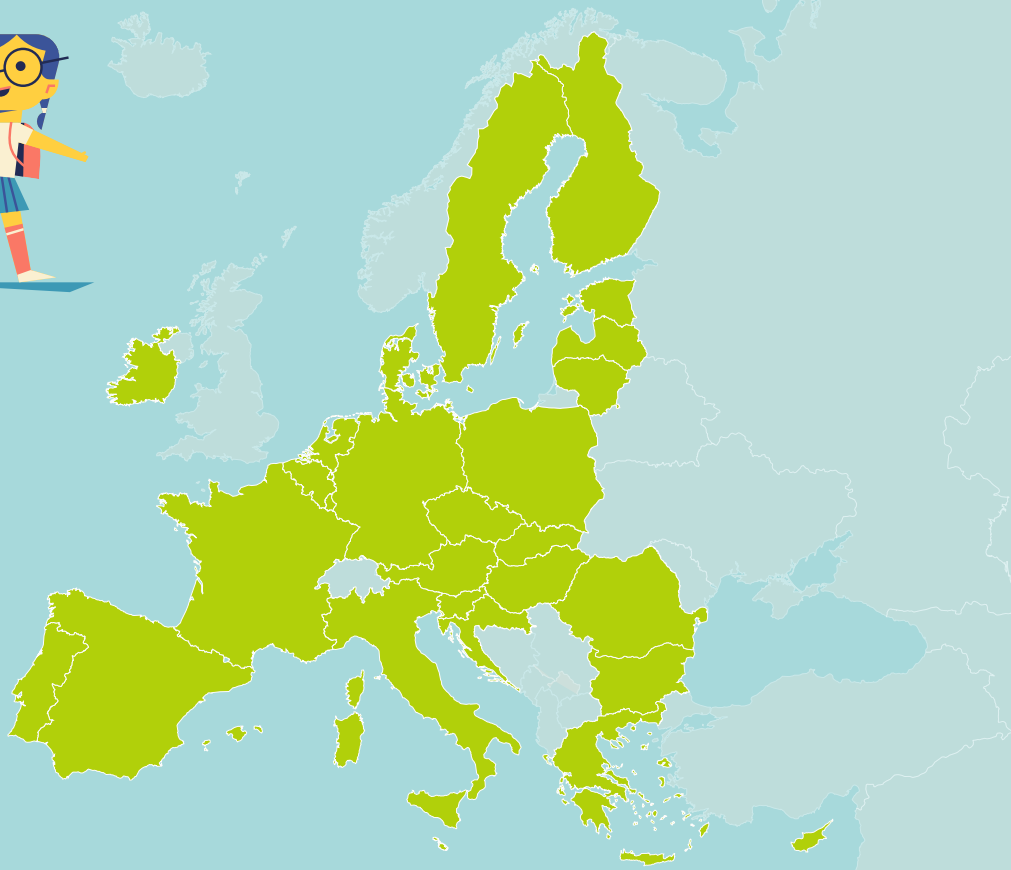


The EU: What's it all about ?



EU = European Union

- ◆ The European Union is a group of 27 European countries.
- ◆ After World War II, six countries decided to team up and make sure that none of them was able to make weapons on its own. In those days, this organisation was called the 'European Economic Community'.
- ◆ Over time, more countries decided to join the EEC as it started to join economic forces and create common political structures.
- ◆ When travelling between most EU countries, you no longer have to show your passport.
- ◆ 20 EU countries also use the same currency: the euro.
- ◆ The EU also has three common symbols:



a flag (12 golden stars on a blue background)



a hymn (Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy')



a motto ('United in diversity')

Are you ready to discover what is special about each EU country?

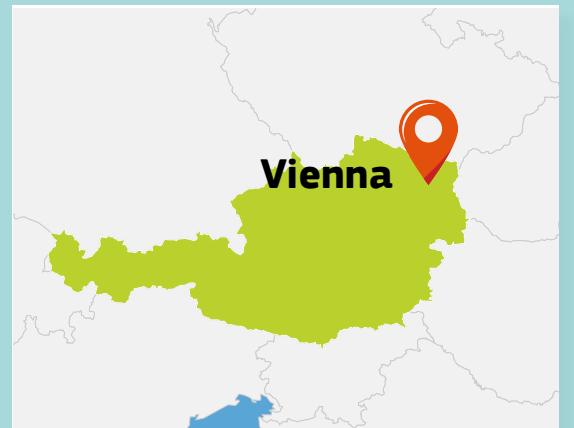
Austria



Austria is a mountainous country in **central Europe**. So you won't be surprised to learn that Austrians love to take part in outdoor sports such as skiing and hiking. The country also has many national parks which cover a combined area of 2 376 km².

Do you know what **yodelling** is? It's a special way of singing which combines your normal voice with a high-pitched tone.

Austria has a rich cultural heritage. As well as the famous classical composers **Mozart, Haydn and Schubert**, Hollywood star **Arnold Schwarzenegger** and Oscar-winning actor **Christoph Waltz** were also born in Austria. It is also the birthplace of **Sigmund Freud**, neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis.



There are 8.8 million people living in Austria; the country's capital city is **Vienna** and the national language is German.



Austria uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of the famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart appears on the Austrian 1 euro coin.



Austria is particularly famous for its delicious cakes and desserts, such as '**Sachertorte**', a delicious rich chocolate cake. On the savoury side, **Wiener Schnitzel** (veal coated in breadcrumbs) and '**Tafelspitz**' (boiled veal or beef) are both well known.



Austria joined the European Union in **1995**.



Vienna is home to the **world's oldest zoological garden**, the '**Tiergarten Schönbrunn**', which opened in 1752.

