not capture the main tower!

Later in his life, in 1355, Charles was made Holy Roman Emperor and the Czech kingdom became very powerful, with Prague as a major city at the heart of it. Charles died in 1378.

## Civil War

After Charles' death, his son, Wenceslas IV came to the throne. However, he was not a good king and he did not listen to the people. A man called Jan Hus challenged the Catholic Church and asked for changes to it, known as Protestantism. However, he was arrested and burnt at the stake in 1415. When Wenceslas IV died of a heart attack in 1419, Jan Hus' supporters raised an army known as the Hussites. The brother of Wenceslas, Sigismund, raised his own army to fight back.

There were many battles, but eventually the Hussites were defeated. Sigismund died with no **heir**, and Albrecht of Austria took the throne. Soon after, a politician called George of Poděbrady became king. George agreed with the Hussites, and the Pope did not like this, so Prague lost its power.



**Heir** — This is a person who received possessions or power after somebody, usually a relative, dies

## The Hapsburgs

After George's death, several kings ruled the Czech nation but it was not very powerful any more. Eventually, a group of Austrian kings called the Hapsburgs took over and added the Czech nation to their empire.

In 1576, Emperor Rudolph II allowed the Protestants to worship in their way and helped make peace within the land. However, the next King, Ferdinand II did not agree with this, and he started killing Protestants, leading to a Thirty-Years War. Ferdinand was thrown out as king, but his supporters raised an army and they won the battle in 1620, putting Ferdinand back on the throne.

From then on, Catholicism was the only religion allowed, and with the defeat many Protestants ran away to other countries.

A hundred years later, the great Austrian Queen, Maria Theresa ruled over Prague. Her son, Joseph II, allowed the Protestants to worship once more, and Prague became a more powerful, peaceful city again.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Czechs were becoming fed up being ruled by Austrians. They tried to rebel in 1848, but this failed. During this time, the country became heavily industrialised with railways and factories built all over Prague and the rest of the country.

## The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

At the end of the World War I, after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Czechoslovakia was founded and the kings were replaced by presidents. After this, Czechoslovakia became involved in World War II, when Hitler wanted to take over Europe. One of the first places he targeted was Czechoslovakia since it is next to Germany. The country was freed from the Nazis in 1945 by the Russians.

Following World War II, Czechoslovakia was under Communist rule. However, the Communists were just as bad as the Nazis, and the people of Czechoslovakia wanted to end it. A politician called Alexander Dubček tried to make things better for the people. However the Communists did not want their authority challenged, so Russia sent tanks to crush the rebellion and restore Communist rules. This event is known as the Prague Spring.

In 1989 when Communism collapsed, Dubček was put in power along with other protesters to bring democracy to Czechoslovakia. Soon after, in 1993 Czechoslovakia was split into two countries: The Czech Republic and Slovakia. This was one of the most peaceful splits as the politicians talked to avoid war, and the two separate nations were formed.

Recently, in 2002 Prague suffered from terrible floods causing thousands of Korunas worth of damage. In 2004 it joined the EU and NATO and has become a central region of investment and development.

## Czech Republic's Geography

The total area of the Czech Republic is 78,864 km<sup>2</sup> (30,450 sq mi). The Czech Republic has a temperate, continental climate with relatively hot summers and cold, cloudy winters, usually with snow. Most rains are during the summer. The temperature difference between summers and winters is relatively high due to its landlocked geographical position.

Even within the Czech Republic, temperatures vary greatly depending on the elevation. In general, at higher altitudes the temperatures decrease and precipitation increases. Another important factor is the distribution of the mountains.

The coldest month is usually January followed by February and December. During these months there is usually snow in the mountains and sometimes in the major cities and lowlands. During March, April and May, the



temperature usually increases rapidly and especially during April the temperature and weather tends to vary widely during the day. Spring is also characterized by high water levels in the rivers due to melting snow followed by floods at times.



Moravian-Silesian Beskids

The warmest month of the year is July, followed by August and June. Autumn generally begins in September, which is still relatively warm, but much drier. During October, temperatures usually fall back under 15° or 10°C (59° or 50°F) and deciduous trees begin to shed their leaves. By the end of November, temperatures usually range around the freezing point.

## Czech Republic's People

The population is 10,228,744. Czech's make up about 90 percent of the country's population. The Slovaks make up about 3 percent and Poles, Germans, Roma (Gypsies), and Hungarians account for most of the

remainder. Czech is the official language of the Czech Republic.

Christianity is the main religion in the Czech Republic. Around 27 percent of Czech's population is Roman Catholic and another 59 percent claim to have no religion at all.

Nearly all of the people in the Czech Republic are literate (can read and write), education is required from 6 through 15 years of age and most of the students go on to further their education.

## Czech Republic's Sights

There are several centers of tourist activity: The historic city of Prague is the primary tourist attraction, and the city is also the most common point of entry for tourists visiting other parts of the country. Prague is known for its famous architecture.

Most other cities in the country attract significant numbers of tourists, but the spa towns such as Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně are particularly popular holiday destinations. Other popular tourist sites are the many castles and chateaux, such as those at Karlštejn, Konopiště and Český Krumlov.

Away from the towns, areas as Český ráj, Šumava and the Krkonoše Mountains attract visitors seeking outdoor pursuits.



Karlštejn Castle

# Denmark

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**Denmark** is a small country in northern Europe. It shares a border with Germany and is connected to Sweden by a road and rail bridge. The capital city is Copenhagen ([click this link to read about Copenhagen on Wikipedia](#)). Other big cities in Denmark are Århus and Odense. Denmark has been a member of the European Union since 1973 and uses the Danish Krone as its currency.



Map showing the location of Denmark in Europe

## Denmark's History

Denmark has been a member of the European Union since 1973.

## Denmark's Geography

Denmark has thousands of islands including 443 which are named. Denmark is a very flat country and its highest mountain is Møllehøj, at 171 metres. Because of Denmark's indented coast and thousands of islands, Denmark has a coastline of over 7,300 kilometres. The climate in Denmark is temperate and the country experiences cold winters and cool summers.



The flag of Denmark



## Denmark's People

The majority of people in Denmark are of Danish descent. There are small minorities from South Asia and the Middle East and Inuit (click the link to read about Inuit people on Wikipedia) people from Greenland and the Faroe Islands (both territories are possessions of Denmark). The national language is Danish.

Around 83% of the population are Lutheran Christians and 3% are Muslim.

The most popular sports in Denmark are football, sailing, badminton and handball.



Gefion Fountain in Copenhagen

## Denmark's Sights

Denmark is a popular destination for tourists and is very popular for short trips for visitors from Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom. Denmark's many sandy beaches attract large numbers of Germans and the capital city Copenhagen is popular with others especially tourists from the UK and Sweden - often because of the quality beers and lower prices compared to Sweden.

# Estonia

**Estonia** is a small country in northern and eastern Europe. It shares borders with Russia and Latvia. The capital city is Tallinn. The only other big city is Tartu. Estonia joined the European Union in 2004 and uses the Euro as its currency.

## Estonia's History

In 1918 Estonia had a brief period of independence that lasted until the **Soviet Union took over the country**. In 1991 Estonia gained its independence from the Soviet Union. In 2004 Estonia gained full membership into the European Union and started using the Euro as its currency in 2011.



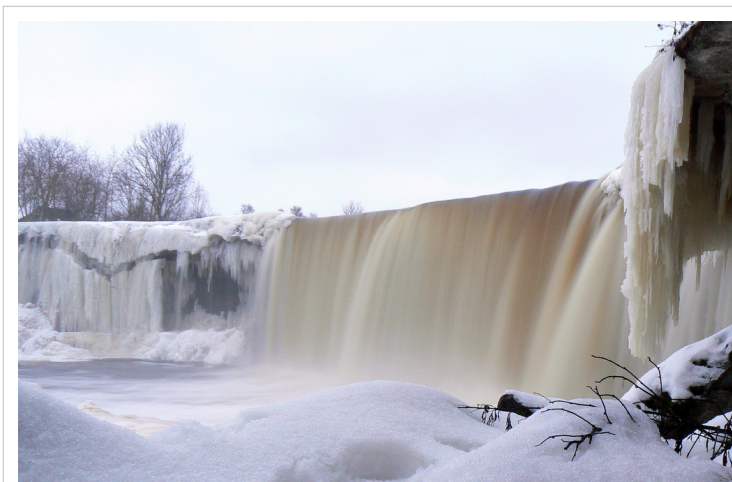
The flag of Estonia.



Map showing location of Estonia in Europe



**Collapse of the Soviet Union** — After 1991 the Soviet Union divided into many different countries creating Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other countries in Europe and Asia



Waterfall in Jägala, Estonia.

## Estonia's Geography

Estonia is one of the smallest countries in Europe covering an area of 45,227 km<sup>2</sup> (17,462 sq mi). Estonia has **more than 1,150 lakes** and reservoirs, which cover about 5 percent of the land. Nearly half the country's land is forested. Estonia generally has cool summers and cold winters.

The Baltic Sea forms Estonia's western and northern edges and although the country is small it has almost 4,000 km of coastline because the coast is so indented. The country's highest mountain, Suur Munamägi

(Egg Mountain) is only 318 metres above sea level.

## Estonia's People

The population of Estonia is 1,315,912. Estonians make up about 65 percent of the population. Russians are the largest minority group. They make up around 30 percent of the population. About 46 percent of the population are practicing Christians. 36 percent of the population claim to have no religion. Muslims and Jewish faiths are also present throughout the country.

The official language of Estonia is Estonian. A large minority speak Russian. All most all Estonians are literate. Education is required for 9 years beginning at the age of 7.

## Estonia's Sights

Estonia has 2 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, these are the **Historical Centre of Tallinn** and the **Struve Geodetic Arc** which is an imaginary line which runs through many countries including Estonia, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Moldova and during the 19th century was used to calculate the exact size and shape of the Earth.

Tallinn is extremely popular for cultural and night-life holidays for people from all over Europe. The city is a popular destination for British stag nights (the party before a man gets married). Its location so close to big cities like Helsinki (Finland) and St. Petersburg (Russian) also make it a popular base for tourists.

## Europe

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Europe is a continent which is home to more than a quarter of the world's countries. The climate of Europe varies from Arctic conditions to temperate in the south. Every world religion is represented in Europe and hundreds of languages are spoken too.

### What is Europe?

Europe extends from Iceland in the west to Russia and Georgia in the east, Norway in the far north to Spain in the south. The map below shows geographical Europe, the countries generally referred to as Western Europe are highlighted in yellow. There are 50 countries in Europe at the moment although a few of these (Russia, Cyprus, etc.) are considered to be mostly or entirely in Asia. However, they are considered European for social-political, cultural, or other reasons. As well as these 50 countries, there are a number of small dependent territories which have their own governments but are not sovereign countries, such as the Faroe Islands and the Isle of Man.



## **What is WikiJunior Europe about?**

Wikijunior is a part of Wikibooks which is devoted to creating books for children and teenagers. These books must be useful and accurate but they should also be interesting to read and not too in-depth. Wikijunior Europe provides a profile of each country with maps and flags plus information about the history, people and geography of each country. If you are reading this and wondering where to get more information, try the Web links for more detail on each country.

## **Is Europe the same as the European Union?**

Europe is a geographic entity which runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural mountains (which are in western Russia). The European Union is a political, social and economic union of 27 countries in Europe. The members of the European Union (in order of when they joined) are: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Romania (January 1st, 2007) and Bulgaria (January 1st, 2007).

There are also several countries which are in the process of joining the European Union. These countries are Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey. Many other nations (Serbia, Ukraine, etc.) have also said that they wish to join the European Union in the future.

## **What are the languages of Europe?**

More than 100 languages are spoken in Europe. The most spoken languages are German, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Italian and Polish. Visit Wikijunior Languages to find out more about European languages and other languages from around the world.

## **What are the religions of Europe?**

Like every other continent, all religions are practised in Europe. Christianity is by far the most common religion and almost every country in Europe has a majority of people who are Christian. Islam is the major religion in Turkey and Azerbaijan and a large parts of Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania and Russia. Judaism is represented in small numbers in every country but especially in France and the United Kingdom. Indian religions like Sikhism and Hinduism are practised especially in the United Kingdom. Atheism (not believing in a god) is very common in Czech Republic (more than 50%), Estonia, the United Kingdom, Germany and many parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Visit Wikijunior World Religions to find out more about religion.

## **What are the currencies of Europe?**

Fifteen countries in the European Union use the Euro. All countries in the European Union (except the United Kingdom and Denmark) are expected to start using the Euro in the future. All other countries in Europe have their own currencies.

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# Finland

**Finland** is a large country in north eastern Europe. It shares borders with Norway, Sweden and Russia. The capital city is Helsinki. Other big cities in Finland are Tampere and Turku. Finland has been a member of the European Union since 1995 and uses the Euro as its currency.



Map showing location of Finland in Europe



Helsinki Cathedral

## Finland's History

The area now known as Finland was settled at the latest around 8500 BC during the Stone Age. The settlers came from the areas of today's Estonia and Russia. Sweden established its official rule of Finland in the 13th century. Swedish became the dominant language of noble people and used in education. The Finnish famine of 1866–1868 killed 15 percent of the population, making it the last and one of the worst famines in European history. On December 6, 1917 Finland declared its independence. During World War II, Finland fought the Soviet Union twice. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland tried to build relationships

with former Soviet republics and Europe.



**Collapse of the Soviet Union** — After 1991 the Soviet Union divided into many different countries creating Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other countries in Europe and Asia

## Finland's Geography

The area of Finland totals 338,145 km<sup>2</sup> (130,559 sq mi)—which is slightly smaller than the state of Montana. Finland has over 187,000 lakes and 179,000 islands. Lake Saimaa is the 5th largest lake in Europe. Most of Finland is low lying ground with occasional hills. Thick forests cover about 74 percent of Finland. Wildlife includes bear, wolf, lynx, and Arctic fox. Summer days in Finland are long and cool and winter days are short and cold. During summer, daylight lasts as long as 19 hours a day in the far south. In winter, the sun does not rise above the horizon for 51 days.



## Finland's People



The population of Finland is 5,238,460. Most of the population in Finland are natives. They make up about 93 percent of the population. The other major ethnic group are the Swedish. The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish.

Most people are Christian. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is the national church. More than 85 percent of the population are members of the church.

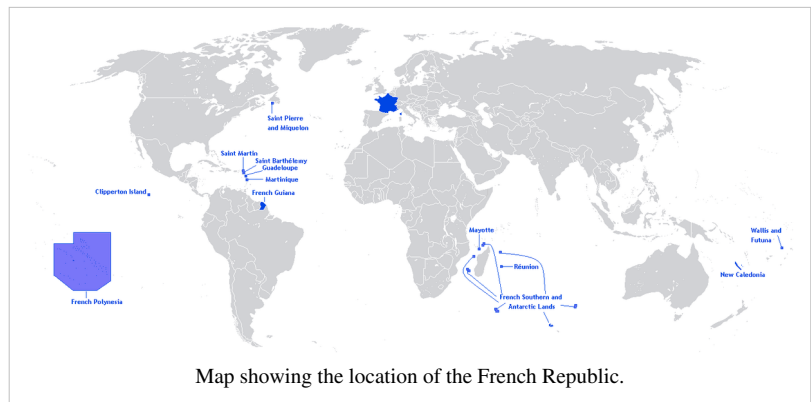
Education in Finland is free and required between the ages of 7 and 16. Almost everyone who lives in Finland is literate.



**Literate** — Able to read and write

## France

**France** is the third largest country in Europe (after Russia and Ukraine). France is located in Western Europe and shares borders with Andorra, Spain, Monaco, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium. It is connected to the United Kingdom by the Channel Tunnel. The capital city is Paris. Other large cities are Lyon and Nice. France uses the Euro as its currency along with 16 other countries in Europe. France is a member of the European Union and was a founding member of the organization.



Lavender field in Provence, France

## France's History

During Roman times, France was known as Gallia, with the Gauls living there. The Gauls were the largest Celtic tribe in Gallia and the area was conquered by Julius Caesar. Later, France gained its independence.

Until 1789, France was a monarchy but the French people became unhappy with this and overthrew Louis the Sixteenth in the French Revolution. Soon after Napoleon ruled France and started a massive military campaign across most of Europe. Napoleon was eventually defeated by the British at Waterloo (Austerlitz) and removed from power.



**Monarchy** — Countries which are ruled by a king or queen are known as monarchies. In some countries the monarch has enormous powers but in most European monarchies the power of the monarch is very limited

France fought in both World Wars alongside the British. Since World War II France has had friendly relations with most other European countries and was a **founding member of the European Union** alongside Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy.

## France's Geography

While metropolitan France (the main part of the country) is located in western Europe, France also has a number of territories in North America, the Caribbean, South America, the southern Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and Antarctica. Some of these areas are completely part of France while others have types of self-government.

Metropolitan France covers 547,030 square kilometers (211,209 sq mi), and is the **largest country in the European Union**. France has a wide variety of landscapes, from coastal plains in the north and west to mountain ranges of the Alps in the south-east, the Massif Central in the south-central and Pyrenees in the south-west. At 4,807 metres (15,770 ft) above sea-level, the highest point in western Europe, Mont Blanc, is in the Alps on the border between France and Italy. Metropolitan France also has extensive river systems such as the Loire, the Garonne, the Seine and the Rhône, which divides the Massif Central from the Alps and flows into the Mediterranean sea at the Camargue, the lowest point in France (2 m / 6.5 ft below sea level).

In the west, the climate is mainly oceanic with a high level of rainfall, mild winters and cool to warm summers. Inland the climate becomes more continental with hot, stormy summers, colder winters and less rain. The climate of the Alps and other mountainous regions is mainly alpine, with the number of days with temperatures below freezing over 150 per year and snow cover lasting for up to six months.

## France's People

With about **65 million people**, France is the 19th most populous country in the world. France's largest cities are Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Lille, Toulouse, Nice, and Nantes. Most people live to be 80 years old and almost everyone older than 15 can read. Most families have 2 children and are Roman Catholic. The majority of people speak French. There are other native language spoken by small groups of people in France including Breton and Basque

The French education system is highly developed. Most of the primary and secondary schools are public although there are some private ones. School in France is required at the age of 6 but a lot of children start school at an early age. 3 year old's go to nursery classes and children under the age of three go to what is called pré-maternelle classes which is like daycare.

The majority of French people are Roman Catholic Christians. France has Europe's biggest Jewish population and the largest number of Muslims in Western Europe.



The Eiffel Tower in Paris, France.

