



Czech Republic

Status: Parliamentary Republic
Area: 30,451 sq. miles
Population: 10,644,842 (2015 estimate)
Currency: 100 haleru = 1 koruna (1Kč = \$0.04)



Austrian stamps were the first utilized in the area that would eventually become Czechoslovakia. This Austrian stamp carries a Prague cancel.

The Czech Republic is a landlocked country about the size of South Carolina in the heart of western Europe. In the 9th century, Czech tribes united with the neighboring Moravians for defense against migration from the East. After the collapse of the Great Moravian state, Bohemia became an important political center within the Holy Roman Empire.

Austrian attempts to suppress Czech Protestantism ignited the Thirty Years' War and resulted in 1620 in the integration of Bohemia into the Hapsburg Empire. In the 19th century, Czech nationalism blossomed, promoting their language and culture. During World War I, the Czechs established a National Council in Paris, which sought an independent Czecho-Slovak state. Czech and Slovak war prisoners held in Russia helped form units with the Allied Powers, including the famous Czech Legion, which fought its way from Kiev to Vladivostok from 1918 to 1920.

On October 18, 1918, amid the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian state, the Paris National Council declared itself a "Provisional Government," and issued a Declaration of Independence. Though troubled by ethnic tensions in the interwar years, Czechoslovakia was unique among the new eastern European nations in maintaining its democratic government.

In September 1938, the Munich Agreement acceded to Hitler's demands and transferred about a third of Czech territory to its neighbors. Six months later Germany invaded the remaining Czechoslovak lands. The Czech areas became the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. This lasted until May 1945.

After the war, Czechoslovakia was reconstituted as a socialist republic under Russian control. A brief movement for political liberalization was ended in 1968 by a Russian military invasion. The end of communist rule came peacefully in 1989 with the "Velvet Revolution." Sentiment for independence in Slovakia led to tensions with Prague. In 1990, the name Czechoslovakia was hyphenated to emphasize the equality of the two national groups. Such compromises were unsuccessful and on January 1, 1993, the Slovak and Czech Republics separated in the "Velvet Divorce."

Postage stamps were introduced throughout Austria, including Bohemia, on June 1, 1850. It remained with Austria when the Dual Monarchy was created in 1867. In the chaos of independence, Austrian stamps remained valid until February 1919. During this period a number of Austrian stamps were overprinted. Though considered unofficial, some of these passed through the mail. The first Czechoslovak stamps reached post offices in December 1918.

Czechoslovak stamps continued to be used after the German occupation from March 15, 1939 until a new overprinted set appeared on July 15. After World War II, postage stamps were issued as the Germans retreated. The first stamps printed in Prague appeared on May 23, 1945. Czech Republic stamps appeared on January 30, 1993 reflecting the separation from Slovakia. Earlier this year, the Czech Republic adopted Czechia as its official short form name. This will presumably be reflected on postage stamps in the future.



Nineteen stamps of Czechoslovakia were overprinted in 1939 to create the first stamps for Bohemia and Moravia, including the 10-koruna Castle Ruins at Bratislava, Scott 19.



Prague Castle, often described as the largest castle in the world, is depicted on the first 37 stamps (1918-20) from Czechoslovakia, Scott 8.



Early Prague Castle stamps were issued as imperforate, but rouletted versions such as this one (Scott 41) were said to have been made by a postmaster at a branch post office in Prague without postal officials' approval, according to the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*.



In 1944, a slight change was made to the 1942 design of the Adolf Hitler stamps to create Bohemia and Moravia's final stamp, Scott 90.



The Czech Republic's first stamp in 1993 shows the coat of arms, Scott 2877.