Did you know that Vienna is one of the four headquarters of the United Nations? The United Nations Office in Vienna (UNOV) was established on 1 January 1980 as the third Headquarters after New York and Geneva (and before Nairobi). It is located in the Vienna International Centre, which hosts a whole range of international organisations.

Originally just an Austrian country dance, the 'Waltz' is now a classic for any ballroom dancer and is often the first dance performed by married couples at weddings.



The **Waltz** is a famous ballroom dance from Austria.



'**Apfelstrudel**' is a famous Austrian pastry made with spicy apples, raisins and cinnamon.

Belgium



Brussels is home to the **headquarters** of the **European Union** and **NATO**, making it one of the most international cities in the world.

Have you heard of the famous comic characters **Tintin** and **The Smurfs**? They were created in Belgium!

Belgium can be proud of its sporting talents! The legendary cyclist **Eddy Merckx** won the 'Tour de France' five times, while **Kim Clijsters** and **Justine Henin** dominated women's tennis at the beginning of the 21st century. In 2017, the athletics gold medallist **Nafissatou Thiam** was voted World Athlete of the Year.



There are nearly 11.5 million people living in Belgium; the country's capital city is **Brussels** and there are three national languages: Dutch, French and German.



Belgium uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of the Belgian King appears on Belgium's euro coins.



Belgian fries are famous the world over and were added to the UNESCO list of cultural treasures in 2017. '**Moules-frites**' (mussels and chips) is the national dish of Belgium. And don't forget to sample some of Belgium's world-famous **chocolate** if you visit!



Belgium was one of the founding members of the European Union in **1957**.



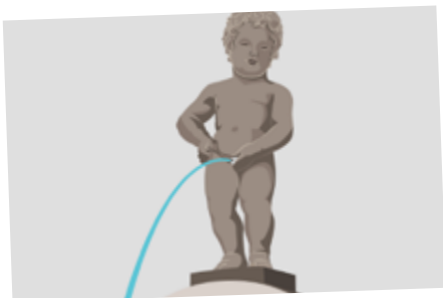
The Belgian city of **Antwerp** is the world's main diamond centre.



Belgium is known around the world for its **beer**: there are over 200 active breweries in the country.



A Belgian man called **Luc Luycx** came up with the design for the 'heads' side of the **euro** – which is standard for all euro coins, while the 'tails' side is different for each country.



The '**Manneken Pis**', a tiny statue, rich in history and tradition, has become one of the main landmarks of Brussels.



The reputation of **Belgian waffles** is second to none!

Bulgaria



Bulgaria is in **eastern Europe**. The **Danube River** forms a natural border with Romania, while the **Balkan Mountains** stretch from Serbia in the west across the centre of Bulgaria to the **Black Sea** in the east. The country has many hot springs and the **Central Balkan National Park** in Bulgaria is one of the largest protected areas in the EU.

Would you have guessed that the inventors of the **digital wristwatch** and the **airbag** were both born in Bulgaria?

Football is very popular in Bulgaria, but it's in athletics that **Stefka Kostadinova** set the world record in 1987 for a high jump of 2.09 metres. That record still stands today!



There are nearly 7 million people living in Bulgaria; the country's capital city is **Sofia** and the national language is Bulgarian.



Bulgaria uses the **lev** as its currency. One lev is worth about 51 euro cents.



Bulgarians love **yoghurt** and use it in various dishes: mixed with cucumbers to create a cold summer soup called '**tarator**', or with jam, fruit or honey as a dessert. Yoghurt may even have originated in Bulgaria more than 5 000 years ago!



Bulgaria joined the European Union in **2007**.



Bulgarians celebrate their **name day**. This is usually the day of the saint after whom they are named.



Unlike most people, Bulgarians **nod to say 'no'** and shake their heads to say 'yes'.



With the EU's help, Bulgaria has managed to increase the numbers of the Imperial Eagle, which had previously been in danger of dying out.



Bulgarians wear '**Martenitsi**' in March, to celebrate '**Baba Marta**' (literally 'Granny March'). This mythical figure is believed to chase away the cold winter and make room for spring.



Bulgarians grow roses in the famous '**Rose Valley**', which are used to make rose oil for perfume.

Croatia



Croatia is located at the crossroads of **central Europe**, the **Mediterranean** and the **Balkans**. Enjoying a warm climate, the Croatian coastline is dotted with over **1 000 islands**, making it a very popular tourist destination.

Do you use a **fountain pen** at school? The first solid-ink fountain pen is a Croatian invention. Nikola Tesla, born in Smiljan, was one of the first people to discover X-ray imaging.

Football is the most popular sport in Croatia and its national team reached the final of the 2018 football World Cup tournament. Perhaps you've heard of star player **Luka Modrić**? Handball and water polo are also very popular and Croatia has won world and Olympic championships in both!



Croatia uses the **euro** as its currency. The country has chosen four designs for their national sides of the euro coins, all featuring the distinctive Croatian chequerboard pattern in the background. All the coins also depict the 12 stars of the European flag.



Croatia's food, like its culture, is a mix of various influences. Two of the many famous dishes are '**purica s mlincima**' (turkey served with a kind of flatbread) and '**crni rižot**' (black risotto), which owes its name to the dark squid ink in which it is prepared. In terms of sweets, you will often find cherry-filled '**štrudle**', luscious layer cakes, or '**fritule**' (tiny balls of fried dough).



Croatia joined the European Union in **2013**.