## France's Sights

With **81.9 million foreign tourists** in 2007, France is the **most popular tourist destination in the world**, ahead of Spain and the United States. France features cities of high cultural interest like Paris, beaches and seaside resorts, ski resorts, and rural regions that many enjoy for their beauty and tranquility. Aside of casual tourism France attracts a lot of religious pilgrims to Lourdes, a town in the Hautes-Pyrénées département, that hosts a few million tourists a year. Popular tourist sites include: : the **Eiffel Tower**, the Louvre Museum, the Palace of Versailles, the Musée d'Orsay, the Arc de Triomphe, Sainte-Chapelle, the Château du Haut-Kœnigsbourg, Puy de Dôme, and the Musée Picasso. There are 38 Wikijunior:World Heritage Sites in France which is fewer sites than only Italy, China and Spain.

## External Links

- France at the CIA World Fact Book <sup>[1]</sup>
- Infoplease.com <sup>[2]</sup>

## References

[1] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fr.html>

[2] <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107517.html>

# Georgia

**Georgia** is a small country located in the far east of Europe. Its neighbours are Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The capital city is Tbilisi and the currency used in Georgia is the Lari.

## Georgia's History

Georgia was made a part of the USSR, also known as the Soviet Union, in 1922. After Georgia gained independence from the USSR in 1991 it had a civil war.



**Soviet Union** — The Soviet Union was a communist country which included 15 modern-day countries including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and many others

## Georgia's Geography

Georgia covers an area of about 69,700 km<sup>2</sup> (about 26,900 sq mi). It is bounded by Russia on the north and by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey on the south. Rugged mountains make up about 85 percent of the total land area. The coastal area of Georgia has hot summers and cold winters while the mountain areas of Georgia have cool summers and rainy winters.



The Likani Palace from the Kura River, Borjomi, Georgia.

## Georgia's People

The population of Georgia is 4,646,003. Nearly 100 different ethnic groups make up Georgia's population. Georgians are the largest group, making up about 70 percent of the population, followed by Armenians, Russians, and Azerbaijanis. Georgian has been the country's official language since 1918. Russian is also a commonly spoken language. Education is free and required from the first grade to the eleventh grade. Georgia has an adult literacy rate of 99.5 percent. The majority of people are Christian.

# Germany

**Germany** is a large country in northern and central Europe. It shares borders with Denmark, Poland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, France, Netherlands and Belgium. The capital city is Berlin. Other big cities are Munich, Hamburg and Cologne. Germany has been part of the European Union since it began and uses the Euro as its currency.

## Germany's History

In ancient times, several German tribes inhabited much of the land of modern Germany.

During the Roman Empire's expansion under Julius Caesar and others that followed him, much of the western and southern part of current day Germany was occupied by the Romans. This very much displeased them and, after being also attacked by Huns from the east, they pretty much invaded the Roman Empire up to Rome to flee from them. This was a primary cause in the downfall of the Roman Empire, and the subsequent Dark Ages of Europe.



Map showing location of Germany in Europe



**Roman Empire** — This empire stretched over much of Europe and north Africa around 2000 years ago



By the beginning of the medieval times time Germany consisted of a number of small tribal states. In the beginning of the 8th century an attempt was made by Charlemagne (a name derived from Latin, meaning "Charles the Great"), a king of a great German tribe called the Franks, to unite them.

After Charlemagne's death in 814, following German customs of those times, his land was divided up to his three sons. Modern day Germany became a part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation, that contained much of central Europe (with the exception of France).

Although events reduced the size of this Empire, its destruction only came in 1806/07 after being overrun by Napoleon Bonaparte's forces from France.

After Napoleon's defeat, in the next decades Germany was first united in a loose German Custom Union, (a loose connection of states that maintained some autonomy, or self-rule). Prussia, one of the largest of these states managed to unify the majority of the German states in the Northern German Confederation, a far stronger union, as well as limiting foreign influence on other German states from outside powers.

In 1871, the entirety of Germany was finally unified in a land that stretched from the borders of modern day France to the borders of modern day Russia. This was one of the "Central Powers" of World War I that started and eventually lost the war. Germany, being a loser in this war, was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, thus giving much of its land away to France, Poland and Russia. The treaty also limited Germany's influence on world affairs significantly, and fines placed on them by the allied brought their economy to near ruin.

German dissatisfaction with the treaty, and economic crisis made it easy for Adolf Hitler to promote his extreme form of Nationalism, leading to his rise in 1933.

Initially, perusing the goal of 'unification' of the German peoples, Hitler first made alliances with Austria. In 1938, he occupied the Sudetenland, a region of Czechoslovakia, and despite an agreement with other powers such as Britain later occupied the whole of that country. In 1939 the German invasion of Poland, began World War II in Europe.

After World War II, Germany was a ruin, and despite initial hopes at the Potsdam conference, quickly became divided by the opposing ideals of America (and the Allied powers) and Soviet Union.

For at least 4 decades, Germany was divided. Those in East living under an increasingly strained Communist regime. Those in the West assisted by American aid, produced an economic miracle and were amongst the founder members of the European Union.

German re-unification came in 1990 as a consequence of dissatisfaction in the east with the increasingly brutal regime. In 1989 the Berlin Wall, which had since the 1960s divided the former capital Berlin, had fallen.



Brandenburg Gate in Germany



**Berlin Wall** — After World War 2 a large wall was built dividing Communist East Berlin from Capitalist West Berlin. It was finally dismantled in 1989



## Germany's Geography

The country of Germany covers an area of 357,021 km<sup>2</sup> (137,847 sq mi), consisting of 349,223 km<sup>2</sup> (134,836 sq mi) of land and 7,798 km<sup>2</sup> (3,011 sq mi) of water. It is the seventh largest country by area in Europe and the 63rd largest country in the world. Because of its central location, Germany shares borders with more European countries than any other country on the continent. Its neighbours are Denmark in the north, Poland and the Czech Republic in the east, Austria and Switzerland in the south, France and Luxembourg in the south-west and Belgium and the Netherlands in the north-west.

## Germany's People

Germany is a country of about 82 million people, the majority of whom speak German as their first language.

Christianity is the largest practiced religion in Germany with 64% of the population who practice it. The second largest religion is Islam with 4% of the population. Other practiced religions include Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism.

Optional kindergarten education is provided for all children between three and six years old, after which school attendance is required for at least nine years. Primary education usually lasts for four years. In contrast, secondary education includes four types of schools based on a pupil's ability as determined by teacher recommendations: the Gymnasium includes the most gifted children and prepares students for university studies and attendance lasts eight or nine years depending on the state; the Realschule has a broader range of emphasis for average students and lasts six years; the Hauptschule prepares pupils for vocational education, and the Gesamtschule or comprehensive school combines the three approaches.



Central Berlin at night.

## Germany's Sights

Berlin remains a very popular destination for tourists because of its night life and the history of what was two cities before 1989.



The Reichstag, seat of the German Parliament

# Greece

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**Greece** (Hellenic Republic) is a country in southern Europe. It shares borders with Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. The capital city is Athens. Other big cities in Greece are Thessaloniki, Patras and Piraeus. Greece is well known for its history and its islands. The country is also a member of the European Union and uses the Euro as its currency along with 16 other countries in Europe.



The flag of Greece.

## Greece's History

Greece is heir to the heritages of ancient Greece, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, and nearly four hundred years of Ottoman rule. Greece is the **birthplace of democracy**, the Olympic Games, western books, and western drama including both tragedy and comedy. The Iliad, an epic poem written by Homer in the 8th Century BC, is the oldest work of western writing.

Ancient Greece was not a single country; Greece was lots of small city-states in the south and two kingdoms in the north. Generally the south was much more advanced; Athens and Sparta, the most powerful Greek cities, were in the south. There were many wars between the cities, and it was not until 338 BC (338 'before Christ') when they were all united to fight against the Persians under King Philip II of Macedon, one of the two kingdoms of the north. When Philip died his son, Alexander The Great, took his place and campaigned against Persia, establishing a new era, the Hellenistic era.

After the Hellenistic era, in 146 BC, the Roman period began when the Romans ruled over Greek lands. After a century the whole Greek-speaking world became part of the Roman Empire. Greek was the language used by most of the people in the eastern parts of the Empire, while Latin was spoken more in the west. In 330 AD the capital of the Roman Empire changed; Byzantium, an ancient Greek city, became the new capital, which was then renamed to Constantinople (in Greek: 'The city of Constantine' meaning the emperor who chose Byzantium as the new capital). In the following years the Roman Empire was divided into two parts; the east part became the Byzantine Empire. In 1453 the siege of Constantinople by the Turks took place, the Ottoman Empire was then established.



The Caryatides in the Acropolis Museum, Athens



The Ancient Theatre of Epidauros.

For almost four centuries, Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire. In 5 March 1821 Greeks started a revolution so they could be independent. Greece became an independent country on 3 February 1830. Many wars occurred before Greece gained the lands it has today. Greece also took part in the two World Wars. Greece fought alongside the Allies in World War II and the Entente in World War I. A civil war took place after the World Wars, too. After a military junta of 1967–1974 a vote was held for Greeks to decide whether they wanted Greece to become a Republic or to remain a Kingdom. The Greek vote of December 8, 1974, resulted in the end of the monarchy in Greece and the establishment of the current Third Hellenic Republic.



**revolution** — when the people try to change the government by force.

Greece became the tenth member of the European Union on January 1, 1981. The country adopted the Euro in 2001 and successfully organized the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. At the moment Greece is facing big economic and social problems.



An ancient theatre and the Parthenon, ancient Greek temple, a major site in Athens, the Greek capital.



## Greece's Geography



Santorini, an island formed by a volcano, 3,000 years ago.

Four fifths of Greece consist of mountains or hills, making the country one of the most mountainous in Europe. The highest mountain in Greece is **Olympus**, the mythical house of the ancient Gods. Western Greece contains a number of lakes and wetlands. Greece has also many islands, over 6,000, the largest being Crete. Other well-known large islands are Rhodes, Santorini and Corfu.

Greece is an active earthquake zone, small earthquakes occur every year in Greece, especially in Western and Southern Greece. Greece has a coastline of over 13,600 kilometres.

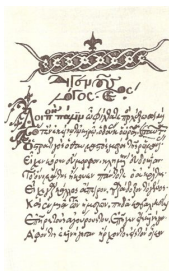
The climate of Greece can be categorized into three types: the Mediterranean, the Alpine and the Temperate. The Mediterranean type of climate features mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. The Alpine type of climate features harsh winters with large snowfalls, while the summers are cool with many thunderstorms. This climate is to be found on high mountains. The Temperate type of climate features cold, damp winters and hot, dry summers.

## Greece's People

### Greek Alphabet through the ages



Greek alphabet in early Ancient,



Medieval

Ελληνικό αλφάβητο

and modern standard forms.

Greece's population is around 11,300,000. The majority of people living in the country are ethnic Greeks with some people from foreign countries like Albania and Bulgaria staying in the country at the moment. The most spoken language in Greece is Greek, as well as the official language of the state. But there are also people who speak Bulgarian and Turkish close to the borders with Bulgaria and Turkey. Greek language has a history of almost 4,000



years. English is widely spoken as a foreign language, along with other languages such as French, German, Italian and Spanish among others. These five languages are also provided around the country's schools. Education in Greece is required from the ages of 5 to 15.

The majority of Greek people are Greek (Eastern) Orthodox (95%) and it is also the state religion. There are other Christian groups in Greece, too, the largest being Catholic Christians; the majority lives in the Cyclades and the Ionian Islands. The country's oldest religious minority is the Jewish community, however, it is no longer the largest non-Christian group. There are also some Muslims residing in the Northern Greek region of Thrace, close to the Turkish borders.

Greek cuisine is a typical Mediterranean cuisine, similar to those of Italy, the Balkans, Turkey, and the Middle East. The majority of national foods are based around olive oil, vegetables and herbs, grains and bread, wine, fish, and various meats. Also important are olives, cheese, aubergine, courgette, and yoghurt. Greek desserts are characterized by the dominant use of nuts and honey. Greek salad is widely known around the globe.

The most famous sport among Greeks is probably football. Greeks also tend to listen to foreign music a lot, while Greek music is famous in countries in the Balkans and the Middle East.

## Greece's Sights

Greece attracts more than 16 million tourists each year. Greece has been an attraction for international visitors for a long time because of its rich and long history and more recently for its glorious Mediterranean coastline and beaches. The most popular destinations for tourists are the Cyclades, Athens, Crete, Rhodes, the Ionian Islands, where the island of Corfu is, and other coastal regions of the country as well as places of archaeological interest.

There are 17 sites that are included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Among them are the **Acropolis of Athens**, the ancient sites of Vergina and Olympia but also the old cities of Corfu and Rhodes.



A beach in one of Greece's islands.



A church in the old town of Rhodes.



The old city of Corfu.

# Holy See

**Vatican City** is an independent state that is located inside Rome. It came into existence only in 1929. It is clearly distinct from the central authority of the Roman Catholic Church, known as the Holy See, which existed long before 1929. Vatican City is ruled by the Pope and he represents all of the world's Roman Catholics. Vatican City is the smallest country in the world, with an area of 44 hectares (110 acres). Vatican City has its own constitution, postal system, seal, flag, and other symbols of statehood.



Map showing the Holy See inside Rome



The flag of Vatican City.

## Vatican City's History



St. Peter's Basilica

During the Middle Ages, the Papacy, where the pope resided, controlled much of central Italy, (known commutatively as the Papal States). However, soon pressure from outside and the reunification of Italy made it so the Papacy lost all of its land except the Holy See.

## Vatican City's Geography

Because of its minute size, the Vatican City has a climate and geography similar to that of Rome. Vatican City has a temperate, Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters from September to mid-May and hot, dry summers from May to August.

## Vatican City's People

Vatican City's population is around 800. Vatican City uses Italian in its legislation and official communications. Italian is also the everyday language used by most of those who work in the state. All citizens of Vatican City are Roman Catholic.

## The sights of Vatican City

The Vatican City is itself of great cultural significance. Buildings such as St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel are home to some of the most famous art in the world, which includes works of art by artists such as Botticelli, Bernini, Raphael and Michelangelo.

# Hungary

**Hungary** is a small country in central Europe. It shares borders with Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria. The capital city is Budapest. Other big cities in Hungary are Debrecen and Miskolc. Hungary has been a member of the European Union since 2004 and uses the Forint as its currency.



Map showing the location of Hungary (red) in Europe and the European Union (orange)

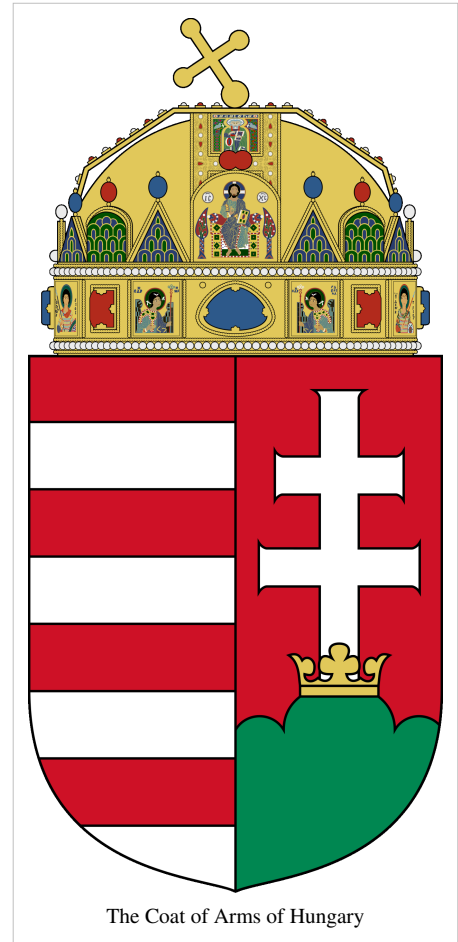
## Hungary's History

Hungary was founded in 1000 by István I (Stephen) as a kingdom. Croatia became a part of Hungary in the 12th century. The Mongols attacked Hungary in the 13th century. In 1301 the last king from the Árpád **dynasty** died out and after that the kings came from several families. In 1526 the Turks conquered large parts of the country, and it split up into three parts called *Royal Hungary*, *Transylvania* and *Ottoman Hungary*. The king of Royal Hungary came from the



The flag of Hungary.

Habsburg family, so it became a part of the *Austrian Empire*. Hungary was re-united in 1699. After that there were two big uprisings against the Habsburg kings: one from 1703-1711 and the other in 1848-1849. The first one was lead by Francis II Rákóczi and Sándor Petőfi the poet took part in the second one. People in Hungary are proud of them, a lot of streets and schools have their names. After World War I the Allied powers divided Hungary and gave the parts to the neighboring countries. Almost 3.5 million Hungarians became **minorities** mostly in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia. In World War II joined the Axis powers and took back some of these territories, but after the war lost them and the Soviets took control. In 1956 there was a revolt against the Communist government. In 1989 Hungary became a republic.



**Dynasty** — the family where the ruler of a country comes from



**End of communism** — In 1989 massive protests caused the end of Communism in many countries in central Europe including Hungary

## Hungary's Geography

Hungary can be found in the Carpathian basin. Most of Hungary is flat but the Carpathian mountains in the northern part of the country reach a height of 1,014m at the mountain Kékes. The country is land-locked.

## Hungary's People

Hungary has a population of about 10 million. Most of the population speaks Hungarian. Other spoken languages most common are English amongst the younger generation, and Russian amongst the older generation - though some refuse to use it due to the Communist connotations. Other languages include Slovakian, Romanian, Croatian, Ukrainian and German spoken in minority pockets at the relevant borders of those countries. Most of the Hungarian population are Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox). There are small numbers of Jews too.



## Hungary's Sights

The city of Budapest is a UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

There are many things to see in Hungary. Within Budapest, the Országház (Parliament Building) is one of the most spectacular and famous Houses of Parliament in Europe. Opposite the Országház, is the Imperial Palace, the place of residence for the past rulers of Hungary. Mainly used during the Austrian occupation, it is a reminder of the country's turbulent history, along with Kossuth Tér, dedicated to the revolutionary Lajos Kossuth. Nearby is the everlasting flame - a fire that has been burning since the departure of the Communists in 1989. Also in the capital is the Basilica of St. István, the patron Saint of Hungary. Another highly recommended place to see is Hősök Tere (Heroes Square). It is a colonnade containing statues of all the kings of Hungary and in the centre is a column upon which St. István stands holding the Szent Korona (Saint's Crown).



