



Slovakia – a business guide to the language, culture, economy and people

The country

There are two Slovak Republics. On the surface is a land of rugged mountains whose steep slopes attract climbers, hikers and winter sports enthusiasts. Long valleys are guarded by romantic castles. A string of 13th-century medieval towns shelter Gothic artworks and the capital Bratislava is a cosmopolitan city with a rich cultural life. Slovakia's cities and folk culture reflect a long and varied history.

Deep below the surface, however, lies another fascinating world of mines and caverns, underground rivers and ice caves. Rich ore seams in the mountains have been mined since the Bronze Age. The world's first technical university – the mining academy – was established in 1762 and trained many leading mining engineers.

Geography

The Slovak landscape is noted primarily for its mountainous nature, with the Carpathian Mountains extending across most of the northern half of the country. Amongst these mountain ranges are the high peaks of the Tatra mountains. To the north, close to the Polish border, are the High Tatras which are a popular skiing destination and home to many scenic lakes and valleys as well as the highest point in Slovakia, the Gerlachovský štít at 2,655 metres (8,711 ft), and the country's highly symbolic mountain Kriváň.

People

Slovaks are a Slav people of whom half a million live in the capital, Bratislava and 250,000 in the second city Kosice. 10% of the population is of Hungarian extraction and about 500,000 Slovaks are Roma.

Religion

The Slovak constitution guarantees freedom of religion. The majority of Slovak citizens (68.9 %) identify themselves with Roman Catholicism (although church attendance is lower); the second-largest group are people without confession (13%). About 6.93% belong to Lutheranism, 4.1% are Greek Catholic, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, Calvinism has 2.0%, other and non-registered churches 1.1% and some (0.9%) are Eastern Orthodox.

Economy

Slovakia is a high-income economy with one of the fastest rates of growth in the EU and OECD. Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004 and will join the Eurozone on 1 January 2009. Over the past two decades, the country has made remarkable progress in its transition from a command-driven to a market economy.

Politics

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Slovakia's population of 5.4 million have lived in a fully-democratic political system. In July 1992 Slovakia, led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, declared itself a sovereign state. Slovakia and the Czech Republic went their separate ways after January 1, 1993, an event sometimes called the Velvet Divorce. Slovakia has remained a close partner with the Czech Republic and other countries within the Visegrad Group.





Business Culture and Etiquette

Slovakia has a small business community and is a very relationship-based culture. People are informal and happy to work on a first name basis. They enjoy charm and good humour and tend to be indirect in public but frank in private. Slovaks prefer face-to-face meetings and telephone communication to faxes and emails but written communication, especially minutes and action points, are useful ways of cementing understanding.

Leadership, in Slovakian business, is top down with decision making lying with one, or a few, senior managers. Teams are dominated by a senior figure who takes decisions and delegates tasks. Consensus is not seen to be necessary. People are on time for meetings and agendas and action plans are kept to. People follow deadlines without being reminded.

Making contact

Greetings are warm but not effusive. The normal greeting is a handshake, direct eye contact and the appropriate greeting for the time of day: either "dobry den" for hello, "dobré rano" for good morning or "dobré popoludne" for good afternoon. and "dobru noc" for good evening. Close friends and family may kiss each other on the cheek. Slovaks are still rather formal although with the younger generation this is changing, Err on the side of caution and initially use peoples titles or surname rather than first names. "Pan" (Mr.) or "Pani" (Mrs.) are used before the surname.

Building successful business relationships

Personal relationships are crucial in successful business and you should be prepared to spend time on this. It may also be necessary to initially concentrate on your personal experience, qualifications and background to establish respect and credibility when doing business in Slovakia.

Meetings

It is recommended to start a business meeting with polite conversation of a general nature, accompanied by a toast with a local alcoholic drink. Only after that, should the conversation turn to business matters. Meetings are generally chaired by the most senior delegate who sets the agenda and the content, this is the key person to concentrate on as they are either the decision maker or the door to the decision maker. It is advisable to avoid business meetings in the months of July and August or around the times of national holidays. Although many people do speak English it may be necessary to arrange for an interpreter. When doing business in Slovakia written documents should ideally be translated into Slovak and distributed to all present.

Gift giving

Acceptable gifts for business meetings are items for the office, quality pens (including pens with your company logo) or specially selected wines. On receiving an invitation to a home, luxury chocolate, a scarf for the hostess or flowers are welcome gifts.



Language

Slovak is the official language of Slovakia, although some Hungarian is spoken and many Slovaks have knowledge of German and Russian. Some business people have a good command of English, and English is becoming more popular, particularly among the young. Nevertheless, German is better understood.

To conduct meetings effectively, it may make sense to use an interpreter.