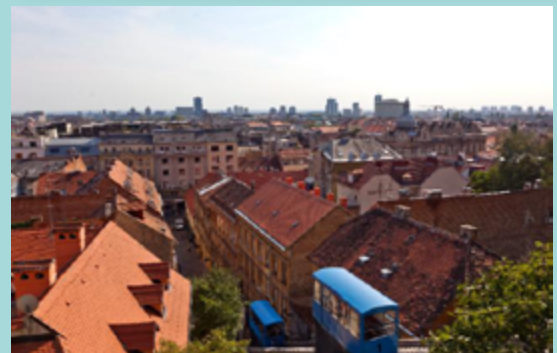
Zlatni rat, also known as the 'Golden Cape', is one of the most famous beaches in Europe. It looks like a tongue reaching across the sea, and the size and shape of its tip changes with the tides, currents and wind.



By stretching some fabric over a wooden frame, Croatian inventor Faust Vrančić made the first ever **parachute** in 1617.



One of the traditional symbols of Zagreb is the 'licitar' – a colourful decorated heart-shaped biscuit made of sweet honey dough. At Christmas, the tree in Zagreb's main square is covered with hundreds of these hearts!



There are 4.1 million people living in Croatia; the country's capital city is **Zagreb** and the national language is Croatian.



The **Dalmatian dog**, a black and white spotted breed, comes from the Dalmatian coast in Croatia.



The **necktie** is a Croatian invention. Its Croatian name – 'kravata' – comes from the word 'Hrvat' ('Croat' in Croatian).

Cyprus



Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean. Enjoying a Mediterranean climate, Cyprus is a **very popular tourist destination**. The island counts two main communities: Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Armenians, Maronites and Latins represent about 5% of the population.

While small in size, Cyprus is **rich in history, culture and tradition** due to its strategic position at the crossroads of three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa). The country has been governed by many different civilisations over the years.

Popular sports in Cyprus include football, basketball, and tennis. Cypriots are also known for their abilities in sailing and athletics. Pavlos Kontides won the silver medal in sailing at the London 2012 Olympics and three of the best known track and field athletes are **Milan Trajkovic** (110m hurdles), **Apostolos Parellis** (discus) and **Eleni Artymata** (200m/400m).



Cyprus uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of the Idol of Pomos (a stone prehistoric sculpture found near the Cypriot village of Pomos dating back to the 30th century BC) appears on Cyprus' 1 euro coin.



'**Mezze**', a selection of different small dishes, is as popular in Cyprus as it is in Greece. Many other dishes reflect Greek, Turkish and Middle Eastern influences. These include **halloumi cheese** (white cheese made from sheep's milk and often grilled), '**talatouri**' (yoghurt dip with mint and garlic), and '**loukoumades**' (deep fried doughnuts dipped in honey syrup).



Cyprus joined the European Union in **2004**.



Cyprus is the **third smallest EU country** after Malta and Luxembourg.



The island has one of the best-preserved fortifications in Europe, the so-called **Venetian Walls** that surround Nicosia.



Cyprus is one of the few places in the world where **green turtles** and **loggerhead turtles** nest and breed on the beaches.



There are over 860 000 people living in Cyprus; the country's capital city is **Nicosia** and is the only divided capital in Europe; and the two official languages are Greek and Turkish.



Legend has it that **Aphrodite**, the mythical goddess of love and beauty, rose from the foam of the sea near the city of Paphos in Cyprus.



The Cyprus '**mouflon**' is a rare wild sheep only found in the mountains of Cyprus and is represented on the country's euro cent coins.

Czechia



Czechia is a **central European** country. Its capital city, Prague, is one of the oldest cities in Europe and its historical centre attracts many tourists.

Czech culture is very rich and Czechia has produced many famous people. These include painter **Alfons Mucha**, composers **Bedřich Smetana** and **Antonín Dvořák** and writers and thinkers **Jaroslav Seifert** and **Václav Havel**.

Czechia has one of the best **ice hockey** teams in the world, having won a total of twelve ice hockey world championship medals! Maybe you've heard of famous ice hockey star **Jaromír Jágr**?



Czechia uses the **koruna** as its currency. One koruna is worth about 4 euro cents.



Traditional Czech dishes often consist of meat stews and make the perfect winter meals! They are usually served with a side dish, one of the most popular ones being '**knedlíky**' (potato or bread dumplings). Other popular dishes include '**smažený sýr**' (fried cheese) and '**gulášová polévka**' (a hearty, spicy soup). '**Karlovy Vary**' spa wafers are a traditional and very popular snack, and come in lots of flavours!



Czechia joined the European Union in **2004**.



Charles University, founded in 1348 in Prague, by Charles IV, is the oldest university in central Europe.



The sugar cube was invented in a Czech **sugar** factory in 1843.



Looking out over the Vltava River, **Prague Castle** is the largest ancient castle in the world.



There are 10.6 million people living in Czechia; the country's capital city is **Prague** and the national language is Czech.



The famous **Charles Bridge** crosses over the Vltava River in Prague and is a popular tourist attraction.



The word '**robot**' comes from the Czech word '**robota**' which means 'hard work'. The robot was first introduced to the world by the Czech writer **Karel Čapek** in his 1921 science-fiction play '**R.U.R.**' (Rossum's Universal Robots).

Denmark

Denmark is a low-lying country located in **northern Europe**. It consists of a peninsula called Jutland and more than 400 **islands**. Did you know that Greenland and the Faroe Islands are also part of Denmark?

With its windy climate, Denmark has become a leading producer of **wind energy**, which accounts for over 40% of the country's electricity production.

Denmark's national sport is football but other sports such as handball, badminton and tennis are also popular. **Caroline Wozniacki** was one of the best female tennis players in the world. Did you know that **handball** was invented in Denmark?



There are 5.8 million people living in Denmark; the country's capital city is **Copenhagen** and the national language is Danish.



Denmark uses the **krone** as its currency. One Danish krone is worth about 13 euro cents.