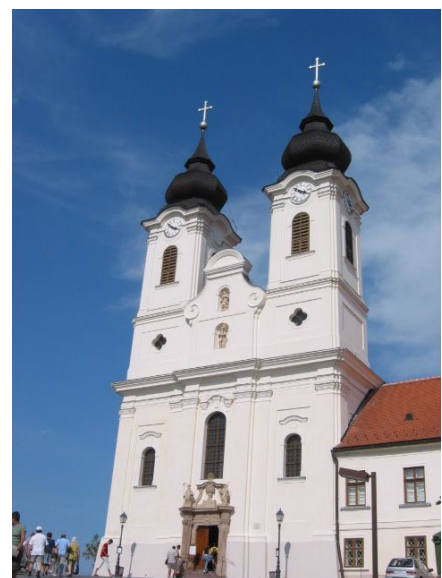
The Országház (Budapest parliament)



Heroes Square in Budapest

Outside of the capital is the famous Lake Balaton. A favourite among the native population and tourists alike, the lake offers unparalleled a great beach-side holiday in a land-locked country. It is 40km wide and 75km long and can be seen from space. Lake-side towns of Siofok and Balatonfüred are popular tourist accommodations. A main cultural attraction at the lake is the peninsula of Tihany, hosting a Medieval Abbey which used to be a religious centre hundreds of years ago. Today, it is the mausoleum of Károly IV, the last King of Hungary. Inside is an exhibition dedicated to life inside the Abbey and also one about the King.

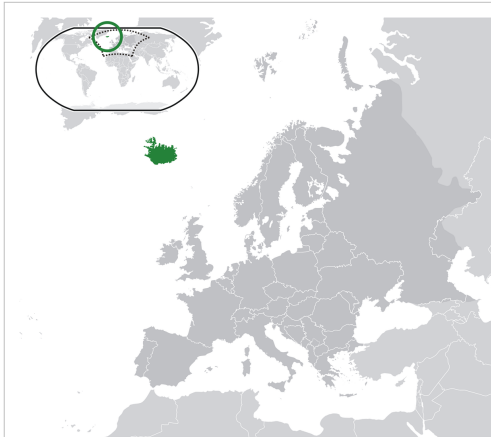
The town of Győr is famous in Hungary for its confectionery. "Győri" products are a common item seen on Hungarian supermarket shelves. The town itself boasts an impressive town hall as well as bank side walks along the Danube.



Tihany Abbey, mausoleum of Károly IV

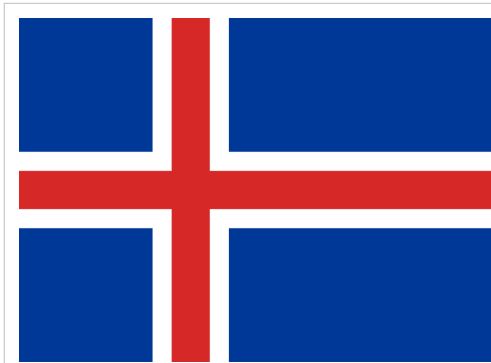
# Iceland

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Map showing the location of Iceland

**Iceland** is an island country in the far north west of Europe and is famous for its nature's beauty and variety also the loftiness Icelandic Sagas who tell the tales of the Vikings and their survivors. Iceland does not border any other country and the capital city is Reykjavik where almost 70% of the Icelandic population live. Iceland is not part of the European Union but it has applied to join in the future. The **Krona** is the currency of Iceland.



The flag of Iceland

## Iceland's History



A 19th century replica of a meeting of the Alþingi at Þingvellir.

It is generally believed that Iceland was discovered and settled by Norse Vikings in the second half of the 9th. The first settler was **Ingólfur Arnason** who came to Iceland with his brother Hjörleifur. Hjörleifur was killed by his slaves but Ingólfur built his homestead in Reykjavík in 874. From 874 to 930 lots of people, mostly Norse Vikings and their Irish slaves moved to the island and by 930, most available farmland had been claimed and the Althing, a parliament was founded as the political hub of the Icelandic Free State. Christianity was peacefully adopted in the year 1000.

In 1814, following the Napoleonic Wars, Denmark-Norway was broken up into two separate kingdoms by the way of the Treaty of Kiel. Iceland, however, remained a Danish dependency. The country's climate worsened during the 19th century, leading to mass emigrations to North America, largely Canada. Meanwhile, a new independence movement arose under the leadership of Jón Sigurðsson, inspired by the romantic and nationalist ideologies of mainland Europe. In 1874, Denmark granted Iceland home rule, which was expanded in 1904. In 1918, Iceland became fully

independent but the head of state remained as the King of Denmark.

During World War II, the German occupation of Denmark on April 9, 1940 severed communications between Iceland and Denmark. A month later, British military forces sailed into Reykjavík harbor, violating Icelandic neutrality. Allied occupation of Iceland lasted throughout the war. In 1941, responsibility for the occupation was taken over by the United States Army. Following a national vote on the subject, Iceland formally became an independent republic on June 17, 1944. The occupation force left in 1946. Iceland became a member of NATO on March 30, 1949, amid domestic controversy and riots. On May 5, 1951, a defence agreement was signed with the United States -- American troops returned and stayed as part of the defence agreement throughout the Cold War and until the autumn of 2006.

Since World War II Iceland's economy has grown incredibly. The most common industries are financial services, tourism and fishing.



**Cold War** — between 1945 and 1991 there was military, economic, space, sporting and competition between the USA (and its allies) and the USSR (and its allies). There were often fears that a global war might start.

## Iceland's Geography



Strokkur Eruption



Lava Flow at Krafla, 1984



Surtsey eruption. A new island was formed just outside the coast of Iceland

Iceland is an island with no borders. It is often referred to as **the island of ice and fire** and is constantly being shaped by Glaciers and volcanoes. The island is about 103,000 km<sup>2</sup> (39,768.5 sq mi) meaning that per 3 Icelanders has 1 km<sup>2</sup> for them self. About 23,805 km<sup>2</sup> (9,191 sq mi) of the island is Vegetation, 2,757 km<sup>2</sup> (1,065 sq mi) are Lakes and about 11,922 km<sup>2</sup> (4,603 sq miles) are Glaciers. Iceland is geologically a young land, Iceland is located on a geological so called hot spot, thought to be caused by a mantle plume. Meaning that under the island is a hot red burning lava coming up all the way from the inner earth. The island is also over the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, which runs right through it. This combined location means that geologically the island is extremely active, having many volcanoes, notably Hekla, Eldgjá, and Eldfell. The volcanic eruption of Laki in 1783–1784 caused a famine that killed nearly a quarter of the island's population; the eruption caused dust clouds and haze to appear over most of Europe and parts of Asia and Africa for several months after the eruption.

Because Iceland is over a so called hot spot there are lots of hot springs and are also geysers. A word derived from the name of the most famous one in Iceland, Geysir in Haukadalur the most geologically active is Strokkur in the same area. With such a widespread availability of geothermal power, and also because of the numerous rivers and waterfalls that are harnessed for hydro power, residents of most towns have hot water and home heat for a low price. The island itself is composed primarily of basalt, a low-silica lava associated with effusive volcanism like Hawaii. There are, however, a variety of volcano-types on Iceland that produce more evolved lavas.





Skaftafell Glacier. Iceland is constantly being shaped by these huge ice cubes

## Iceland's People



Gullfoss, Because of Iceland is such a young land it contains hundreds of waterfalls

The Icelandic Population is about 300.000 people which is about the size of a small city in Europe therefore there are lots of things that make the Icelandic people so special for one their language.

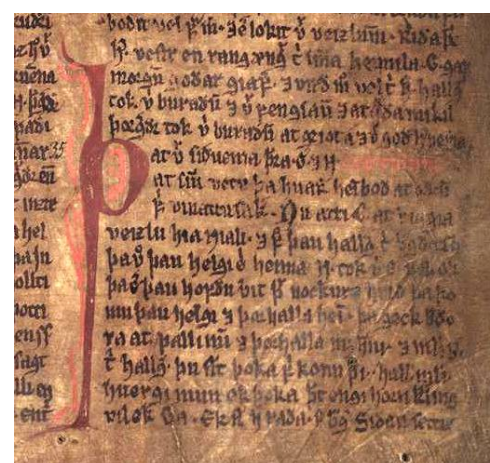
Icelanders write and speak Icelandic, a North Germanic language descended from Old Norse. It is the only living language to retain the runic letter Þ which indicates the fact that Icelandic has changed less from Old Norse than the other Nordic languages and has a considerable extent development of new vocabulary based on native roots rather than borrowings from English. Because of that Icelanders can still read and understand Old Norse which their famous sagas are written in. The Sagas were written around the time of the island's settlement. Until the Christianization of

Iceland, many traditional Viking beliefs held strong, remnants of which remain today. For example, some Icelanders either believe in elves or are unwilling to rule out their existence. Christianity is the main religion in Iceland.

The majority of national foods are based around fish, lamb and dairy products. **Porramatur** is a national food, consisting of many different dishes; this is not consumed on a daily basis but usually around the month of Þorri. Traditional dishes include skyr, cured ram scrota, cured shark, singed sheep heads and black pudding.

Though changing in the past years, Icelanders remain a very healthy nation. Children and teenagers participate in various types of leisure activities. Popular sports today are mainly football, track and field, handball and basketball. Sports such as golf, tennis, swimming, chess and horseback riding on Icelandic horses are also popular.

Iceland is home to the television station Nick Jr.'s animated program LazyTown (Icelandic: Latibær), a television program created by Magnús Scheving. It has become a very popular program for children and adults, and is



A page from Möðruvallabók containing part of the Icelandic Sagas

shown in over 98 countries,





Reykjavik the capital of Iceland. Where more the 2/3 of the Icelandic population live

including the US, Canada, Sweden and Latin America.[17] The LazyTown Studios are located in Garðabær. Iceland was also the home of The Sugarcubes, a popular 80's and 90's pop group; whose members included the now famous singer Björk.

## Iceland's Sights

500,000 tourists visit Iceland every year. Popular attractions include the rugged landscape of Iceland which is generally peaceful because there are so few people in the country. Volcanoes, mountains and lakes are all extremely popular because of their sheer number. The capital city is popular because of its

small city when compared to other world capitals. Iceland has 2 UNESCO World Heritage Sites: **Pingvellir National Park** and Surtsey, which is a small volcanic island of the Icelandic coast.

# Ireland

**Ireland** is an island off the north west coast of mainland Europe and the second biggest island in the British Isles. It shares a land border with the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland). The capital city is Dublin. Other large cities are Cork and Galway. Ireland is a member of the European Union and uses the Euro as its currency. Ireland is often known as the **Republic of Ireland** to avoid confusion with **Northern Ireland** which is part of the UK.

## Ireland's History

Ireland has had an eventful history from prehistoric times until today,

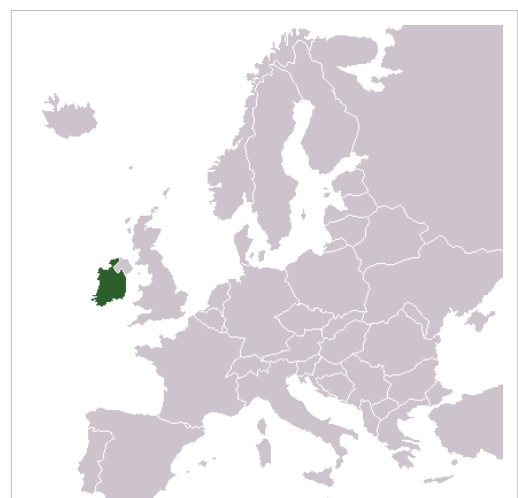
The first people arrived in Ireland over 10,000 years ago and were a community of hunter-gatherers. Later, about 3000 years ago, the Celts began to arrive in Ireland. The present-day Irish are partly descended from the Celts. Because of the Irish language and descent from Celts, Ireland is one of the **Celtic nations** along with Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Cornwall and Brittany.

Ireland was also invaded many times by **the Vikings**, or Norsemen as they were called. The Vikings later began to settle in many places. Some of their more famous towns were Dublin, Wicklow, Waterford, Wexford and Limerick.

In later times, Ireland was invaded by the Normans and then the British, who ruled until the 20th century. Major events in Irish History including the Irish Famine in 1846-1851 and the Easter Rising in 1916, occurred during this period. During the 19th and early 20th century large numbers of people emigrated from Ireland, mostly to the USA but also to Australia, Canada and the UK.



The flag of Ireland.



Map showing the location of Ireland in Europe

The Republic of Ireland finally gained independence in December 1922. The country joined the European Union in 1973 (at the same time as the United Kingdom and Denmark). Since Ireland became independent there have been disagreements and violence over Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains part of the UK and many Irish people on both sides of the border believe that there should be a united Ireland. Since the 1970s there have been terrorist attacks, shootings and violence in Northern Ireland, Ireland, the UK and other countries. Today both parts of Ireland are generally peaceful.



**Irish Famine** — Between 1846 and 1851 millions of people in Ireland died and the country's population fell from about 8 million to 4-5 million because of deaths and emigration



Malahide Castle

## Ireland's Geography

The largest mountain in Ireland is **Carrauntoohil** at 1,041 meters. It is in the MacGillicuddy Reeks in Co. Kerry. Ireland is the only place in the world (apart from Scotland) where there are bogs. These are large plains where turf is extracted for fires. The EU have placed laws, preserving the bogs as it takes around 5,000 years for a bog to develop and they are extremely rare.

Ireland has been said to look like "a giant teddy bear" in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic Ocean beats at the west coast, creating many islands and inlets by erosion. There are also a few interesting geographical sites, such as The Burren (Co. Clare) and the Giant's Causeway (Co. Antrim).

Ireland is divided into four provinces; Munster in southern Ireland has the most fertile land and is famous for its rugby team; Leinster where the British had most control in the 18th and 19th centuries; Connaught, the least fertile land in the country, and the most rural, and finally Ulster in the north of Ireland, most of which is still part of the United Kingdom.

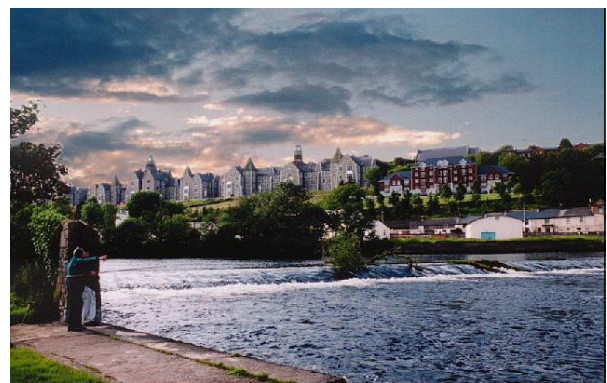
These four provinces are divided into counties, the counties are bigger in Munster and Connaught and smaller in Leinster and Ulster. There are 32 counties altogether, six of which are still part of the United Kingdom.

The longest river in Ireland is the River Shannon which extended by canals forms a major transport route in the country.

## Ireland's People

The population of The Republic of Ireland is **4.2 million** (a further 1.5 million live in Northern Ireland). Most people in Ireland speak English but a large minority also speak Irish Gaelic.

Within the Republic 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Ireland is one of the main Catholic countries along with Poland, Italy and Spain.



## Some Famous Irish People

- The film actor Liam Neeson played Qui-Gon Jinn in Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace.
- Ernest Walton from County Waterford (with his colleague, John Cockcroft from England) won the Nobel Prize in Physics for splitting the atom.
- John Philip Holland designed and built the first Submarine for the US Navy.
- Bram Stoker wrote the famous horror story, Dracula.

## Ireland's Sights

Ireland is extremely popular with tourists from around the world. The cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Belfast (in Northern Ireland) are popular throughout the year. There are **2 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Republic of Ireland** - Skellig Michael in the south-west and Brú na Bóinne in the north-east. In addition, the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland is also a World Heritage Site.

# Italy

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**Italy** (Repubblica Italiana) is a large country in southern Europe. It shares borders with Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and France. There are also two small countries within Italy: San Marino and the Vatican City (Holy See). The capital city is Rome (Roma). Other big cities in Italy are Milan (Milano), Venice (Venezia) and Naples (Napoli). Italy is well known for its cuisine, fashion and sports cars. Italy is a member of the European Union and uses the Euro as its currency.



The flag of Italy

## Italy's History

People have lived in Italy for over 200,000 years. Around 800 BC (800 years 'before Christ'), Italy consisted of several Italic tribes and many Greek colonies that were created along the southern coasts of Italy and Sicily. The most famous of these Italic tribes are the Etruscan and the Latini. The city of Rome was part of Latium.

Between that time and 200 AD, Rome grew larger and larger and by means of war and treaties, the Romans eventually conquered all the land of Italy and the Roman Empire governed over large parts of Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East.

Italy, as a unified country, was established in 1861 although many parts of present day Italy (Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia for example) didn't become part of the country until later. The last changes to the borders of Italy were in the 1950s when Trieste officially became part of Italy.

Under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini Italy built up an empire including Albania, Libya and Ethiopia and took control of the cities of Trieste and coastal regions of present day Slovenia and Croatia (where many native Italians lived). During World War II Italy was allied with Nazi Germany. Thanks to the Partisan movement, help from the British and American forces Italy was able to overthrow the fascist government eventually. Since 1946 Italy has been a republic. The present Prime Minister of Italy is Silvio Berlusconi.

## Italy's Geography

Italy is a land of contrasts and including a large coast line as well as mountains. Italy's highest mountain is Monte Bianco (known as Monte Blanc in English). The largest Italian islands are Sicily (Sicilia in Italian) and Sardinia (Sardegna in Italian). Italy's climate has resulted in a large industry for wine making. There are also two countries which are entirely surrounded by Italian territory: Vatican City and San Marino.

Italy is home to many active volcanoes and is an active earthquake zone. The largest volcano in Europe is Etna in Sicily.

Much of Italy has a Mediterranean climate with hot summers and mild winters but because of the large number of mountainous regions the climate varies enormously. Apart from in the mountains, the temperature in Italy rarely falls below 0°C and in summer often goes above 30°C.



Grande Canal in Venice



Piazza Maggiore, Bologna



## Italy's People

The population of Italy is around 59,610,000. Most people in Italy speak Italian but there are large minorities of German, Slovene and French speakers close to the borders with Austria, Slovenia and France. People in Italy have one of the longest life expectancies in the world. In the past Italy was a country of emigration and millions of Italians emigrated to countries like the USA, Canada and Argentina during the 19th and 20th centuries.

## Religion

Roman Catholicism is by the largest religion in the country, although the Catholic Church is no longer officially the state religion. 88% of Italians identified as Roman Catholic, although only about one-third of these described themselves as active members. Other Christian groups in Italy include Eastern Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox, Pentecostals and Evangelicals. The country's oldest religious minority is the Jewish community. It is no longer the largest non-Christian group.