Basic words and phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Slovak phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases:

	Slovak	Pronunciation
Hello	Ahoj,	Anoy,
Good day/morning	Dobrý deň / Dobré raňo	<i>Do-bree den / Do-byre ra-no</i>
Goodnight	Dobrá noc	<i>Dob-ruh nots</i>
Goodbye	Dovidenia	<i>Doh-vee-den-eeyah</i>
Yes/no	Áno / Nie	<i>Ahno / nyeh</i>
Please/thank you	Prosím / Ďakujem	<i>Pro-seem/da-kooh-Yahm</i>
Excuse me	Prepáčte (mi)	<i>Pre-pach-te me</i>
My name is...	Volám sa.....	<i>Vol-am sa</i>
What's your name?	Ako sa volate?	<i>Akoh sa volate</i>

Finding interpreters and translators

You will make a very positive impression by learning a few basic words and phrases, but if you wish to translate your marketing materials or make the most out of an important business meeting you should employ the services of a professional interpreter or translator. The RLN has a quality-assured database of providers in your area. Should you wish to learn the language or improve your knowledge of Slovakian business culture, the RLN also has details of language and cultural training providers in your area.

Please contact the RLN on 01332 826432 or e-mail info@rln-eastmidlands.com for more information.

Festivals and National Days



The following dates and festivals have local and national importance in Slovakia and should be taken into consideration when planning business trips and meetings.

Festivals

April – Wine Festival, Pezinok

June – Art Film Festival

July – Bratislava Musical Festival

July – The Folklore Festival at Východná

August – Hanna Hanna Art Gathering and Festival

October – Ekotopfilm: International Festival of Sustainable Development Films

November/December – International Film Festival Bratislava

Important dates

Date	Local name	English translation
1 January	<i>Deň vzniku Slovenskej republiky</i>	Day of establishment of Slovak Republic (1993)
6 January	<i>Zjavenie Pána</i>	Epiphany
March/April	<i>Veľkonočný piatok</i>	Good Friday
March/April	<i>Veľkonočný pondelok</i>	Easter Monday
1 May	<i>Sviatok práce</i>	May Day / Labour Day
8 May	<i>Deň víťazstva nad fašizmom</i>	Day of victory of fascism (1945)
5 July	<i>Sviatok svätého Cyrila a Metoda</i>	St Cyril and Methodius Day
29 August	<i>Výročie Slovenského národného povstania</i>	Slovak national uprising anniversary
1 September	<i>Deň Ústavy Slovenskej republiky</i>	Day of the constitution of the Slovak Republic (1992)
15 September	<i>Sviatok Panny Márie Sedembolestnej, patrónky Slovenska</i>	Day of our lady of sorrows, patron saint of Slovakia
1 November	<i>Sviatok všetkých svätých</i>	All Saints Day
17 November	<i>Deň boja za slobodu a demokraciu</i>	Struggle for democracy and freedom day
24 December	<i>Štedrý deň</i>	Christmas Eve
25 December	<i>Prvý sviatok vianočný</i>	Christmas Day

Did you know?...



Some interesting and perhaps little known facts about Slovakia:

- There are 24 universities in Slovakia, and 88% of the Slovak population receives a higher or secondary education.
- There are almost 4 million mobile phone users in Slovakia today.
- The major industries in Slovakia include car manufacturing, engineering, chemicals, oil refining and plastics.
- Slovakia has the largest fortified castle in Central Europe – Spis Castle
- Slovakia has more forests than any other European country/region, outside of Scandinavia
- Although it is the capital of Slovakia, there were very few Slovaks in the city of Bratislava, until the middle of the 20th century. Most residents were Germans, Hungarians, Austrians or Czechs.
- Slovakia has the oldest continually operating mint in the world.
- Slovakia is blessed with 6 UNESCO World Heritage sites from caves and castles to old towns and villages.
- Tennis champion Martina Hingis (born in 1980), former World No. 1 and winner of five Grand Slam singles titles and nine Grand Slam women's doubles titles, was born in Slovakia to a Slovak father and a Czech mother.
- The most famous American of Slovak descent is probably pop artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987), whose parents immigrated from Miková in north-eastern Slovakia.
- Slovak and Czech languages are mutually intelligible to people accustomed to the other language's pronunciation, particularly people who have lived at the time of Czechoslovakia (the country split in 1993).
- Kia Motors's European car factory is located in Slovakia, while Peugeot-Citroen and Volkswagen also have manufacturing plants in the country. Thanks to this, by 2008 Slovakia will have become the biggest car producer per capita in the world.

Currency: Slovak Koruna (SKK)

Time zone: GMT + 1 hr (+ 2hrs daylight saving)





Further information

For further information on language and cultural matters, including sourcing Slovakian language trainers, interpreters or translators, please contact the RLN on 01332 826432 or e-mail info@rln-eastmidlands.com.

Podcasts

The RLN has a range of free downloadable resources, including a cultural briefing on Slovakia and a podcast guide to Central Europe. Visit the RLN Podcast website www.rlnpodcast.com, where you can download these and other resources free of charge.

Other sources of information

Foreign & Commonwealth Office London www.fco.gov.uk
The British Embassy in Slovakia www.britishembassy.sk
Slovenkso.com: Your Guide to Slovakia www.slovensko.com

Useful contacts

The British Embassy in Slovakia www.britishembassy.sk
Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry www.web.scci.sk

Sources used in compiling this guide

Central European Development Agency (CEDA) www.consultceda.co.uk
Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk
International House www.ihworld.com
UK Trade and Investment www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk
Kwintessential Cross Cultural Solutions www.kwintessential.co.uk
Heart of Europe www.hearthofeurope.co.uk
Eupedia www.eupedia.com

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