'**Smørrebrød**' (rye bread open sandwiches with all kinds of sweet or savoury toppings) is a typical dish for Danes, as well as '**Frikadeller**' (meatballs) served with potatoes and vegetables. At Christmas, for their main meal, Danes like to eat '**Flæsketeg**' (pork roast) as well as duck and goose.



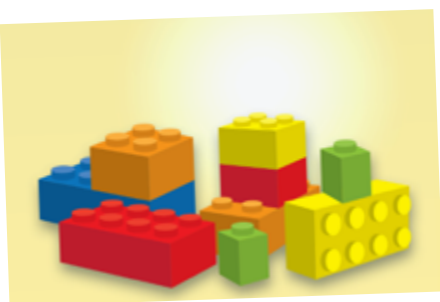
Denmark joined the European Union in **1973**



Europe's longest suspension bridge – the Great Belt Bridge – links the Danish islands of Zealand and Funen.

Danes have a special word '**hygge**' for that cosy feeling of togetherness. It means relaxing in great company.

The **Danish monarchy** is the oldest continuing monarchy in the world, having existed for over 1 000 years.



You've almost certainly played with **Lego bricks** before, but did you know that they were invented in Denmark in 1949?



Danish storywriter **Hans Christian Andersen** wrote many of today's well-known fairy tales, including classics such as 'The Ugly Duckling' and 'The **Little Mermaid**'. There is even a Little Mermaid statue in Copenhagen that is now a symbol of the city.

Estonia



Estonia is the most northern country of the three **Baltic** States which are situated in **northern Europe**. The country is characterised by its lush forests and numerous islands. It has many **national parks** and lots of wildlife.

Estonia's capital city, Tallinn, has become an **innovation hub**, whilst also preserving its medieval history. Many technology companies were born here, the most famous being **Skype**, a communication service that you may have already used to video chat with your family or friends!

Despite the harsh cold climate, Estonians enjoy outdoor sports. They also excel at fencing and wrestling. One of the greatest chess players of all time, grandmaster **Paul Keres**, was Estonian. **Neeme Järvi**, a world-renowned musical conductor, and **Arvo Pärt**, the most performed living composer in the world, are both Estonian.



There are 1.3 million people living in Estonia; the country's capital city is **Tallinn** and the national language is Estonian.



Estonia uses the **euro** as its currency. A geographical image of the country appears on Estonia's euro coins.



Estonians enjoy a variety of food, including fish, pork, sausages and soups. Potatoes, beetroot and cabbage (sauerkraut) are popular vegetables. **Black rye bread** is the most common form of bread and **rhubarb pie** is a typical treat in Estonia. Estonians are also very proud of their sweets. One of the oldest sweets made in Estonia is marzipan.



Estonia joined the European Union in **2004**.



Estonians are champions in a rather unusual sport, invented by the Finns: **wife carrying**. Between 1998 and 2008, Estonian couples won the world championship 11 times in a row!



Singing holds a special place in the hearts of Estonians. It has played an important role in the country's history and, since 1869, massive choir festivals take place every five years, gathering tens of thousands of singers together.



In 2013 Tallinn became the world's first capital city to offer residents free public transport. Buses are now free of charge for residents in 11 of Estonia's 15 counties.



Cross-country skiing is one of the most popular winter sports in Estonia.



Lynxes roam freely in Estonian forests.

Finland



Finland is the **most northerly country in the EU**. Did you know that in northernmost Finland there is continuous daylight in midsummer and no daylight at all in midwinter? Finland is Europe's most **forested** country and famous for its **many lakes**.

Are you familiar with the '**Moomin**' children's stories or the '**Angry Birds**' video game? They both were created by Finns!

'**Pesäpallo**' (the Finnish form of baseball) is the national sport of Finland. The Finns have won several world championships in floorball (a type of indoor hockey) but are mostly known for their performances in **ice hockey** and **Formula One**. **Kimi Räikkönen** was one of the best **Formula One** drivers in the world!



Finland uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of two flying swans appears on its 1 euro coin.



Traditional Finnish dishes often include fish or meat, while well-known Finnish delicacies include **bilberry pie** and **Karelian pie** – a pie with a rye flour crust and rice filling. And the ultimate treat for Finns is '**Salmiakki**' – a salty liquorice. Do you think you would like it?



Finland joined the European Union in **1995**.



There are 5.5 million people living in Finland; its capital city is **Helsinki** and its national languages are Finnish and Swedish.



On 27 July, Finns celebrate **National Sleepy Head Day** ('Unikeonpäivä'). According to tradition, the laziest person in the family is woken up and thrown into the nearest river, lake or sea!



The **Päijänne Water Tunnel** in Finland is Europe's longest tunnel and the world's second longest.



Finland organises **world championships in 'crazy sports'** such as wife carrying, swamp soccer, boot or mobile phone throwing, and air guitar, to name just a few.



Lapland, in the north of Finland, is said to be the home of **Santa Claus** and his many reindeers.



The '**sauna**', a **hot, steamy room for bathing**, is a Finnish invention and a real way of life in Finland!

France



France, in **western Europe**, is the largest country in the EU. It is bordered by the **Atlantic Ocean** in the west. To the east is the **Alps** mountain range, a popular skiing destination. The southern region along the **Mediterranean Sea** is hot and dry, attracting sun-seeking tourists in the summer.

Many famous people were born in France: scientists and inventors such as **Louis Pasteur** who discovered vaccines and **Eugène Poubelle** who invented the dustbin; as well as actors, filmmakers, painters, writers, designers, and so on.

The French enjoy many sports: football, rugby, tennis, cycling and motorsports, for example. France has won the football World Cup twice and the rugby Six Nations Championship 17 times!



There are 67 million people living in France; the country's capital city is **Paris** and the national language is French.



France uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of a tree, symbolising life and growth, encircled by the French motto, appears on its 1 and 2 euro coins.