## Education

Italy has had a state-wide public school system, or Education System, since 1859. Today, there are two stages of education in Italy: primary and secondary. Primary school commonly comes after 3 years of nursery school (or kindergarten) although it is not required. Primary school lasts 5 years. Secondary school is divided into 2 stages. The first stage of secondary school lasts 3 years and involves an exam at the end of the year. The second stage of secondary school lasts 3 to 5 years.

## Sports

The most popular sport in Italy is football. Italy's national football team is the second most successful team in the world and the current FIFA world champion. Popular sports include football, basketball, volleyball, water-polo, fencing, rugby, cycling, ice hockey, roller hockey and F1 motor racing. Winter sports are most popular in the Northern regions, with Italians competing in international games and Olympic events.

## Italy's Sights

Millions of tourists visit Italy every year. It is the world's 5th most popular destination for tourists with more than 25 million visitors every year. The most popular cities for tourists are Venice, Rome and Florence. Famous sights include the Grand Canal in Venice, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Colosseum in Rome.

Sights from the Roman Empire like Pompeii, Naples, Ischia, Capri and Baiae are very popular with tourists.

Italy has more UNESCO World Heritage Sites (41 of them) than any other country in the world. The entire cities of Verona, Siena, Vicenza, Ferrara are World Heritage Sites.

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# Kazakhstan

**Kazakhstan** is a very large country in far eastern Europe and western Asia. It shares borders with Russia, Uzbekistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The capital city is Astana. Other big cities are Almaty and Karaganda. Kazakhstan is not part of the European Union and uses the *Tenge* as its currency.

## Kazakhstan's History

The Russians began advancing into the Kazakh steppe in the 18th century, and by the mid-19th century all of Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, and civil war, the territory of Kazakhstan was reorganized several times before becoming the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936, a part of the USSR (Soviet Union). Kazakhstan declared itself an independent country on December 16, 1991, the last Soviet republic to do so.



**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991



Kaindy lake in south-east Kazakhstan.

## Kazakhstan's Geography

Kazakhstan is ranked as the **ninth largest country in the world** as well as the world's largest landlocked country. It has an area of 2.7 million square kilometres (1.05 million sq. mi). It is bordered by Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and China. The country also borders on a large part of the Caspian Sea. The climate is continental, with warm summers and colder winters. Kazakhstan has thousands of lakes and rivers and most of the country is not populated.

Most of the country is part of the continent of Asia and only a small part in the north-west is located in Europe.

## Kazakhstan's People

The **Kazakh language**, spoken by 65 percent of the population, has the status of the "state" language, while Russian, which is spoken by almost all Kazakhstanis, is declared the "official" language, and is used routinely in business. The ethnic Kazakhs represent 59 percent of the population and ethnic Russians 25 percent. Other ethnic groups represented, include Tatars, Uzbeks, Bashkirs, Uyghurs and Ukrainians. Islam is the largest religion in Kazakhstan, followed by Russian Orthodox Christianity.

## Kazakhstan's Sights

Kazakhstan has three UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasavi, Petroglyphs and Saryarqa (Steppe and Lakes of Northern Kazakhstan). Because of the huge distances between cities and lack of public transport, tourism is not common in Kazakhstan but more and more people are visiting the country every year

## Latvia

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**Latvia** is a small country in north eastern Europe. It shares borders with Estonia, Russia, Belarus and Lithuania. The capital city is Riga. Other big cities in Latvia are Daugavpils and Liepāja. Latvia has been an independent country since 1991 and in 2004 the country joined the European Union.

### Latvia's History

Beginning in the 13th century, Latvia was successively dominated by Germany, Poland, and Russia. Latvia became an independent country in 1918. In 1940 the USSR (Soviet Union) took over Latvia. Latvia has been an independent country since 1991 and in 2004 the country joined the European Union.





Riga Bridge



**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991

## Latvia's Geography

Latvia covers an area of about 63,700 km<sup>2</sup> (about 24,600 sq mi). Forests cover 47 percent of the land. Forests are most dense in the north. The country's forests, meadows, and marshes support many types of animals. Some types of animals include the deer, wild boars, wolves, lynx, beavers, and otters.

Summers are warm and the weather in spring and autumn fairly mild, however, the winters can be extreme due to the northern location. Precipitation is common throughout the year with the heaviest rainfall falling in August. During severe spells of winter weather in Latvia is dominated by cold winds from the interior of Russia and severe snowfalls are common.



Town Hall Square and "Guild of Blackheads" House in Riga

## Latvia's People

The population of Latvia is about 2,259,810. Ethnic Latvians make up about 58 percent of the population. Russians, are the largest minority, representing about 30 percent of the population. Other minorities include Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Lithuanians. The official language of the republic is Latvian. Ethnic minorities in Latvia often also speak their own native languages such as Russian, Lithuanian, and Polish.

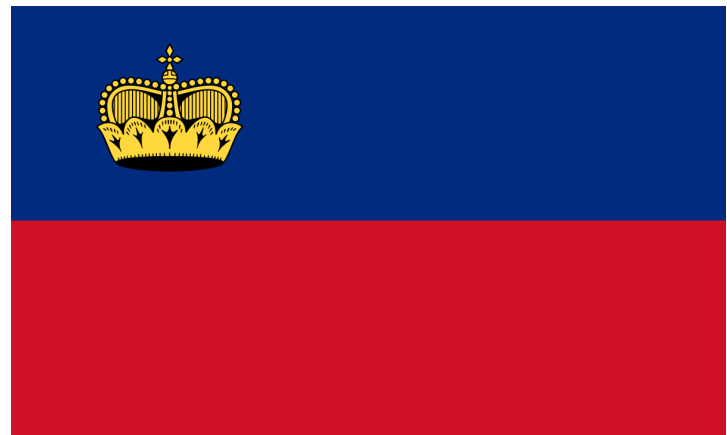
Education in Latvia is free and required from the age of 6 to 15. Latvia has an adult literacy rate of almost 100 percent.

# Liechtenstein

**Liechtenstein** is a tiny country in central Europe. It shares borders with Austria and Switzerland. The capital city is Vaduz. Liechtenstein is one of the smallest countries in the world. It is not part of the European Union and uses Switzerland's currency, the Swiss Franc, as its currency.

## Liechtenstein's History

Liechtenstein had many advances in the nineteenth century. In 1836 the first factory was opened. In 1861, the Savings and Loans Bank was founded, as was the first cotton-weaving mill. Two bridges over the Rhine were built in 1868, and in 1872 a railway line across Liechtenstein was constructed. Liechtenstein follows a policy of neutrality and is one of few countries in the world to have no army. In 1866 Liechtenstein became permanently independent from the German Empire and has been a completely independent country ever since.



The flag of Liechtenstein.



Map showing the location of Liechtenstein in Europe

In the years after World War II, during which Liechtenstein remained neutral, the country became richer because of low taxes and attractive laws for businesses. Today Liechtenstein is **a tax haven with many wealthy people** and big corporations having bank accounts in the tiny country. Liechtenstein's people have one of the highest standards of living in the world. During the **Cold War** Liechtenstein remained neutral.



**Cold War** — between 1945 and 1991 there was military, economic, space, sporting and competition between the USA (and its allies) and the USSR (and its allies). There were often fears that a global war might start.



Vaduz Castle overlooking the capital

## Liechtenstein's Geography

Liechtenstein is the fourth smallest country in Europe, after the Vatican City, Monaco, and San Marino. Liechtenstein is located in the Upper Rhine valley of the European Alps. The entire western border of Liechtenstein is formed by the river. In winter, the mountain slopes are well suited to winter sports.

The highest mountain in Liechtenstein is Grauspitz at 2,599 metres. Liechtenstein is one of only two **doubly landlocked countries** in the world which means that Liechtenstein is landlocked (it has no coast)

and also that the countries surrounding Liechtenstein (Austria and Switzerland) are landlocked too. The only other doubly landlocked country in the world is Uzbekistan.

## Liechtenstein's People

Its population is made up of mostly ethnic Alemannic, although its resident population is approximately one third foreign-born, primarily German speakers from the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Swiss, Italians, and Turks. **Foreign-born people make up two-thirds of the country's** workforce. Nationals are referred to by the plural: Liechtensteiners. The official language is German. Most of the population is Roman Catholic but 5% of people living in the country are Muslim.

## Liechtenstein's Sights

Because Liechtenstein is a small country there are not many tourists. Business people and wealthy individuals visit the country for financial reasons and some curious tourists come just because they want to visit one of the smallest countries in the world.

**Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein**, the national museum, is a popular site for locals and tourists who make it to the country. Vaduz Castle (*see the image above*) and Gutenberg Castle are popular for cultural reasons and it is possible to go skiing in Liechtenstein's high mountains.



# Lithuania

**Lithuania** is a country in north eastern Europe. It shares borders with Poland, Russia, Belarus, and Latvia. The capital city is Vilnius. Other big cities in Lithuania are Kaunas and Klaipėda. Lithuania has been part of the European Union since 2004. Lithuania's currency is called the **Lithuanian Litas**

## Lithuania's History

Lithuania was first formed in the 6th century. Lithuania first appeared on the map in the middle of 13th century when **Mindaugas** united Lithuanian lands. He became a King in 1253 and then Lithuania was recognised as the **Kingdom of Lithuania**. Later on, the country expanded quickly and in the beginning of the 15th century Lithuanian Duchy was **one of the largest countries in Europe**, stretching from Baltic to the Black sea. However, due to a great threat of being occupied by Grand Principality of Moscow, Lithuania united with Poland in 1569 into a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth country. Lithuania had its own army, currency, laws (the three statutes of Lithuania) and institutions.



Map showing the location of Lithuania in Europe



The national flag of Lithuania.



**Poland-Lithuania** — five hundred years ago this was a big empire covering most of modern-day Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine

In 1795 during the third Partition of the Commonwealth, the country was occupied by Russia, Prussia and Austria. Majority of Lithuanian lands were in the Russian Empire with the rest of it in Prussia. Lithuania re-established its independence after the First World War on February 16, 1918. During the Second World War, The Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in June 1940, one year later Lithuania was occupied by German forces and was reoccupied by Soviet Union in 1944. **More than 13% of Lithuanian population, including Lithuanian Jews, were killed during the war**, many of them by the secret Soviet police forces were deported to Siberian GULAGs where people died from cold and hunger, the others had been sent to German labour camps.

March 11, 1990 Lithuania was the first Soviet Republic to renew its independence. Lithuania joined the United Nations on September 17, 1991 and on May 31, 2001 it became the member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). On January 4, 1994, it became the first of the Baltic states to apply for NATO membership. On March 29,

2004, it became a NATO member, and on May 1, 2004, Lithuania joined the **European Union**.



Neman River near Alytus, Lithuania



**End of the Soviet Union** — After 1991 the 15 parts of the Soviet Union became independent countries which today include Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia and many other countries

## Lithuania's Geography

Lithuania is situated in northern Europe. It has sandy coastline with big dunes some of which face the open Baltic Sea. There are no mountains in Lithuania, only hills which are not higher than 300 metres (1,000ft). However, there are many lakes and wetlands. The main river is **Neman** (Nemunas). Green forests cover about 30% of the land. Climate is wet and moderate, though sometimes weather fluctuations happen with -25C in winter and 38C in summer. According to one geographical computation method, Lithuania's capital, Vilnius, lies only a few kilometres south of the geographical centre of Europe.

## Lithuania's People

There are only **3.3662 million people living in Lithuania**, 84.6% of whom are ethnic Lithuanians who speak the Lithuanian language, the official language of the country. Together with Latvian, it is one of the two surviving members of the Baltic language group and one of the oldest used spoken languages in the entire world. There are also some minorities in Lithuania, including Poles (6.3%), Russians (5.1%), and Belarusians (1.1%).

Most Lithuanian schools teach English as a first foreign language, but students may also study German, or, in some schools, French. The majority of Lithuanians are Christian Catholics, even though they were very last in Europe to be baptised. It is said that many Lithuanians were following Baltic pagan religion until the middle of 18th century. Many traditions, celebrations and songs come from the pagan times. People then believed in many gods (gods of earth, wind, thunder, water, etc.).

Since 2004 many Lithuanians have moved to other parts of the EU, especially Germany, the UK and Ireland, to work and live.

## Lithuania's Sights

Today Lithuania is a popular tourist destination. Most tourists come from the neighbouring Baltic countries, Russia, Germany, Poland and the UK. Vilnius, the capital, is a popular city for cultural museums and night-life. There are **three UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in Lithuania: Kernavė (an archaeological site), Curonian Spit (shared with Russia) and the Old Town of Vilnius. The Hill of Crosses is a notable religious tourist attraction.

# Luxembourg

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**Luxembourg** is a small country in western Europe. It shares borders with Germany, France and Belgium. The capital city is also called Luxembourg. The country has been a member of the European Union since the organization was founded in 1957. It uses the Euro as its currency.



Map showing the location of Luxembourg in Europe

## Luxembourg's History

## Luxembourg's Geography

The country is only 2,586 square kilometres which is one of the smallest areas in the world. The geography of the country is dominated by low hills and mountains. The highest mountain is Kneiff at 560 metres.



The flag of Luxembourg

## Luxembourg's People

People from Luxembourg are known as Luxembourgers and natives are a mixture of French, German and Celtic origins. There are large numbers of people in the country with Belgian, Italian, Bosnian and Serbian backgrounds.

The languages of the country are French, German, and Luxembourgish. There are large numbers of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians, Jews and Muslims in Luxembourg. Luxembourg is the richest country in the world (when measured per population). The average Luxembourger earns about \$90,000 per year.



Place d'Armes, Luxembourg, Luxembourg

## Luxembourg's Sights

The rural areas near the German border are popular with German tourists and the capital city, Luxembourg, is a popular weekend-break destination and also an important place for business meetings.

## Macedonia

**Macedonia** (officially known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) is a country located in south eastern Europe in the Balkan peninsula. Its neighbours are Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. The capital of Macedonia is Skopje. Other big cities in Macedonia are Bitola and Kumanovo. The currency of Macedonia is the Macedonian denar.



Map showing location of Macedonia in Europe

## Macedonia's History

Macedonia became independent from Yugoslavia on September 8th, 1991. In the following years it faced disputes with Greece which also claims the Macedonia name (it's the name of a historical region which includes much of Greece as well as the Republic of Macedonia). At present the country has agreed to be known as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.



the flag of Macedonia



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia

## Macedonia's Geography

Macedonia is a mountainous country with many lakes and valleys. The tallest mountain is Mount Korab at 2764 metres. Lake Ohrid (see the picture below) is the country's largest lake and the deepest lake in the Balkan peninsula.

## Macedonia's People

People in Macedonia are a mixture of many nationalities. The majority of people in the country are Macedonian but there are also large minorities of Serbs, Albanians and Bulgarians. The most widely spoken language is Macedonian which is very closely related to Bulgarian. There are large numbers of Serbian and Albanian speakers in Macedonia.

Over 66% of Macedonians are Orthodox Christians with the rest of the population mostly Muslim.



Church St. John at Kaneo, Lake Ohrid, Macedonia



# Malta

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**Malta** is a tiny country and island in southern Europe. It's the smallest European Union country in size and population. Its capital city is Valletta. Malta has been a member of the European Union since 2004 and uses the Euro as its currency.

## Malta's History

Malta gained independence in 1964 and is currently a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, as well as the European Union which it joined in 2004.

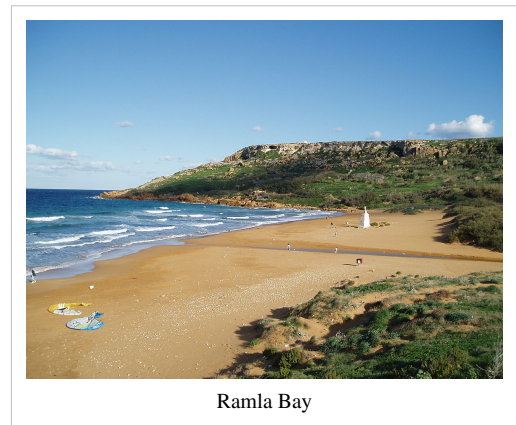
## Malta's Geography

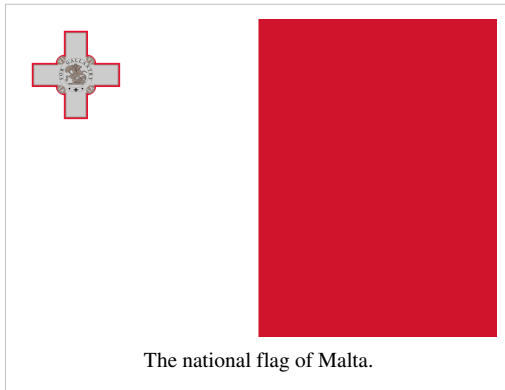
Malta is an archipelago in the Mediterranean Sea about 93km south of Sicily. The three largest islands are Malta Island (Malta), Gozo (Għawdex), and Comino (Kemmuna). The climate is Mediterranean, with mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. There are only two seasons, which makes the islands attractive for tourists, especially during the drier months. However, strong winds can make Malta feel cold during the springtime.

## Malta's People

The country's official languages are Maltese and English. Italian was an official language of Malta until the 1930s, and is widely spoken as a second or third language. Native Maltese people make up the majority of the island. However there are minorities, the largest of which are British people, many of whom retired to Malta.

Primary schooling has been required since 1946, and secondary education became required in 1971 up to the age of sixteen. Education is required between the ages of 5 and 16 years. While the state provides education free of charge, the Church and the private sector run a number of schools in Malta and Gozo, such as St. Aloysius' College in Birkirkara. Most of the teachers' salary in Church schools is paid by the state.





## Moldova

**Moldova** is a country in eastern Europe bordering Romania and Ukraine. The capital city is Chişinău. Moldova is not part of the European Union and uses the **Moldovan leu** as its currency.

### Moldova's History

Until 1991 Moldova was part of the USSR.



**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991

The area east of the Dniester river, known as **Transnistria**, contains a majority of ethnic Ukrainians and Russians who did not wish to be part of Moldova. In 1992 military conflict occurred between Transnistria and the Moldovan government and Transnistria declared itself independent although most countries in the world still recognise it as being part of Moldova. Transnistria's capital is **Tiraspol**. Since independent, the Communist Party has been the most popular party in Moldova until 2009 when a coalition took control.

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. The average income in the country is about \$1,800 per year, far lower than central and western Europe and lower than other parts of eastern Europe.