French cuisine is often regarded as one of the finest and France has produced some of the best chefs in the world! France has many traditional dishes and **each region has its speciality**. A typical French breakfast consists of **coffee or hot chocolate and croissants (pastries)**. Some estimate that there are around 1 000 different types of cheeses in France!



France was one of the founding members of the European Union in **1957**.



Europe's highest peak, the **Mont Blanc** (4 809 m), is located in the French Alps.



The jeans you wear are made of denim. But did you know that **denim** originally comes from the French city of Nîmes? 'Of Nîmes' in French translates as 'de Nîmes' and, with time, this became 'denim'.



Have you ever heard of the French writer **Charles Perrault**? He wrote some well-known fairy tales that inspired popular Disney movies such as 'Cinderella' and 'Sleeping Beauty'.



The **French baguette** is a long, thin white stick of bread. It's also very practical for making sandwiches!



The all-steel **Eiffel Tower** in Paris was named after its creator, Gustave Eiffel. Dating from 1889, it is now one of the most visited monuments in the world!

Germany



Germany, in **western Europe**, is one of the largest and wealthiest countries in the EU. Much of northern Germany consists of low-lying farming lands. Further south, bordering the **Alps**, the landscape is much more mountainous and forested.

Germany's cultural heritage is famous. Classical composers **Beethoven** and **Bach**, and famous actors **Daniel Brühl** and **Diane Kruger** are all from Germany. Perhaps the most famous scientist of all time is the German Nobel Prize winner **Albert Einstein**.

Germany is a strong sporting nation: it has won the football World Cup four times and has achieved international success in several winter sports! It also excels in Formula One: German drivers **Michael Schumacher** and **Sebastian Vettel** have both won many world championships.



There are 83 million people living in Germany; the country's capital city is **Berlin** and the national language is German.



Germany uses the **euro** as its currency. Its 1 and 2 euro coins feature an image of an eagle, a symbol that has been used in Germany for over 1 200 years.



Germans traditionally eat hearty food. Their meals often include sausages ('Wurst') and meat, together with vegetables, such as cabbage and potatoes. **Black Forest gâteau** and '**Rote Grütze**' (red fruit pudding) are popular desserts.



Germany was one of the founding members of the European Union in **1957**.



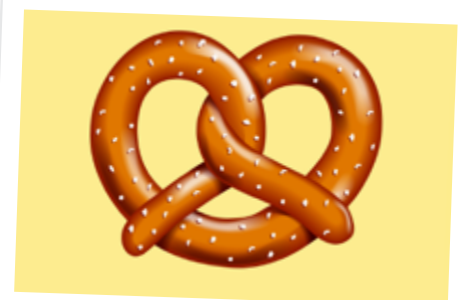
Did you know that the first known printed book was printed in German, just as the first ever known printed magazine?

Germany is famous for its colourful and traditional **Christmas markets**, organised across the country during the festive season.

The **Neuschwanstein Castle** in Bavaria inspired Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom!



In Germany, education is free even for international students. This is the case not only in primary and secondary education, but also in higher education, public colleges and universities.



Germany is famous for its many types of bread and its baked bread pretzels ('**Brezel**').

Greece



Located in **southern Europe**, Greece has a spectacular coastline and **many islands** including Crete, Corfu and Rhodes. The country is one of the sunniest and warmest in Europe and its history is incredibly rich. Its sunny climate, glorious beaches, seaside and historical ruins attract thousands of tourists every year.

Ancient Greece was home to great mathematicians such as **Euclid** and **Pythagoras**, and philosophers such as **Plato**, **Socrates** and **Aristotle**. Maybe you've heard of them?

Athletics, basketball, football, sailing, swimming and water polo are the most popular sports in Greece. Pole-vaulter **Katerina Stefanidi**, artistic gymnast **Lefteris Petrounias** and basketball player **Giannis Adetokunbo** are some of Greece's best modern-day athletes.



There are 10.7 million people living in Greece; the country's capital city is **Athens** and the national language is Greek.



Greece uses the **euro** as its currency. Its 1 euro coin portrays an owl, reproduced from the design of an ancient Athenian coin.



Greek salad, made with olives and feta cheese, and **pita** (a flat round bread filled with vegetables and meat) are popular around the world! Other traditional dishes include **moussaka** (a layered oven-baked dish with meat and aubergines) and **'tzatziki'** (a yoghurt-based dip with cucumber and garlic). The Greek diet is regarded as one of the healthiest in the world!



Greece joined the European Union in **1981**.



Ancient Greek scientist **Eratosthenes** was the first to claim that the **Earth is round** and to calculate its circumference. It took 2 000 years for scientists to prove how accurate his calculations actually were!



Athens is believed to have been the first **democracy** in the world, allowing citizens to vote on laws.



The first **Olympic Games** were held in Ancient Greece in 776 BC!



Greeks love to dance: they have over 63 types of folk dance and 'sirtaki' is one of the most popular.



Mount Olympus - according to Greek mythology - was the home of gods such as **Athena**, goddess of wisdom, **Poseidon**, god of the sea, and **Zeus**, the father of all gods.

Hungary



Hungary is a mostly flat country in **central Europe**. Most of the land is fertile and used for farming. The north is mountainous with lots of forests. The country's numerous castles and palaces attract many tourists, many of whom arrive on the cruise tours that regularly sail along the River Danube.

Hungary has a **strong musical tradition**, especially in classical and folk music. Have you ever heard of the famous Hungarian composers **Liszt, Bartók** or **Kodály**?

Hungarians love sports and have won hundreds of Olympic medals! They enjoy **football** and **water sports**, especially water polo and swimming. When Lake Balaton freezes over, winter sports enthusiasts go there to skate and sledge.



Hungary uses the forint as its currency. 1 **forint** is worth about 0.3 euro cents.



You won't find many savoury Hungarian dishes that don't contain **paprika** spice! Hungarians use it in most of their traditional dishes, including '**goulash**' – a hearty soup of beef and potatoes, '**pörkölt**' (meat stew) and '**töltött káposzta**' (meat-filled cabbage rolls). Popular Hungarian desserts include '**rétes**' (apple filled pastries) and '**palacsinta**' (pancakes).



Hungary joined the European Union in **2004**.



There are 9.8 million people living in Hungary; the country's capital city is **Budapest** and the national language is Hungarian.



Budapest's underground **metro system** is one of the oldest in the world, second only to the London Underground in the United Kingdom



Lake Balaton, located in the centre of the country, is the largest lake in central Europe.



Hungarian chess player **Judit Polgár** is regarded as the best female player of all time!



The **Rubik's cube** is a Hungarian invention, named after its creator Erno Rubik.



Bathing in thermal spas is an old tradition for Hungarians; the country has around 1 500 **natural hot springs!**

Ireland



Ireland, in **western Europe**, is an island in the Atlantic Ocean. It is known for its high cliffs, Celtic culture, and green pastures.

Ireland has a rich cultural heritage and is famous for its traditional **music**, **dance**, and **storytelling**. Have you heard of The Script, Villagers and U2? They are all Irish bands. Great Irish authors include **Oscar Wilde**, **James Joyce**, **Samuel Beckett** and **Bram Stoker**, who wrote the novel 'Dracula'.

Ireland has achieved international success in rugby. **Gaelic sports** are typical of Ireland, such as **Gaelic football**, which is a cross between rugby and football.



There are 4.9 million people living in Ireland; the country's capital city is **Dublin** and its two national languages are Irish and English.



Ireland uses the euro as its currency. All of its **euro** coins feature an image of a Celtic harp, a traditional symbol of Ireland.



Traditional Irish cuisine is based on meat and root vegetables. **Irish Stew** is the best example: it is made with lamb, carrots and potatoes. Other popular dishes include bacon with cabbage and **colcannon** (mashed potatoes with kale).



Ireland joined the European Union in **1973**.



The longest place name in Ireland is **Muckanaghederdauhaulia** (in Irish – 'Muicineach idir Dhá Sháile'). Can you pronounce it?



Do you like dressing up for Halloween on 31 October? Halloween celebrations originated in Ireland, as a Celtic pagan festival called **'Samhain'**.



In the 19th century, Ireland suffered the Great Famine - a period of mass starvation and disease - when many Irish people left the country or died of hunger. Although Ireland remained poor for most of the 20th century, since the 1990s it has recovered and now performs particularly well in **high-tech industry**.



Gaelic sports are popular in Ireland, one of the most famous being **hurling**: the oldest field sport in the world!



Have you ever seen a **shamrock**? It is a green three-leaf clover and the national symbol of Ireland.

Italy



Italy is a peninsula in southern Europe, known for its boot-like shape. In the north, people enjoy winter skiing in the **Alps**, while the south is very popular in the summer for its beautiful coastline and countryside. Italy is also famous for its lakes: at over 400m deep, **Lake Como** is one of the deepest in Europe!

The Italian Renaissance produced some of the greatest artists of all time: **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Michelangelo** and **Botticelli**, for example.

Italians are good at many sports but are most passionate about **football**! Other popular sports are motorsports, cycling, skiing and basketball. You may have heard of football player **Francesco Totti** or motorcycle champion **Valentino Rossi**.



Italy uses the **euro** as its currency. All of its euro coins feature different images, all inspired by the works of famous Italian artists.



Everyone knows about Italian food: **pizza**, **pasta**, **risotto**, **lasagna**, **ravioli**, **ice-cream** and more! In Italian cooking, ingredients and dishes vary by region.



Italy was one of the founding members of the European Union in **1957**.



There are 60 million people living in Italy; the country's capital city is **Rome** and the national language is Italian.



You won't believe how many things were invented by Italians: the **thermometer**, the **electric battery**, the **ice-cream cone**, the **violin**, the **radio** and the **piano** are just some of them!



Did you know that **Vatican City**, which is completely surrounded by Rome, is the smallest country in the world?



Have you ever heard of **Christopher Columbus** and **Marco Polo**? They were both famous Italian explorers.



Have you heard of **Julius Caesar** and the **Roman Empire**? At its peak, the Roman Empire covered all territories surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Julius Caesar was responsible for much of the extension of the Roman Empire to the west.



Tiramisu is a coffee-flavoured dessert originating from the North-East of Italy. It is very easy to prepare and comes in many delicious variations. Did you know that its name means "cheer-me up" because that is the effect it has on people eating it?

Latvia



Latvia is one of the three **Baltic** States in **northern Europe**. It is a very flat and low-lying country with many forests, pastures and long sandy beaches. The country counts over 12 000 **rivers** and 3 000 **lakes**! 20% of its territory is protected, which makes Latvia a safe haven for many animals such as lynxes and wolves.

Latvia has recently become a hub for the **high-tech industry**. The country also boasts a thriving **art and architecture** scene. Local architects are currently trying to protect the 19th century Latvian wooden architecture in towns and cities. With over 800 Art Nouveau buildings, Riga is one of the world's greatest exponents of this architectural style. Latvia also has famous classical music figures, such as the conductor **Andris Nelsons**.

Latvia's national sport is **ice hockey**, and it punches well above its weight for a small country. Dozens of Latvians play in the National or Kontinental Hockey Leagues, and the national team's fans are regarded as amongst the loudest and most passionate around.



Latvia uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of a woman in a traditional Latvian folk costume appears on its 1 euro coin.