### Moldova's People

The official language of Moldova is Moldovan which is recognized as a dialect of Romanian. A large number of people, especially in the Transnistria region, speak Russian.



## Moldova's Sights

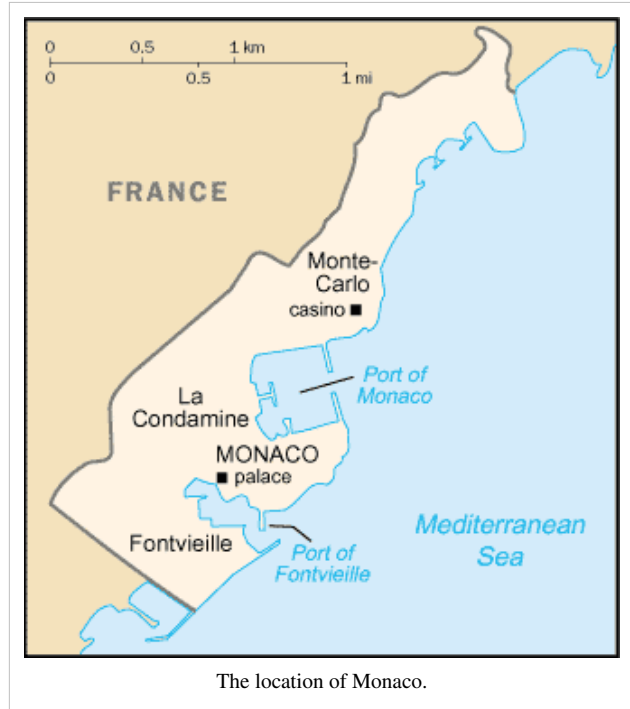
Tourism is increasing in Moldova especially since 2007 when new laws meant that EU citizens no longer need visas to visit the country. Wine-making holidays, especially near the capital are the most popular activity for tourists in Moldova. Monasteries like **Căpriana monastery** are also popular with Moldovan and foreign tourists.

# Monaco

**Monaco** is a tiny country (the second smallest in the world) located in southern Europe. It shares a border only with France. The capital city is Monte Carlo. Monaco is not part of the European Union but it has a very close relationship with European countries and uses the Euro as its currency.

## Monaco's History

The **Grimaldi family** has ruled over Monaco since 1297 and the state's **sovereignty** was officially recognized by the Franco-Monegasque Treaty of 1861. Despite being independent, Monaco's defense is still the responsibility of France.



**Sovereignty** — is the right to have control over an area of people, government, or oneself.

## Monaco's Geography

Monaco is the **smallest French-speaking country in the world**. It had a total area of 1.95 square kilometres (0.75 sq mi) but after expansion into the sea its area is now 2.05 km<sup>2</sup>. Monaco is noted for its beautiful, hilly, rugged, and rocky natural scenery and its sunny Mediterranean climate with mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers.

Because of Monaco's small size there are no mountains or lakes within the country. The highest point is 163 metres on the southern slopes of Mont Agel, although the highest parts of this mountain are located in France.

## Monaco's People



Fontvieille, Monaco



The flag of Monaco.

The largest proportion of residents are French nationals, followed by Monegasque, and Italians. French is the only official language, but Italian, English, and the two local languages, Monégasque and Occitan, are also spoken. The literacy rate is 99%.

As in nearby France and Italy, most people in Monaco are Christians, mainly Roman Catholic. After Israel, Monaco has the highest number of Jews as a percentage of its population. **Monaco has the highest HDI rating in the world.** HDI (Human Development Index) is a list of countries sorted into order measuring life expectancy, income, health, education, happiness, crime and other factors. Monaco is a popular base for rich people from around the world because of no income taxes. The enormous success of the **Monte Carlo Casino** provides income to Monaco and its Royal Family meaning residents pay less taxes.

## Monaco's Sights

Monaco is well-known around the world for being a place for the rich and famous. Expensive and luxurious resorts, hotels and apartments as well as low taxes make the country a popular location for the richest people in the world. The **Formula 1 Monaco Grand Prix** is famous too and attracts many tourists. The Monte Carlo Casino attracts gamblers from around the world.

The country is home to several large marinas for luxury yachts, sandy beaches and restaurants specialising in French and Italian cuisine.



Monaco Grand Prix

# Montenegro

**Montenegro** is a small country in south eastern Europe. It shares borders with Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The capital city is Podgorica. Other important cities are Nikšić, Budva and Bar. Montenegro is Europe's newest country. Montenegro isn't part of the European Union but it has applied to join in the future and it uses the Euro as its currency.



Map showing the location of Montenegro in Europe

## Montenegro's History



Two islands off of Perast, Bay of Kotor.

Montenegro's independence from the Ottoman Empire was formally recognized in 1878. From 1918, Montenegro became a part of Yugoslavia. Based on the results of the referendum held on May 21, 2006, Montenegro declared **independence on June 3, 2006** and is still currently the newest fully recognized country in the world. On June 28, 2006, it became the 192nd member state of the United Nations, and on May 11, 2007, the 47th member state of the Council of Europe.



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia



## Montenegro's Geography

Montenegro is a country located in South-eastern Europe. It covers a total area of 14,026 km<sup>2</sup>. It has a coast on the Adriatic Sea to the south and borders Croatia to the west, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the north-west, Serbia to the north-east, and Albania to the south-east. Its capital and largest city is Podgorica. The name Montenegro means "**Black Mountain**" and originates from the Venetian language. The country's name in Montenegrin is **Crna Gora** which has the same meaning as the English name. The highest mountain in Montenegro is Bobotov Kuk at 2,522m.



Montenegrin Cathedral (Serbian Orthodox) in the town of Kotor.

## Montenegro's People

Montenegro has a **population of 678,177**. Most of the population speak Montenegrin which is a dialect of Serbian, but other languages spoken include Albanian, Bosnian and Croatian. Most Montenegrin are Orthodox Christians. Other religions include Muslim and Roman Catholicism.

Montenegrin children start their education in either pre-schools or elementary schools.

Children begin at elementary schools at the age of 6; and continue for 9 years. The students may continue their secondary education, which lasts 4 years (3 years for trade schools) and ends with graduation. Higher education lasts with a certain first degree after 3 to 6 years.



The flag of Montenegro.

## Montenegro's Sights

Montenegro is very popular with tourists from western, central and southern Europe as well as Russia. Tourists visit the coastal areas for the night-life (in Budva) and the culture (in Kotor and Ulcinj). During the winter months there are ski resorts in the north of the country and bird watching is popular at **Lake Skadar**, the biggest lake in south-east Europe, because birds use the area as a stopping place during migrations.

Montenegro has two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Kotor (small town at the end of a large fjord) and Durmitor National Park.

# Netherlands

**The Netherlands** also known as *Holland*, is a small country in north west Europe. It shares borders with Germany and Belgium. The capital city is Amsterdam. Other big cities are the Hague, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Eindhoven. The Netherlands is part of the European Union and uses the Euro as its currency.

## History of the Netherlands

Dutch history goes back many years. During the era of the Roman Empire the Batavians inhabited the region.



Map showing location of the Netherlands in Europe

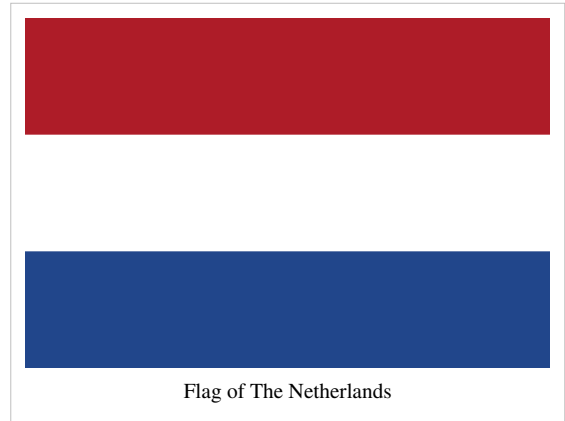


Canals in Amsterdam

Modern history in the Netherlands begins in the 1560s. It was during this time that the Netherlands revolted against Spanish rule. Led by William of Orange, also called William the Silent, they declared their independence in 1581. The Netherlands was a republic, known as the United Provinces or the Dutch Republic. William was assassinated in 1584. In 1609 the Netherlands was at peace with Spain, but it was only for twelve years. In 1621 war broke out again, but the Spanish could not

conquer the Netherlands and were forced to recognize Dutch independence in 1648.

In the 1600s the Netherlands reached its "golden age". It created **an empire across the world**. Dutch trade dominated the seas, and Dutch culture flourished. The Dutch went to war with the English three times in the 1600s and defeated the English twice.



Flag of The Netherlands



Amsterdam Pride, one of Europe's largest gay festivals

Unfortunately for the Dutch, the Netherlands began to decline in power and leave the golden age in the early 1700s. In 1795 they were invaded and conquered by France. Napoleon Bonaparte set up a republic that did whatever he wanted, but he still thought he did not have enough control over the Dutch. So in 1806 he made his brother, Luis, king of the Netherlands, called the Kingdom of Holland. But when Louis began to show more interest in the Dutch interests than in Napoleon's, Napoleon kicked him out and made the Netherlands part of the French Empire in 1810.

After Napoleon was defeated in 1815, the **United**

**Kingdom of the Netherlands** was created. King William I was the King. Belgium was part of the Kingdom. The Belgians were mostly Catholic, and the Dutch mostly Protestant and the Belgians did not want to be ruled by the Dutch. So they revolted in 1830 and became independent in 1839.

During World War II the Netherlands was invaded and occupied by Germany. Many Dutch Jews were deported and killed in concentration camps but some survived because of the help of local people. Since the 1950s the Netherlands has lost its empire but become one of the richest and most liberal countries in the world. In 2001 the Netherlands was the first country in the world to allow **Same Sex Marriage**.

## Geography of the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a low country, with no mountains. The highest peak is only 322 meters. Many rivers end in the Netherlands, one of those is the Rhine. If it were not for dikes, almost one third of the country would be below water. The Netherlands tends to have a moderate maritime climate, with cool summers and mild winters. The Netherlands has 20 national parks and hundreds of other nature reserves that include lakes, dunes, woods, and other habitats.



**Dike** — a barrier built to stop sea water from flooding the land

## People of the Netherlands

The official language is Dutch, which is spoken by most of the population, the exception being some groups of immigrants. There is a tradition of learning foreign languages in the Netherlands: about 70% of the total population have good knowledge of English, 55– 59% of German, and 19% of French. Some Dutch secondary schools also teach Latin and Ancient Greek. The majority of Dutch people are Christian and a minority are Muslim.

## Sights of the Netherlands



Windmill in Haarlem, the Netherlands

The Netherlands is one of the biggest tourist centres in the world with 10 million visitors every year. The highest number of tourists are from Germany and the United Kingdom. Tourists come for the artistic and cultural attractions as well as the city life in Amsterdam. Gay visitors are attracted to the Netherlands because of its respect of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual) rights and carnivals and celebrations are held through out the summer months. Other Europeans visit because of the country's tolerance on soft drugs (cannabis) and for music and theatre festivals.

There are **9 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in the Netherlands including one in the Caribbean. The most visited Heritage Site is the *Seventeenth-century canal ring area of Amsterdam* - a collection of canals which encircle the centre of Amsterdam.



# Norway

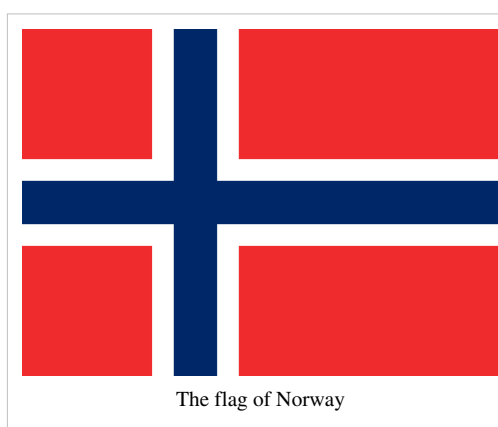
**Norway** is a country in north-western Europe. It shares borders with Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The capital city is Oslo. Other big cities in Norway are Bergen, Stavanger, Trondheim and Kristiansand. Norway's currency is called the Norwegian krone. Norway is not a member of the European Union. The Norwegian people voted "no" for joining the EU.



Map showing the location of Norway in Europe

## Norway's History

Norway's history is dominated by war, especially from 900-1349 A.D. The well-known *Vikings* discovered and settled places like Greenland, Iceland and Newfoundland, and conquered places like the Isle of Man, the Orkneys and the Shetland Islands. After *the Black Death*, Norway was a part of *The Kalmar Union* (Norway, Denmark and Sweden), and later, when Sweden went out of the union, Norway was part of Denmark for almost 400 years. In 1814 Norway made its own constitution, and Norway was allowed to keep it when in union with Sweden. In 1905 Norway became independent again, and after an election, the Norwegian people chose to be a kingdom with the Danish King's son as King. He took the more Norwegian-like name Haakon, and his son took the name Olav. The Queen continued to be Maud.



The flag of Norway



National Theatre of Norway in Oslo



**Constitution** — A permanent set of laws for a country



## Norway's Geography

**Fjords**, long inlets from the sea, cover most of Norway's coastline. Norway is a very *long* country, like Chile. It stretches from 57° and 81° North and parts of the north are in the Arctic Circle.

Norway has over 50,000 islands and a coastline of 83,000 kilometres (because of the large number of islands and rugged coastline).

Norway's highest mountain is Galdhøpiggen at 2,469 metres.

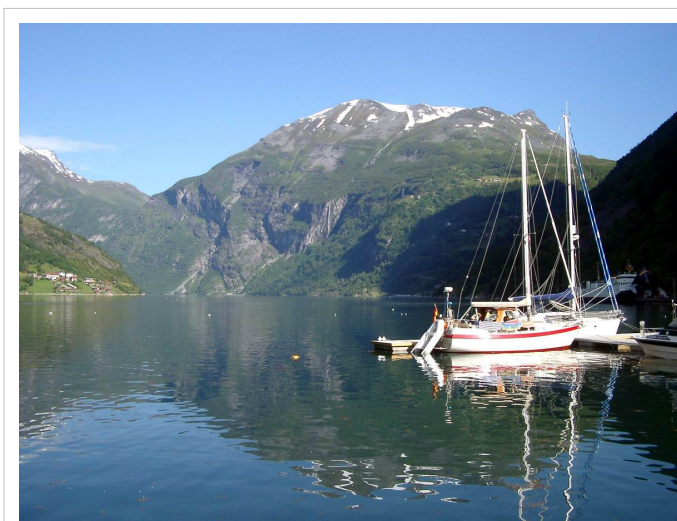
## Norway's People

Norways' population is mostly ethnic Norwegians and people from the other Scandinavian countries. Approximately 4.7 million people live in Norway.

The majority of Norwegians are Protestant Christian. There are also small minorities of Catholic Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The main language of Norway is Norwegian (which has 2 written forms). A variety of Sami languages are spoken by the Sami people especially in the north of the country.

One famous Norwegian artist was Edvard Munch who is famous for *The Scream*



Geiranger, Norway

## Norway's Sights

Norway is very popular with tourists especially those who love the great outdoors. Norway is a **very expensive country** but many tourists visit every year to see the famous fjords, the unspoiled nature and the attractive towns around the country.

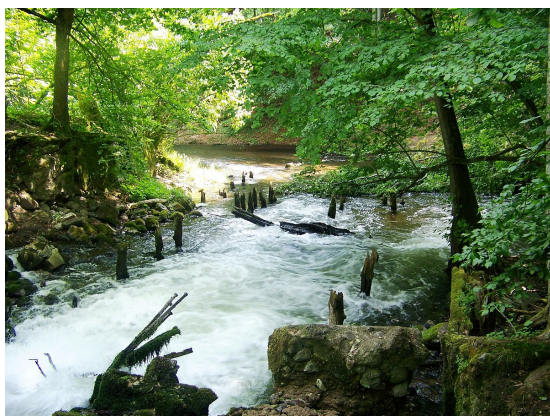
The most visited tourist sites in Norway are Holmenkollen Ski Jump and Bryggen which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The capital, Oslo, is popular for business trips and sight-seeing trips and cruises in the Arctic north are popular especially during the winter.

# Poland

**Poland** is a large country in central Europe. It shares borders with Germany, Russia (Kaliningrad), Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Slovakia and Czech Republic. The capital city is Warsaw. Other big cities are Krakow and Gdansk. The currency of Poland is the zloty.



## Poland's History



Drawa National Park

Poland regained its independence in 1918 after World War I but lost it again in World War II, occupied by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Poland lost over six million citizens in World War II, and emerged several years later as a socialist republic within the Eastern Bloc under strong Soviet influence. In 1989 communist rule was overthrown.



The flag of Poland.



Warsaw in Poland



**End of communism in Europe** — In 1989 Communism ended in countries like Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Romania after the people protested for change

Poland has changed many times in history and the latest borders were settled at the end of World War 2. Between 1945 and 1989 Poland had a communist government. Since 2004 Poland has been a member of the European Union.

## Poland's Geography

Poland is a large country about the size of the United Kingdom and Ireland. The highest mountain is Rysy at 2499 meters. Poland has more than 9,000 lakes and two large mountain ranges: the Sudetes (in the south west) and the Carpathian mountains (in the south and south east). Poland has one of the highest numbers of lakes in the world. In Europe, only Finland has a greater density of lakes. Forests cover 28% of Poland's land area. More than half of the land is devoted to agriculture. Summers are generally warm and the winters are cold. The winter months are drier than the summer months.

## Poland's People

The national language of Poland is Polish which is spoken by 98% of the population. Small minorities of people speak German and Ukrainian. Poland is home to about 38 million people. In the past 4 years almost 1 million Poles have moved to the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden. The vast majority of Polish people are Catholic.

Many sports are popular in Poland. Football (soccer) is the country's most popular sport, with a rich history of international competition. Track & field, basketball, boxing, fencing, handball, ice hockey, swimming, volleyball, and weightlifting are other popular sports. The Polish mountains are an ideal venue for hiking, skiing and mountain biking and attract millions of tourists every year from all over the world. Baltic beaches and resorts are popular locations for fishing, canoeing, kayaking and a broad-range of other water-themed sports. American football is becoming popular throughout the country.

## Poland's Sights

Poland is a popular destination for tourists. The majority of foreign tourists visit the historical cities of Krakow and Wroclaw and the capital, Warsaw. The mountains near Krakow are popular in the winter for skiing holidays. Poland has 13 World Heritage Sites including Krakow Old Town.

# Portugal

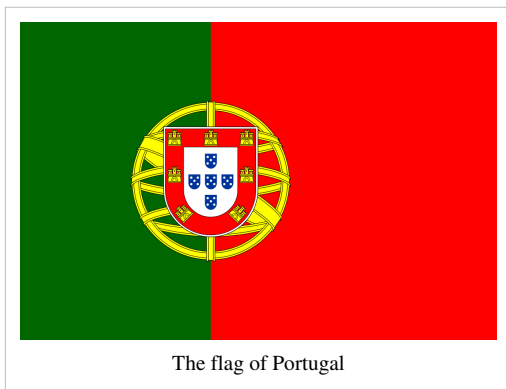
**Portugal** is a country in south western Europe. It shares borders with Spain only. The capital city is Lisbon. The other big city in Portugal is Porto. Portugal has been a member of the European Union since 1986 and uses the Euro as its currency.

## Portugal's History

The history of Portugal is much intertwined with Spain's except for a few but important differences. The Romans first ruled Iberia (the peninsula that is now the main territory of Portugal and Spain), one could attribute first nationalistic movement of that part of Iberia to a group of tribes that lived on what is today Portugal and Galicia (a region of Spain) that actively opposed Roman occupation over that territory, their leader was called Viriathus, he was later assassinated and Rome was then able to take over, until collapse of the Roman Empire. Iberia, especially what is now Portugal due to the large coastline, was then prey to a succession of invasion by barbaric tribes. The Visigoths took control of Iberia but it was then invaded by the moors (a group of North Africans, mostly Muslims) in 711. They completely conquered Portugal but they did not conquer Northern Spain (mostly Christian). Soon these tiny kingdoms would start to push into Moorish Spain this reconquest would be called "la Reconquista". Portugal was created by his first King, Afonso Henrique Henriques in recent reclaimed territory, by revolting against his mother Queen Teresa, finally leading to Portugal's independence in 1139, but the Reconquista didn't end till 1492. Due to the close family tree of the monarchs, Portugal was several times under the same ruler as Spain (most leading to active opposition and armed conflict). Between 1595 and 1663 it was one of the greatest empires. This Spanish empire was the first (not the British empire) where the sun never sets (meaning that it was always daylight somewhere in the Spanish & Portuguese Empire. In 1663 Portugal was again independent and collected an empire based on Brazil. Later its colonies would gain independence. First Brazil in 1825 then Angola Guinea and Mozambique in 1974 followed by East Timor in 1975 and finally Macao was given to China in 1999.



Map showing the location of Portugal in Europe



The flag of Portugal



**moors** — North Africans, mainly followers of the Muslim faith, who conquered and controlled Portugal and most of Spain many centuries ago

## Portugal's Geography

Portugal has a Mediterranean climate with warm winters and hot summers.

Mount Pico at 2,351 metres is the country's highest mountain. It is located on Pico, one of the islands of **The Azores**. There are a number of mountains in the north of the country and the Portuguese like to go skiing in the region during the winter months.

Animals which exist in Portugal but are rare in the rest of Europe include the **Iberian lynx** and the Iberian wolf.

## Portugal's People

The majority of people living in Portugal are ethnic Portuguese but nowadays there are small minorities of people from Brazil, Ukraine, Romania, Russia as well as many people from former Portuguese colonies in Asia and Africa (Cape Verde, Angola).

The language of Portugal is Portuguese.

Although Portugal has one of the lowest incomes in the European Union (lower than many newer EU countries), it has a very high standard of living. The majority of people in Portugal are Christian, mostly Roman Catholic.



Algarve, Portugal

## Portugal's Sights

Portugal is a **very popular tourist destination** partly because of its hot summer climate. Over 12 million tourists visit the country every year with most coming from Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany. The Algarve region and the capital, Lisbon, are the country's most popular destinations for foreign visitors. Lisbon is Europe's second most popular city for tourists (after Barcelona in Spain).

Portugal has thirteen UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These sites are considered places that are especially important in the world for cultural, scientific, historical or geographical reasons. Some of the sites include the historical centres of **Évora** and **Porto** and the Monastery of the Hieronymites in Lisbon.



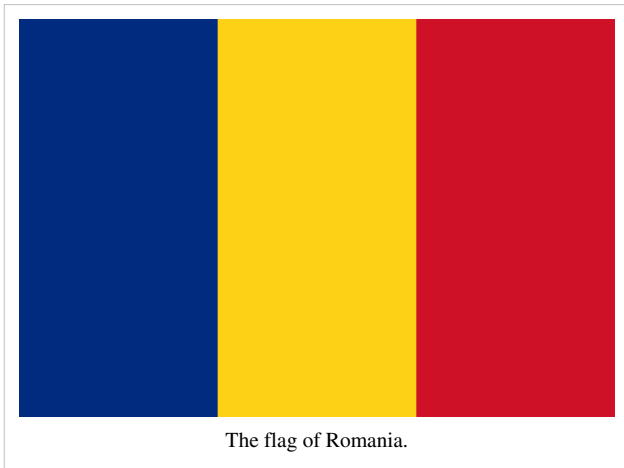
# Romania

**Romania** is a large country in south-eastern Europe. It shares borders with Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary. The capital city is Bucharest. Other big cities are Braila, Timișoara and Oredia. Romania joined the European Union on 1st January, 2007 and uses the Romanian Leu as its currency..



Map showing the location of Romania in Europe

## Romania's History



The flag of Romania.

Between 1945 and 1989 Romania was a Communist country and part of the **Warsaw Pact** group of central and eastern European countries. In 1947 the country became a Republic and the last king of Romania left the country. Between 1965 and 1989 **Nicolae Ceaușescu** ruled over the country as President. Enemies of the government were sent to prison or killed. On 25th December 1989 Nicolae Ceaușescu was removed from power and tried to escape from the country but he was captured and executed later.

Since 1989 Romania has been a democratic country with a growing economy. The financial crisis of the late

2000s and early 2010s has created problems.

## Romania's Geography

With a surface area of 238,391 square kilometres (92,043 sq mi), Romania is the largest country in south-eastern Europe. Romania has the 9th largest territory and the **7th largest population in the EU**. Romania's natural landscape is almost evenly divided among mountains, hills, and plains. Spring is pleasant with cool mornings and nights and warm days. Summers are generally very warm to hot. Autumn is dry and cool, with fields and trees producing colorful foliage. Winters tend to be very cold and foggy.

The **River Danube** (Europe's longest river) forms part of the borders between Romania and Serbia and Bulgaria and on Romania's Black Sea coast the river flows into the sea. 5% of Romania's territory is protected as part of the National Park system. At 2544 metres, Moldoveanu Peak is Romania's highest mountain.

## Romania's People

Romania has a population of 21,904,551. Romanians make up 90 percent of the population. The largest ethnic minorities are Hungarians, who make up 7 percent of the population and Roma (Gypsy) who make up 3 percent of the population. The official language of Romania is Romanian. Romanian is spoken as a first language by 91% of the population, with Hungarian and Roma, being the most important minority languages. The dominant religious body is the Romanian Orthodox Church. Over 1,000,000 Romanians currently live abroad mainly in Germany, Spain and Italy.

## Romania Sights

Tourism focuses on the country's natural landscapes and its rich history. Some fun things to do in Romania include camping and hiking in the Carpathian Mountains, skiing at Poiana Braşov and on Valea Prahovei, the Black Sea Romanian resorts, the medieval churches and monasteries of Moldavia and Bukovina, the Danube Delta, the best preserved delta of Europe, Sighişoara town and medieval festival, the medieval Castles of Transylvania, the folklore and traditions of Maramureş, rural tourism, spas and health resorts, visiting the cultural cities of Braşov, Iaşi, Timişoara, Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest and Alba Iulia, and museums.

There are **7 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in Romania. These sites include *Sighişoara* in Transylvania and Danube Delta (the area where the mighty Danube river meets the Black Sea).



Bran Castle, built in 1212, is commonly known as Dracula's Castle. It was once the home of Vlad III Dracula



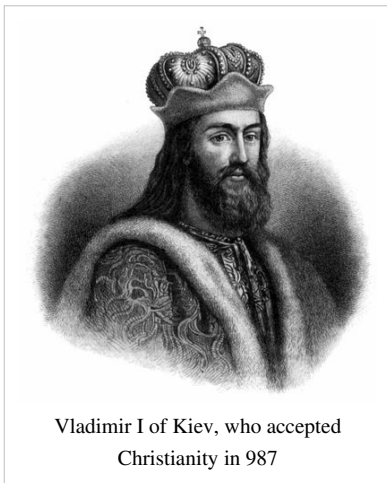
Pietrosu Peak (2,303 m)

# Russia

**Russia** is the largest country in the world in area. Most of the country is located in Asia but the major centres of population are in Europe. In Europe it shares borders with Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Norway and Azerbaijan. The capital city is Moscow. Other big cities in European Russia are St. Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. The currency of Russia is the Ruble. Russia is rich in natural resources, like oil and gas, it has the largest forest area in the world, and its lakes contain one-quarter of the world's fresh water.



## Russia's History



The ancestors of modern Russians were the eastern **Slavic** tribes. In year 882 they created the state called **Rus'**. The capital city was Kiev (now in Ukraine), where the rulers from **Rurikids** dynasty resided. In 10th century they accepted **Orthodox Christianity** from Byzantine Empire.

In the 13th century all Russian territory was **invaded by the Mongols** (also called Tatars), who ruled the land for the next three centuries. During this period, known as **Tatar yoke**, Moscow gradually came to power. Grand Dukes of Moscow united surrounding lands and in 15th century finally defeated the Tatars.

Over the centuries of its existence, the geography and climate of Russia has directed the expansion of its borders as the Russian people seek "warm water ports" in which to be competitive with the rest of the world. This can be

illustrated by their expansion down the coast of the Baltic Sea, to the eastern edge of the continent, and their involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In 16th century **Ivan the Terrible** was crowned as the first **tsar** (emperor) of Russia. During his reign Russia gained large territories along Volga river. He had no heirs, so after his death a period of unrest begun. After that a new dynasty of **Romanovs** was started. Under their rule the Russian Empire became a world power.

During 17th century Russia expanded eastward, through annexation and exploration. New cities in **Siberia** (Krasnoyarsk, Yakutsk, Irkutsk) were founded as military garrisons and trading posts. By the mid-17th century there were Russian settlements in Eastern Siberia, on the Chukchi Peninsula, along the Amur River, and on the **Pacific coast**. The Bering Strait between Asia and North America was first sighted by a Russian explorer in 1648.



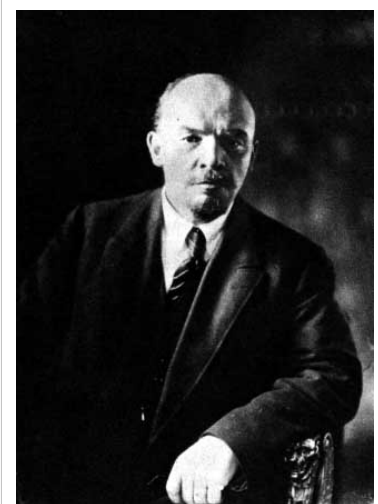
Ivan the Terrible



Catherine the Great

At the beginning of 18th century tsar **Peter I** (Peter the Great) founded new capital in the north and named it **St-Petersburg**. Under Catherine II (Catherine the Great), in alliance with Prussia and Austria, Russia eliminated Poland-Lithuania in a series of **partitions**, gaining large areas of territory in the west. During **Napoleonic wars** Russia was against France. In 1812 Napoleon with his army captured Moscow, but was ultimately defeated; strong winter was very tough for French army. This defeat marked a huge blow to Napoleon's ambitions of European dominance.

In 20th century Russia was one of the leading countries that were in the **USSR** (Soviet Union). In 1917 the „working masses” of Russia, lead by **Vladimir Lenin**, revolted against tsar in **October Revolution**. Tsar Nikolai II and all his family were killed. The capital was moved again to **Moscow**, and St Petersburg was renamed as „Leningrad”. The factories were **nationalized** and the farms were joined into „collective” farmlands called **kolkhoz**. All the industry run according to **5-year plans**.



Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Bolsheviks and founder of the USSR.





**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991

During **World War II**, Nazi Germany invaded Soviet Union. After the **battle of Stalingrad** the Soviets started to drive the Germans out and followed them to Berlin. After the war USSR **occupied Central Europe**, including Eastern Germany. The Soviet Union engaged into a **technological race** with USA. USSR became a **nuclear superpower** and launched a first **manned space flight** (cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin). But the planned economy turned to be inefficient and the people weren't satisfied with the government. The USSR splintered into fifteen independent republics and was **officially dissolved** in December 1991.

## Russia's Geography

The Russian climate and geography is very diverse. Throughout much of the territory there are only two distinct seasons — winter and summer; spring and autumn are usually brief periods of change between extremely low temperatures and extremely high. The coldest month is January and the warmest usually is July. In winter, temperatures get colder both from south to north and from west to east. Summers can be quite hot and humid.

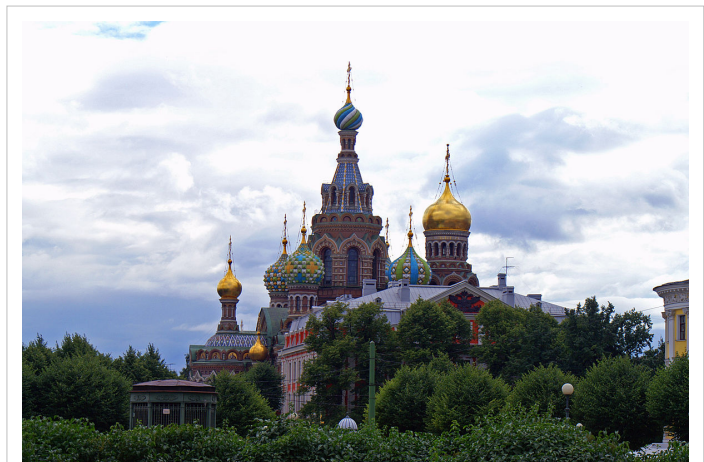
In western Russia there are the world's largest forest reserves which are often known as the Lungs of Europe. Mount Elbrus is the largest mountain in Europe at 5,642 metres.

Russia has thousands of rivers and inland bodies of water, providing it with one of the world's largest surface water resources. The largest and most recognized of Russia's bodies of fresh water is Lake Baikal, the world's deepest, purest, and most ancient freshwater lake. Lake Baikal alone contains over one fifth of the world's fresh surface water. Other major lakes include Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, two largest lakes in Europe. Of Russia's 100,000 rivers, The Volga is the most famous—not only because it is the longest river in Europe but also because of its major role in Russian history.

## Russia's People

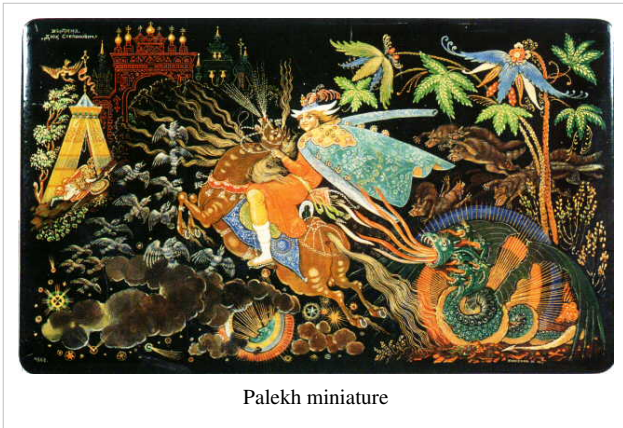
The population is around 142 million. Russia is multi-ethnic country, people of about 160 nationalities live there. Ethnic Russians are about 80% of the population in Russia. Other significant minorities include Tatars and Ukrainians. Majority of the population lives in the cities, western part of the country has higher population density. The language of Russia is Russian. Because of Russia's enormous size there are many religions practiced in the country.

The majority of people are Orthodox Christian but there are also large minorities of Muslims, Buddhists, Catholic Christians and Jews.



Church of the Savior on Blood in St. Petersburg





Palekh miniature

Russia has unique and distinctive culture. Russian literature is widely known all over the world. Most famous Russian writers are **Leo Tolstoy**, **Fyodor Dostoevsky**, **Alexander Solzhenitsyn**. Russia is also known for its classical music and ballet. **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** wrote music to some of the world's most famous ballets: **Swan Lake**, **The Nutcracker**, and **Sleeping Beauty**. **Matryoshka dolls** and different styles of handicraft, like **Palekh** and **Khokhloma**, represent Russian folk art.

## Russia's Sights

Tourists to Russia are required to purchase a visa, in addition to having a valid passport. The majority of tourists to Russia visit the western cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, since these cities are the sites of some of the most famous attractions of Russia, such as the Red Square, St. Basil's Cathedral, the Kremlin in Moscow, the Peter and Paul Fortress, the State Hermitage Museum and the Church of the Savior on Blood in St. Petersburg. A popular vacationing destination is the city of Sochi, known for its beaches. Russia has many World Heritage Sites especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

## San Marino

**San Marino** is a tiny country in central Europe. It is completely surrounded by Italy. The capital city is the City of San Marino. San Marino is one of the smallest countries in the world. It is not part of the European Union but it uses the Euro as its currency.

### San Marino's History

Traditionally, San Marino was founded by **Saint Marinus** in 301 CE. Marinus was a Christian stonemason who fled to the hills that make up San Marino to avoid persecution under the Roman Empire. When all of the other small states in Italy united in the 19th Century San Marino refused to join and has never been part of Italy. San Marino remained neutral during World War I and World War II.

### San Marino's Geography

San Marino is the third-smallest country in Europe, with only Vatican City and Monaco smaller. The total area that San Marino covers is 61 km<sup>2</sup> (23.5 sq mi). The climate is Mediterranean, with warm summers and mild winters.



The location of San Marino in Italy.



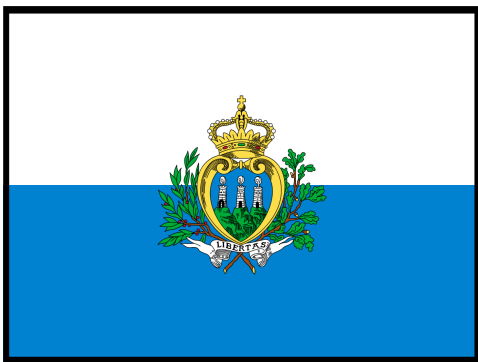
San Marino Castle

## San Marino's People

The Country has a population of approximately 31,000, including 1,000 foreigners, most of whom are Italians. About 5,000 Sammarinese live in foreign countries, predominantly in Italy. The language spoken is Italian. Emiliano-Romagnolo is widely spoken also. Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion.

## San Marino's Sights

Over 2 million tourists visit San Marino every year. Popular attractions include the **Three Towers of San Marino**, The Cathedral of San Marino and the state museum. Buying stamps and coins with the name *San Marino* on them is a popular souvenir for many tourists.



The national flag of San Marino.

# Serbia

**Serbia** is a country located in south eastern Europe in the Balkan peninsula. Its neighbours are Bosnia & Hercegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro (which was part of a union between Serbia and Montenegro until 2006). Within Serbia there are two autonomous regions: **Vojvodina** and **Kosovo Metohija**. In February 2008 Kosovo declared itself independent from Serbia although the majority of countries in the world have not recognised this independence. The capital of Serbia is Belgrade. Other big cities in Serbia are Novi Sad, Niš and Priština. The currency of Serbia is the dinar although the euro is used in much of Kosovo.



Map showing location of Serbia in Europe

## Serbia's History



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia

Serbia has a long history and has been part of many different countries and empires over the centuries including the Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire and, more recently, Yugoslavia. During the 1990s Serbia (the dominant part of Yugoslavia, especially after other countries became independent) fought several wars directly or indirectly in the region. The Yugoslav Army (mostly under the command of Serbs) fought wars in Slovenia and Croatia and the Yugoslav Government (then consisting of just Serbia and Montenegro) aided and funded paramilitary groups during the **Bosnian War**. At the end of the 1990s Serbia was **bombed by NATO** and withdrew from Kosovo (which is populated mostly by Albanians but considered to be the birthplace of the Serbian people and their church).



The national flag of Serbia.



Gradac River



**NATO** — North Atlantic Treaty Organization - this group of countries includes most of western Europe, Canada and the USA. At the end of the 1990s NATO bombed military and civilian targets in Serbia (and Montenegro) because of human rights violations in Kosovo. Following these bombings Serbia withdrew from Kosovo. In 2008 Kosovo declared itself independent.

## Serbia's Geography

Serbia a landlocked country in Central and South-eastern Europe, covering the southern part of the Pannonian Plain and the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Serbia is bordered by Hungary to the north; Romania and Bulgaria to the east; the Republic of Macedonia and Albania to the south; and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro to the west.

The Serbian climate varies between a continental climate in the north, with cold winters, and hot, humid summers, and a more Adriatic climate in the south with hot, dry summers and autumns and relatively cold winters with heavy inland snowfall.

At 2656 metres, **Prokletije is Serbia's highest mountain** although this mountain is located in Kosovo. The highest mountain entirely within Serbia is Stara planina at 2168 metres.

## Serbia's People

The people of Serbia are a mixture of many nationalities. The majority of people who live in Serbia are Serbian. The majority of people living in the Kosovo province are Albanian. Other nationalities include Hungarians, Muslims (Serbian and Bosnian), Slovaks and Roma.

The most spoken language is Serbian but many people speak other languages like Hungarian and Albanian.

Most people in Serbia are Orthodox Christians but there are also large numbers of Muslims (especially in Kosovo) and Catholics (especially in Vojvodina).

## Serbia's Sights

Tourism in Serbia is mostly focused on the villages and mountains of the country. The most famous mountain resorts are Zlatibor, Kopaonik, and the Tara. There are also many spas in Serbia, one the biggest of which is Vrnjačka Banja. Other spas include Soko Banja and Niška Banja. There is a significant amount of tourism in the largest cities like Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš, but also in the rural parts of Serbia like the volcanic wonder of Đavolja varoš, Christian pilgrimage across the country and the cruises along the Danube, Sava or Tisza. There are several popular festivals held in Serbia, such as the **EXIT Festival** and the Guča trumpet festival. Nightlife in Belgrade and Novi Sad is popular with locals and tourists alike and the largest clubs in Belgrade attract clubbers from all over south-eastern Europe.

There are 4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Serbia including a collection of monasteries and churches located in Kosovo. **Gamzigrad-Romuliana, Palace of Galerius** in the east of the country dates back to the 3rd Century CE and was built by the Romans. Studenica Monastery, in the west, is Serbia's largest monastery.



Saint Sava Temple in Belgrade



# Slovakia

**Slovakia** is a country in central Europe. It shares borders with Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic and Poland. The capital city is Bratislava. Other big cities are Kosice and Nitra. Slovakia has been a member of the European Union since 2004 and its currency is the Euro since January 2009.



Map showing the location of Slovakia in Europe

## Slovakia's History

Slovakia became independent on January 1, 1993 with the peaceful division of Czechoslovakia in the Velvet Divorce; it was the last European country to become independent in the 20th century.



The Flag of Slovakia.



**Czechoslovakia** — Until 1993 Czech Republic and Slovakia were united as one country



## Slovakia's Geography

Slovakia is a landlocked country in Central Europe with an area of about 49,000 square kilometres (almost 19,000 square miles). The Slovak climate lies between the temperate and continental climate zones with relatively warm summers and cold, cloudy and humid winters.

Around 40% of Slovakia is covered with forests. Slovakia's forests contain a wide variety of animals include brown bears, wolves, foxes, wild boars, muskrats, chamois and lynxes. Slovakia features a high percentage of wildlife included in protected areas. There are hardly any mountain ranges and areas not under some form of protection.

## Slovakia's People

Slovakia has a population of over five million. The majority of the inhabitants of Slovakia are ethnically Slovak. Hungarians are the largest ethnic minority. Other ethnic groups include Roma and Ruthenians or Ukrainians. The official state language is Slovak, a member of the Slavic Language Family, but Hungarian is also widely spoken in the south of the country and enjoys a co-official status in some municipalities, and many people understand Czech.



## Religion

The majority of Slovak citizens identify themselves with Roman Catholicism (although church attendance is lower); the second-largest group are people without confession. About 6.93% belong to Lutheranism, 4.1% are Greek Catholic, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, Calvinism has 2.0%, and some are Eastern Orthodox. About 2,300 Jews remain of the large estimated pre-WWII population of 90,000.

## Sports

As in much of Europe, football is the most popular team sport in Slovakia. Ice hockey is also popular.

## Slovakia Sights

Slovakia features natural landscapes, mountains, caves, medieval castles and towns, folk architecture, spas and ski resorts. More than 1.6 million people visited Slovakia in 2006, and the most attractive destinations are the capital of Bratislava and the High Tatras.

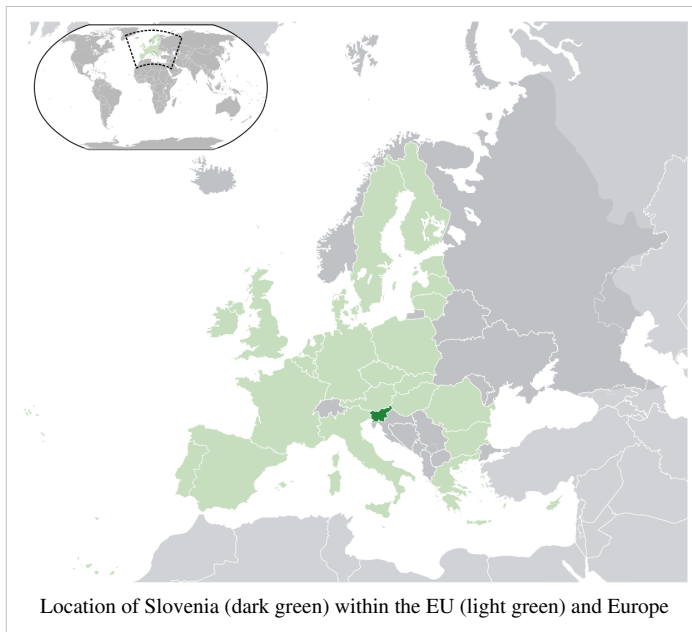
One of Slovakia's main tourist attractions are the Tatra Mountains, (particularly the High Tatras), the highest part of the Carpathians. They feature many rare plant and animal species and offer numerous ski, hiking and mountaineering opportunities.

Rivers and streams in the mountains of Slovakia are often used for rafting and other white-water based activities and sports. New water parks are being built thorough the country. Most visitors come from the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany.

Slovakia has 7 World Heritage Sites including two which are shared with Hungary and Ukraine.

# Slovenia

**Slovenia** is a small country in central and southern Europe. It shares borders with Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia. The capital city is Ljubljana. Other big cities are Maribor (in the east) and Koper (on the coast, next to the Italian border). Slovenia has been part of the European Union since 2004 and uses the Euro as its currency.



## Slovenia's History

Slovenia has been inhabited by people for about 200,000 years. Neanderthals, a type of people who existed before modern-humans, lived in present-day Slovenia as well as other parts of Europe.

A Long ago Slovenia was part of the Roman Empire, Austria-Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs (renamed later as Yugoslavia). Slovenia was the most developed part of **Yugoslavia** and many Slovenes didn't like the fact that much of the money made in the country was sent to poorer regions like Bosnia and Montenegro. Slovenia became an independent country in 1991 after a 10 day war with the Yugoslavian Army and joined the European Union in 2004.

Slovenia started using the Euro as its currency on January 1st, 2007.



**Yugoslavia** — This country included present-day Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia. It existed until 1992 and when the country broke up there were wars - a 10 day war in Slovenia, a big conflict in Croatia, a war lasting several years in Bosnia and fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbia

## Slovenia's Geography

Slovenia is very small but a land of contrasts. The coastal regions have a Mediterranean climate and the inland areas have a continental and alpine climate. **The highest mountain in Slovenia is Triglav (2,864m).** Almost half of the land is covered by forests making Slovenia one of the most forested countries in Europe. The area near the coast and the Italian city of Trieste is Karst which is a region consisting of limestone rocks, underground caves and rivers.

A range of interesting animals live in Slovenia including the bear, ibex, jackal, wolves, boar and deer. The olm is a creature which only lives in Slovenian caves and is known as the **human fish**. The country is also well known for the Lipizzan horses especially in the village of Lipica near the Italian border.

## Slovenia's People

The majority of people living in Slovenia speak Slovenian as their native language. There are sizeable communities of Italian and Hungarian speakers close to the borders with Hungary and Italy. English and German are widely spoken and many older Slovenes have a knowledge of Serbian and often Russian too. The Slovenian language is also spoken in the Trieste area of Italy. The literacy rate (number of people who can read and write) in Slovenia is about 100 percent. The current life expectancy of the people of Slovenia is around 76 years of age.

Traditionally, most Slovenes are Christian - mostly Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox and Protestant. There are also large numbers of Muslims and a small number of Jews.

The population of Slovenia is increasing faster than other European countries because of immigration, mostly from other former-Yugoslavian countries.

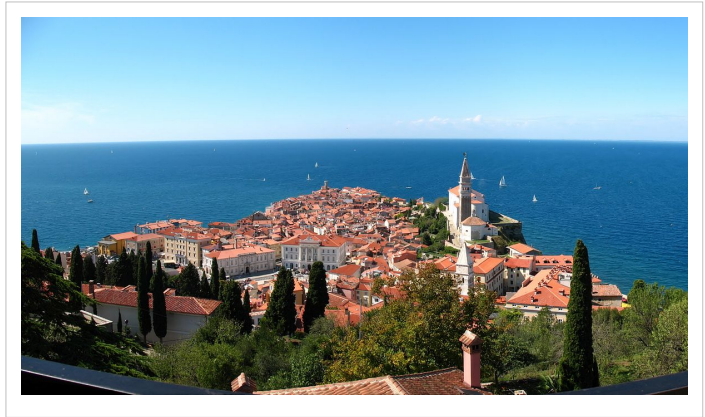


A picture of Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia.



## Slovenia's Sights

Slovenia is a popular destination for European tourists especially those from Germany, Austria, the UK and Italy. The capital city, Ljubljana, is noted for its museums and night-life and its central location in the country make it a good arrival and departure point. Lake Bled is considered to be the premier attraction in the country and during summer months can be very crowded. Piran, on the Mediterranean coast and nearby towns are popular for water sports and the Venetian architecture. Caves, including Postojna Cave and **Škocjan Caves**, attract tourists from all over the world.



There is only **one UNESCO World Heritage Site in Slovenia** - Škocjan Caves. The caves are considered important because of they are one of the largest underground canyons in the world, because of the Karst landscape and the accessibility for tourists.

## Spain

**Spain** is a large country in south western Europe. It shares borders with France, Portugal, Andorra and Gibraltar (governed by the United Kingdom). The capital city is Madrid. Other big cities are Barcelona and Valencia. Spain is part of the European Union and one of 17 countries which use the Euro as its currency.



Map showing location of Spain in Europe

## Spain's History

Between 1936 and 1939 the Spanish Civil War happened. Spaniards fought a bloody civil between the Republican party and the Nationalist party led by Franco. The nationalists were supported by Nazi Germany (Hitler) and Fascist Italy (Mussolini), with men and weapons as well by Portugal (Salazar) in a smaller scale and some militias from Ireland and Romania, the Republican party had no declared support by any nation, in fact France and the United Kingdom adopted a policy of non-intervention (France did for a time support the Republicans), the only real support came from the USSR and it included planes and other heavy armament, most of the international help came in the form of militias (mostly civilians without military training) that volunteered to fight Fascism, they came mostly from Communist movements but also others, like Anarchists and Liberal democrats, they came from Mexico, the USA and all around the world, even China. In the end the Nationalist side won the civil war. This was a testbed for WWII.



Between 1939 and 1978 Spain was controlled by **General Francisco Franco** and was run as a dictatorship.

Spain has been a member of the European Union since 1986. Since this time there has been significant immigration from South America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, other parts of Europe and north Africa.



**Immigration** — This is the number of people who have moved to a country from other countries to live and work. The opposite is emigration

## Spain's Geography

Spain is the **second largest country in Western Europe** (after France). Spain has many high mountains with the largest mountain being Teide at 3,718 metres in the Canary Islands which are located off the African coast.

Spain has a mostly Mediterranean climate with warm winters and hot (often very hot) summers.

Spain is home to many breeds of animals including the rare Iberian Lynx.

## Spain's People



Spain is home to over 45 million people which makes it the **6th biggest country in Europe** (after Russia, Germany, France, United Kingdom and Italy). The majority of people in the country are ethnic Spanish. There are also large minorities of people from Morocco, Ecuador, the United Kingdom, Romania and France.

Spanish (Castilian) is the most spoken language in Spain. There are also large numbers of Catalan, Basque and English speakers.

The majority of Spanish people are Catholic Christians (76%). There are also large minorities of Muslims (3%) and people of no religion (19%).



Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain

## Spain's Sights

Spain is a popular tourist destination. 60 million people visit Spain every year with the majority of tourists from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark.

The most popular destinations for tourists are the Canary Islands, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and the coastal regions of the country. Spain is the 4th most popular country for tourism in the world (after the USA, China and France) and the most popular destination for British and German tourists.

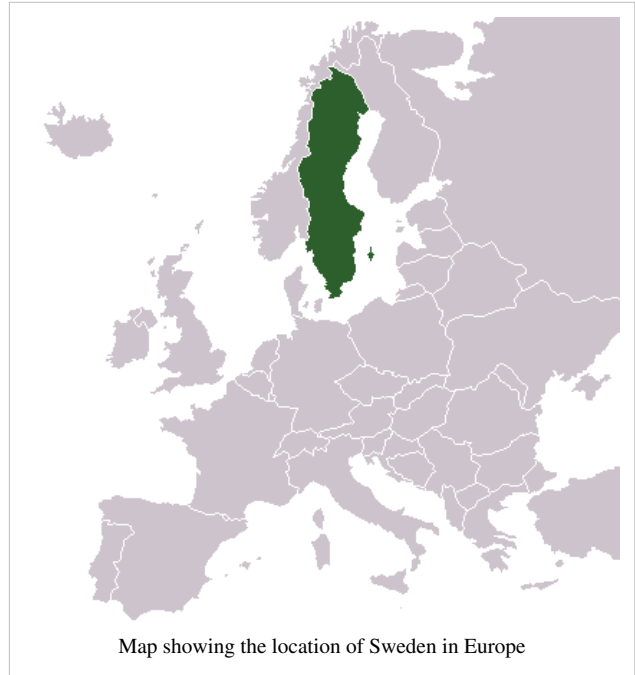
Spain has **42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, second only to Italy. Notable UNESCO sites include the **Works of Antoni Gaudi** and Garajonay National Park in the Canary Islands.

# Sweden

Sweden is a large country in northern Europe. It is one of the 5 countries of Scandinavia. Sweden shares borders with Norway and Finland. The country is also linked to Denmark by a road bridge. The capital city of Sweden is Stockholm. Other big cities are Malmö and Göteborg. Sweden has been part of the European Union since 1995 but uses the **Swedish krona** as its currency.

## Sweden's History

The Vikings, who conquered the British Isles, many parts of western Europe and even visited North America, were from the area which today includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The **Black Death** hit Sweden very hard and large numbers of people were killed in the 14th Century.



Map showing the location of Sweden in Europe



The flag of Sweden.



**The Black Death** — This was the plague which killed huge numbers of people over many centuries in Europe, northern Africa and western Asia.

During the 17th Century Sweden ruled over the **Swedish Empire** which included present-day Finland, Estonia, Latvia and parts of Norway, Poland and Germany. After 1709 the empire shrank because of a failed attempt to invade Russia. In the 19th and early 20th century large numbers of Swedish people emigrated to the USA and Canada.

The last war in which Sweden was directly involved was in 1814, when Sweden by military means forced Norway into a personal union with Sweden, a union which lasted until 1905. Sweden remained officially neutral during World War I and World War II.

## Sweden's Geography

Sweden covers 449,964 km<sup>2</sup> (173,732 sq mi) of land. Sweden is the **third largest country by area in Northern Europe** and fourth in all of Europe. Sweden is surrounded by Norway, Finland, the Skagerrak, Kattegat and Öresund straits, and the Baltic Sea. The highest mountain in Sweden is Kebnekaise at 2,111 metres.

Sweden has a temperate climate despite its northern latitude with distinct seasons and mild temperatures both in winter and summer. Sweden is much warmer than other places in the same latitude, mainly because of the Gulf Stream. In southern and central Sweden, summers are pleasantly warm (sometimes hot or cooler for a couple of days) with comfortable cool evenings; while the north experiences cooler temperatures. In the summer the sun hardly sets in Sweden, especially in the far north where it does not set at all. This allows activity until late in the evening, or even through the night. During winter, temperatures are close to freezing in the south, slightly below freezing in the central regions, and very cold, snowy and below freezing for around 6 months in the north.

Yearly average precipitation (*rainfall*) in most of the country is between 500 and 800 millimeters per year. In some parts though the average is between 1000 and 1700 millimeters. Thunderstorms account for most of the precipitation in the summer. Snowfall usually occurs between November and April, but in northern regions, snow could fall from September to May and stay on the ground for almost 6 months.

## Sweden's People

The dominant language is Swedish, though it is not an official language. Other languages spoken



Kalmar Castle



Uppsala Cathedral

include Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Romani, and Jiddisch. The **population of Sweden is about nine million**. Sweden's population is mostly made up of Scandinavians and Germans. Today most Swedish people are Atheist but traditionally most of the Swedish population have Christian Lutheranism as their religion. Around 5% of the population are Muslim, mostly because of recent emigration from south-eastern Europe and the Middle East.

All young children from 1-5 years old are guaranteed a place in a public day-care facility. Between ages 6-16, children attend required comprehensive school, divided in three stages. After completing the ninth grade, 90% of students continue with a three-year upper secondary school.

Sweden is the **third largest exporter of music** in the world after the UK and the USA. ABBA, The Hives, Ace of Base, The Cardigans, Caesars and Roxette are notable groups from Sweden which are popular all around the world.

## Sweden's Sights

Sweden is mostly visited by tourists from its neighboring countries Denmark, Norway and Finland. Tourists also come from Germany and the United Kingdom. Sweden has a **large number of lakes and forests**, and it is very good for fishing and canoeing. There are several large lakes. Walking is quite a popular activity in the summer. There are no very high mountains in Sweden, so climbing is somewhat limited.

Sweden is the 21st most visited country in the world with over 7 million foreign visitors every year. Stockholm is popular with tourists of all types and people often go further north to experience the wild and under-populated parts of Sweden. There are **14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Sweden** including Laponian area (Swedish Lapland) and the ancient town of Visby on the island of Gotland.



Sweden Ice Hotel

Photo by Tom Corser [www.tomcorser.com](http://www.tomcorser.com).

# Switzerland

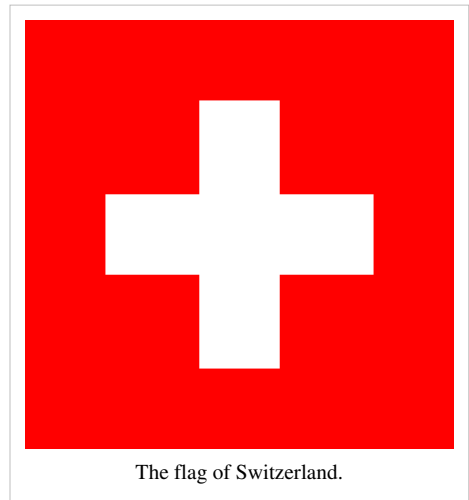
**Switzerland** is a small country in western Europe. It shares borders with Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Liechtenstein. The capital city is Bern. Other big cities are Geneva and Zurich. Switzerland is not a member of the European Union. The currency of Switzerland is the *Swiss Franc*.



Map showing the location of Switzerland in Europe

## Switzerland's History

Switzerland has a long history of neutrality — it has not been at war since 1815 — and hosts many international organizations, including the Red Cross, and the World Trade Organization. In 1920, Switzerland joined the League of Nations, and in 1963 the Council of Europe. Switzerland was not invaded during either of the World Wars. During World War II, the Germans planned on attacking Switzerland, but they never did.



The flag of Switzerland.



**neutrality** — when a country doesn't take *sides* in a war or battle



Canton of Schwyz, Switzerland

## Switzerland's Geography

With an area of 41,285 square kilometres (15,940 sq mi), Switzerland is a relatively small country. The population is about 7.5 million. Switzerland is one of the **most mountainous countries of Europe**. More than 70 percent of its area is covered by the Alps.

Summers tend to be warm and humid at times with periodic rainfall so they are ideal for pastures and grazing. The winters in the mountains alternate with sun and snow, while the lower lands tend to be more cloudy and foggy in winter.





Sunset in the Swiss alps.

## Switzerland's People

The population of Switzerland is 7,554,661. Roman Catholicism is the most practiced religion. Almost 45 percent of the population practices Roman Catholicism. Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Judaism are other practiced religions.

Switzerland is multilingual and has **four national languages**: German, French, Italian and Romansh. Other spoken languages are Spanish, Portuguese, and Turkish. Switzerland has a literacy rate of almost 100 percent. Education is required from ages 5 to 16 years of age.



**literacy rate** — the percentage of adults in a country who can read and write

Like many European nations the Swiss are big fans of football and the national team is widely supported. Many Swiss also follow ice hockey. Over the last few years several Swiss tennis players, like Roger Federer and Martina Hingis, have been multiple Grand Slam singles champions. One of the world's best current ice skaters is Swiss Stéphane Lambiel. Switzerland is also the home of the successful sailing team Alinghi. Other sports where the Swiss have been successful include fencing, whitewater slalom, ice hockey, beach volleyball, and skiing.

## Switzerland's Sights



Abbey of Saint Gall, St. Gallen, Switzerland

Tourists are drawn to Switzerland's climate and landscapes, in particular for skiing and mountaineering. Because of tax differences between Switzerland and neighbouring countries, Switzerland is popular for shopping trips. Being a major world finance centre also brings in a lot of business travellers.

There are eleven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Switzerland including: the Old City of Bern, the Abbey of St. Gall and Monte San Giorgio.

# Turkey

**Turkey** is a large country in south eastern Europe and western Asia. It shares borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan (Nakhichevan), Iraq, Iran and Syria. The capital city is Ankara. Other big cities are Istanbul and Izmir. Turkey is not a member of the European Union but would like to become a member in the future. The currency of Turkey is the **New Turkish Lira**.



Map showing the location of Turkey in Europe and Asia

## Turkey's History

Turkey has a very long history and has been occupied by the Trojans, Greeks, Lydians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuks, Ottomans, and now the modern day Turks.

Before 1923 Turkey controlled countries across south-eastern Europe, south-western Asia and northern Africa as the **Ottoman Empire**. Today there are over 50 countries in Europe, Asia and Africa which were once part of the Ottoman Empire.



The flag of Turkey.

Turkey lost its empire and became an independent country in 1923. Since World War 2 Turkey has been a close ally of most European countries and the USA. Today the country is fairly prosperous, has good relations with its neighbours and hopes to become part of the European Union in the next few years.



**Ottoman Empire** — A Turkish empire stretching from Croatia in the north to Iran in the east, Malta in the west and Niger in the south

## Turkey's Geography

Asian Turkey (made up largely of Anatolia), which includes 97% of the country, is separated from European Turkey by the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles (which together form a water link between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean). European Turkey (eastern Thrace or Rumelia in the Balkan peninsula) includes 3% of the country. The territory of Turkey is more than 1,600 kilometres (1,000 mi) long and 800 km (500 mi) wide, with a roughly rectangular shape. Turkey's area, including lakes, occupies 783,562 square kilometres (300,948 sq mi), of which 755,688 square kilometres (291,773 sq mi) are in south west Asia and 23,764 square kilometres (9,174 sq mi) in Europe. Turkey's area makes it the **world's 37th-largest country**, and is about the size of Metropolitan France and the United Kingdom combined. Turkey is encircled by seas on three sides: the Aegean Sea to the west, the Black Sea to the north and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Turkey also contains the Sea of Marmara in the north west.



The Blue Mosque in Istanbul, turkey.

The European section of Turkey, in the north-west, is Eastern Thrace, and forms the borders of Turkey with Greece and Bulgaria. The Asian part of the country, Anatolia (also called Asia Minor), consists of a high central plateau with narrow coastal plains, between the Köroğlu and East-Black Sea mountain range to the north and the Taurus Mountains to the south. Eastern Turkey has a more mountainous landscape, and is home to the sources of rivers such as the Euphrates, Tigris and Aras, and contains Lake Van and **Mount Ararat, Turkey's highest point at 5,165 metres** (16,946 ft).

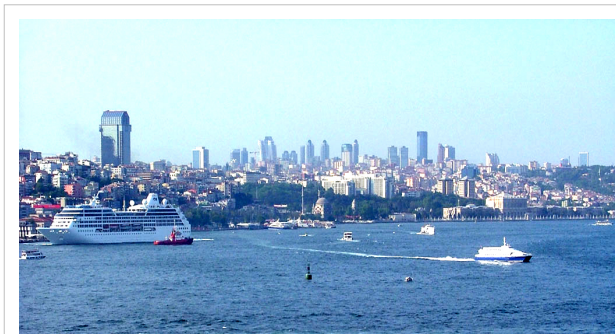
Turkey is geographically divided into seven regions: Marmara, Aegean, Black Sea, Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, south eastern Anatolia and the Mediterranean. The uneven north Anatolian terrain running along the Black Sea resembles a long, narrow belt. This region comprises approximately one-sixth of Turkey's total land area. As a general trend, the inland Anatolian plateau becomes increasingly rugged as it progresses eastward.

Earthquakes are frequent and occasionally severe because most of the mountains were formed by volcanic activity. Turkey has cold, snowy winters and hot, dry summers.

## Turkey's People

The **population of Turkey is 71,158,647**. It is the third largest European country by population (after Russia and Germany). Most of the population speaks Turkish which is the national language of Turkey. Islam is the major religion practised in Turkey, where nominally 99% of the Turkish population is Muslim. About 90 percent of the population lives in the Asian part of Turkey and about 10 percent lives in the European part.

The most popular sport in Turkey is football. Other sports such as basketball and volleyball are also popular. Surfing, snowboarding, skateboarding, paragliding and other extreme sports are becoming more popular every year. Another major sport in which the Turks have been internationally successful is weightlifting; as Turkish weightlifters, both male and female, have broken numerous world records and won several European, World and Olympic championship titles.



Ships in Istanbul

## Turkey's Sights

**Istanbul is the country's major tourist city** and is famous for its mixture of European and Asian culture, architecture and lifestyle. About 29 million tourists visit Turkey every year. Apart from Istanbul, spa resorts, hiking and seaside resorts are popular with tourists. Tourists in Turkey come from a wide range of countries including the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Iran and Japan.

There are **10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in Turkey which include the Historical Areas of Istanbul, the ancient city of **Troy** and the Great Mosque and hospital of Divrigi in the east of the country.

# Ukraine

**Ukraine** is the largest all-European country and the 44th largest country in the world. It's located in Eastern Europe and shares borders with Russia, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Belarus. The name Ukraine means **border land** in Ukrainian and Russian. The capital city is Kiev. Other big cities are L'viv, Kharkiv and Odessa. Ukraine is not part of the European Union. The currency of Ukraine is the **hryvnia**.



The Ukraine Flag.

## Ukraine's History

Although people have lived in Ukraine since 32,000 BCE, the country Ukraine is a fairly recent country. In the centuries before the 20th century, Ukraine was controlled by the Polish, Prussians and other groups of people. Like the majority of nations in Eastern Europe, Ukraine used to be part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (between 1921 and 1991), or Soviet Union. Before that, Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire.



Map showing the location of Ukraine in Europe



**Soviet Union** — This was a massive country consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and many other countries. It was a super power until it ended in 1991

As many as 10 million people died in a famine in Ukraine and other parts of the USSR in the 1930s and over 1 million were killed during World War 2. In 1986 Ukraine (and Belarus) suffered the world's worst nuclear accident when a reactor at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station exploded. Since the disaster over 4,000 people have developed cancer because of the radiation from the explosion.

Ukraine became an independent country in 1991. In 2004, after protests against corrupt elections there was a revolution, known as the **Orange Revolution** which brought in a democratically elected government. In 2012 Ukraine and Poland will host the **Euro 2012** football competition.

## Ukraine's Geography

Ukraine is the **largest country by area that is located entirely in Europe**. Though Russia and Kazakhstan are larger, they aren't entirely in Europe. The total area of Ukraine is 603,700 km<sup>2</sup> (233,100 sq mi).

Most of Ukraine has 4 very distinct seasons with warm summers and cold winters. Rainfall occurs more often in the summer months. Ukraine has a very wide variety of animals that live throughout the country.

Most of the country is flat but there are mountains in the west. The highest mountain in Ukraine is **Hora Hoverla** at 2016 metres.





The Massandra Palace.

## Ukraine's People

The population of Ukraine is around **46,300,000**. Ukrainians make up 73 percent of the population and Russians make up 22 percent of the population. The official language of the country is Ukrainian. Russian is also used within the country, especially in cities and the east.

Most of the people in Ukraine are literate. Education is required for the ages 6 to 14. Most people in Ukraine are Christians - mainly Ukrainian Orthodox. There are small numbers of other Christians, Muslims and Jews living in the country.

## Ukraine's Sights

Because of historical cities, a coastline on the Black Sea and its close location to Russia, Poland and Germany, Ukraine is a popular holiday destination. **20 million** tourists visit Ukraine every year. It is the 8th most visited country in Europe and has become more popular in recent years because EU citizens, Canadians, Americans (USA), Japanese and South Korean tourists no longer require visas to enter the country.

The capital city of Kiev is popular for its churches, landscapes and Soviet architecture. L'viv, in the west, is popular because of its architecture, its Polish and Jewish history and its nightlife. Odessa, on the Black Sea coast, is also popular because of its diverse culture and location.

There are **5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in Ukraine. These include **Saint-Sophia Cathedral** in Kiev and the historic centre of L'viv.

# United Kingdom

The **United Kingdom** is a country located in the north west of Europe. The United Kingdom shares a border with the Republic of Ireland and is connected by the Channel Tunnel to France. The capital city is London. Other large cities in the United Kingdom are Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow.

The UK has been a member of the European Union since 1973 and uses the pound as its currency.

## The United Kingdom's History

The United Kingdom was created on 1 May 1707 with the union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland. Wales was part of the Kingdom of England. Although legally separate countries, they had been ruled by a common monarch since 1603. In 1800, Ireland became part of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was the source of the Industrial Revolution which greatly increased the country's power and led to the development of the British Empire which, at its largest, controlled nearly a quarter of the world. In 1922, the southern counties of Ireland formed the Republic of Ireland, leaving just the northern counties as part of the United Kingdom.



**The United Kingdom** — 4 countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

## The United Kingdom's Geography

The United Kingdom is located on two islands (Britain and Ireland) to the north west of Europe off the shores of northern France.

Large parts of England are low lying but there are upland regions (like the Lake and Peak District's) in the North, as well as mountains in Scotland and Wales. The north of England and Scotland also feature many lakes (termed lochs in Scotland)

Northern Ireland is in the north east of the Ireland primarily centred on the UK's largest lake, Lough Neagh.

The longest river in the United Kingdom, is the River Severn, which starts in North Wales, emerging into a large estuary between England and Wales.



**estuary** — the area where a river meets the sea

Off the coast of the United Kingdom are a number of islands- the biggest islands are the Hebrides and Shetlands off the coast of Scotland, Anglesey off the coast of Wales and the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England.

The Isle of Man (located between Britain and Ireland) is not part of the United Kingdom but is a possession of the British Crown and self-governing.

## The United Kingdom's People

The United Kingdom is a country of 4 nations : England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. English is the most spoken language but many people speak Welsh, Scots Gaelic, Cornish, Urdu and Polish as well as many other languages.

Whilst the majority of the UK population are Christian, there are also followers of other faiths in many large cities. The UK includes Europe's second largest Jewish and Muslim populations and also large numbers of Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists. A sizeable minority of the UK population are not religious.

Many Christians in England, Scotland and Wales are Protestant, although there are also many Catholic churches, especially in Northern Ireland, Liverpool and London.

In Northern Ireland around half the population are Catholic and half are Protestant.

## The United Kingdom's Sights

The UK is a popular tourist destination with over 30 million foreign tourists per year. The majority of tourists visit London, Cambridge and Oxford but other cities popular with tourists include Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, Bath and Liverpool.

Famous landmarks in the UK include Stonehenge, Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, Durham Cathedral, Edinburgh's Royal Mile, Ironbridge Gorge, The National Library of Wales in Cardiff. There are **28 UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in the UK including Stonehenge, Blenheim Palace (a stately home and birthplace of Winston Churchill), Canterbury Cathedral and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire, on the border between England and Scotland

# USSR

The **Soviet Union** (Советский Союз, in Russian, also known in English as the *USSR*) was a country which existed in eastern Europe and northern Asia between 1922 and 1991. It shared borders with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Turkey, Norway, Hungary, Romania, Iran, Mongolia, North Korea, Afghanistan and China. The capital city was Moscow. Other big cities in the USSR were St. Petersburg, Kiev and Minsk. The USSR was not a part of the European Union but since the country split up Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have become EU members. The USSR's currency was called the **Soviet Ruble**.

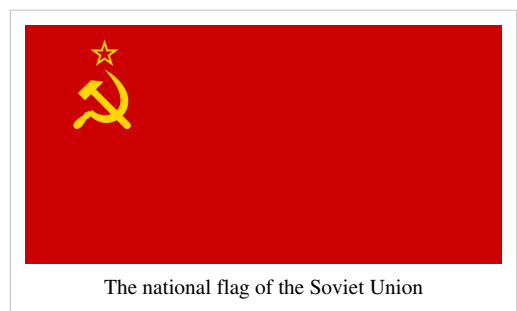
The USSR consisted of the following present-day countries: Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan. The USSR also occupied the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania between World War II and the break up of the Soviet Union but most countries considered the occupation to be illegal.

## The Soviet Union's History

The **1917 October Revolution** overthrew the provisional Russian government and the tsar monarchy and revolutionaries led by the Bolshevik leader **Vladimir Lenin** took control.



Map showing the location of the USSR



The national flag of the Soviet Union



**End of the Soviet Union** — After 1991 the 15 parts of the Soviet Union became independent countries which today include Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia and many other countries

## The Soviet Union's Geography

The Soviet Union was **the world's biggest country**. Today, Russia remains the biggest country in the world. The Soviet Union spread from central Europe to the far east of Asia. West to east was over 10,000 kilometres and the country contained 11 time zones.

The USSR's highest mountain, at 7,496 metres, was Communism Peak (now known as Ismail Samani Peak, in Tajikistan).

## The Soviet Union's People

In 1991 there were 294,000,000 people in the USSR, 51% of whom were ethnic Russians who speak the Russian language, the official language of the country. Other common languages included Ukrainian, Georgian, Kazakh, Armenian and Azerbaijani.

The USSR was officially an Atheist country but many people continued to practice their Christian (mostly Russian Orthodox) and Muslim faiths.

## The Soviet Union's Sights

There were **many UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in the USSR: Red Square and the Kremlin in Moscow, L'viv in Ukraine and many others. Because of the Cold War few tourists visited the Soviet Union until the end of communism.

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