Typical Latvian dishes include the eternal classic of Latvian cuisine **Grey Peas with Bacon** and **Caraway Cheese** (Latvians make a traditional home-made cheese with caraway seeds for the Summer Solstice festival, known as Jāņi). For dessert, Latvians enjoy **Layered Rye Bread Dessert** (rye bread being a staple for most of the population).



Latvia joined the European Union in **2004**.



There are nearly 2 million people living in Latvia; the country's capital city is **Riga** and the national language is Latvian.



The world's first ever decorated **Christmas tree** on record was put up in Riga's market square back in 1510.



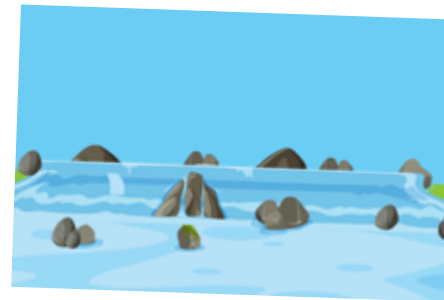
Walter Zapp, a German from Latvia, invented the first mini camera in the world, the Minox, in 1936.



Latvia has one of the **world's fastest internet networks!** There are 800 free connection points in Riga.



Folk dancing and music are traditional in Latvia. The Latvian Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration '**Dziesmu svētki**' is a tradition recognised as unique by UNESCO. The festival, which is one of the largest amateur choral events in the world, takes place once every five years.



In the **Venta Rapid**, you might be lucky enough to see **flying fish!** Every spring, fish such as salmon try to swim upstream through fast-flowing water to reach their breeding ground. The Rapid, despite being not much higher than the average Latvian, is the widest waterfall in Europe.

Lithuania

Lithuania is the largest of the three **Baltic States** in **northern Europe**. The country has lush forests and many lakes and rivers. There are several **natural reserves** where wild animals can roam freely in a protected environment.

Many famous artists are of Lithuanian descent. Would you have guessed, for example, that this is the case for the pop singer **Pink** or the lead singers of the bands **Red Hot Chili Peppers** and the **Killers**?

Considered almost as a religion in Lithuania, **basketball** is the most popular sport there. Several Lithuanian basketball players are stars of the USA's National Basketball Association (NBA); **Domantas Sabonis**, for example. Other popular sports include athletics, football and cycling.



Lithuania uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of the country's coat of arms, 'Vytis', appears on its euro coins.



Lithuanian traditional food usually includes dairy products, meat, potatoes, beetroot, mushrooms, berries and rye bread. The popular dish '**cepelinai**' is a potato dumpling filled with meat and topped with sour cream and bacon. 'Šaltibarščiai' (cold red beet soup) is a refreshing summer dish. The traditional Lithuanian cake '**šakotis**' (meaning 'tree cake', because it looks like one!) is made of butter, eggs, flour, sugar and cream and cooked on a rotating spit, in an oven or over an open fire.



Lithuania joined the European Union in **2004**.



There are 2.8 million people living in Lithuania; the country's capital city is **Vilnius** and the national language is Lithuanian.



Have you ever seen a '**kanklės**'? It is a traditional Lithuanian musical instrument made of a hollow wooden box with strings across the top.



Lithuania was the first Soviet republic to declare independence from the USSR in **March 1990**.



A fun and unusual thing to do if you visit Vilnius is to take a **hot air balloon** ride over the city.



Did you know that Lithuanians avoid shaking hands over the threshold? They believe that it will create an argument between the two people shaking hands'.



Lithuania is famous for **amber** which gets washed up onto the Baltic coastline. Amber is formed when sap (the liquid inside coniferous trees trunks) drips out of the tree's bark. Over millions of years it turns very hard and can then be used to make beautifully radiant yellow-orange jewellery.

Luxembourg

Luxembourg is the second smallest EU country and is in **western Europe**. It is a green and forested country with farming land, rivers and beautiful castles.

Luxembourg was founded in 963, and is today the only "Grand Duchy" in the world. It is also the **richest European country**, with many banks and insurance companies based here.

In terms of sports, Luxembourg has been most successful in **karate** and **cycling**. Luxembourgish cyclists have won the famous 'Tour de France' five times! Other popular sports include football, tennis and athletics.



Luxembourg uses the **euro** as its currency. All of its euro coins feature a profile of the Grand Duke of Luxembourg.



Traditional dishes include '**Bouneschlupp**' (a thick potato and green bean soup with bacon), '**fritür vun der Musel**' (little fried fish from the River Moselle) and '**Huesenziwwi**' (jugged hare stew) – popular during game season. '**Quetschentaart**' (plum pie) is a typical Luxembourgish dessert.



Luxembourg was one of the founding members of the European Union in **1957**.



There are more than 600 000 people living in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg; the country's capital city is **Luxembourg** and the three national languages are French, German and Luxembourgish.



Europe's largest TV and radio station, **RTL** (which originally stood for 'Radio Télévision Luxembourg'), was founded in the 1920s in Luxembourg.

One of the country's most famous attractions is the '**Bock Casemates**': an impressive 21km-long network of hidden underground passages run beneath this Luxembourg fortress, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The United Nations has ranked Luxembourg as one of the **safest countries** in the world.



Thanks to the Schengen Agreement – signed in 1985 in the little Luxembourgish town of Schengen, Europeans can travel freely within the EU.



The **Vianden Castle** is just one of the many castles in Luxembourg.

Malta



Malta is a **group of islands** – Malta, Gozo and Comino – in **southern Europe**. The Maltese landscape is one of farming land and fortified cities. In summer, the sandy beaches and turquoise waters attract many tourists.

The Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Sicilians, Spanish, Knights of St. John, French and British have all ruled over Malta at some point. This rich history is reflected in Malta's **fortified architecture**, which is often used for film locations. Did you know that the movies **Gladiator**, **Troy** and **The Count of Monte Cristo** were all shot in Malta?

Football, waterpolo, tennis and rugby are popular sports in Malta. Maltese people also play their own version of a ball game called '**Boċċi**' which is closely related to the French petanque and similar to bowling.



There are 470 000 people living in Malta; the country's capital city is **Valletta** and the two national languages are Maltese and English.



Malta uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of the Maltese cross appears on its 1 and 2 euro coins.



Maltese cuisine is a blend of historical influences. '**Lampuki pie**' (fish pie), '**fenek**' (rabbit stew), and '**pastizzi**' (pastry filled with ricotta and peas) are some of the most traditional dishes. A typical dessert is '**Imqaret**' (date-filled pastry). Have you ever tasted 'Kinnie'? It is a Maltese soft drink made of bitter oranges and herbs.



Malta joined the European Union in **2004**.



Malta is the most densely populated country in Europe.



Malta has no rivers or lakes.



Do you know why Malta's capital city is called Valletta? It was named after its founder, French nobleman **Jean Parisot de La Valette**, who was the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, a group of knights that ruled over Malta for two centuries.



The **Knights of St. John** ruled over Malta during its 'Golden Age' in the 17th and 18th centuries.



The Pharaoh Hound is a breed of dog and the national hound of Malta. Its native name is Kelb tal-Fenek in Maltese, which means "Rabbit dog". According to myth the Pharaoh Hound was brought by the Phoenicians to Malta, where it has existed for over 2 000 years.

Netherlands

The Netherlands is a flat country in **western Europe** with a long coastline on the **North Sea**. The country is prone to flooding as much of its territory lies **below sea-level**.

The country is the largest **cheese exporter** in the world, and around 80% of all **flower bulbs** sold in the world are grown in the Netherlands! Dutch **electronic music** has gained international fame. **Tiësto**, **Martin Garrix** and **Armin van Buuren** are three world-renowned Dutch DJs. Maybe you have heard of them?

Football, field hockey and volleyball are popular sports. People also enjoy cycling, skating, tennis and golf. Have you heard of '**korfbal**'? This ball sport, similar to netball and basketball, was invented by a Dutch school teacher.



The Netherlands uses the **euro** as its currency. The coins feature the portrait of the King of the Netherlands.



Herring is probably the most typical fish to eat when in the Netherlands. 'Bitterballen' (fried meatballs with mustard) are a popular snack, as well as **Edam** and **Gouda** cheese, which are also commonly eaten at breakfast. During the winter, a good '**erwtensoep**' (pea soup with smoked sausage) will warm you up, while '**poftertjes**' (mini fluffy pancakes served with butter and sugar) make the perfect treat!



The Netherlands was one of the founding members of the European Economic Community in **1957**, one of the predecessors of the EU.



There are 17 million people living in the Netherlands; the country's capital city is **Amsterdam** and the national language is Dutch.



Dutch people are said to be the **tallest in the world!**

Did you know that the symbolic colour of the Netherlands is orange? Historically, it is the colour of the Dutch Royal Family (House of Orange-Nassau) and today, Dutch people like to dress in orange on Kings' Day – the national day – and at matches of the national sports teams.

More than a quarter of all trips in the Netherlands are made by bike, along its 35 000 kilometres of cycle paths. Did you know that the Netherlands currently hosts more bicycles than inhabitants?



Some of the world's most famous painters were Dutch, with **van Gogh** probably being the best known. You might also have heard of Rembrandt and Vermeer.



You will see many old-fashioned (and modern) **windmills** across the Netherlands. In spring, the **country's colourful tulip fields** attract thousands of tourists.

Poland



Poland is in **central Europe** by the **Baltic Sea**, and is one of the largest countries in the EU. It has a varied landscape. The country is rich in **mineral resources** and known for its many **lakes** and dense forests.

Have you heard of the famous Polish 16th century astronomer **Copernicus**? He discovered that the Earth revolves around the Sun, not the other way round, as people believed in those days.

The most popular sports in Poland are football, volleyball, ski jumping, motorcycle speedway and athletics. Famous Polish athletes and gold medalists include the late sprinter and record-setter **Irena Szewińska**, racewalker **Robert Korzeniowski**, and **Adam Małysz**, one of the best ski jumpers of all time!



Poland uses the złoty as its currency. One **złoty** is worth about 22 euro cents.



Poland's most famous traditional dishes are '**pierogi**' (savory dumplings commonly filled with meat, cabbage and mushrooms), '**rosół**' (chicken broth served with noodles and vegetables), and '**bigos**' (a meat and sausage stew served with sauerkraut). '**Paçzki**' (glazed doughnuts filled with jam or chocolate) are a popular treat.



Poland joined the European Union in **2004**.



The **Wieliczka salt mine**, excavated from the 13th century, produced table salt continuously until 2007, as one of the world's oldest operating salt mines. It is one of the most beautiful sites in Poland - definitely worth a visit!



Pol'and'Rock Festival is one of Europe's largest open-air festivals. Attendance is free of charge.



Did you know that the **Polish alphabet** has 32 letters rather than 26?



There are approximately 38 million people living in Poland; the country's capital city is **Warsaw** and the national language is Polish.



The first woman ever to win a Nobel Prize was Polish scientist **Marie Skłodowska-Curie**.



Poland is the most important breeding ground for several European migratory birds. A quarter of all European **white storks** nest there each spring!

Portugal



Portugal is in **southern Europe**. The country's landscape includes pastures, cliffs, rocky plains, fields, and sandy beaches. Did you know that the Portuguese horse breed '**lusitano**' is one of the oldest in the world?

At its peak, the Portuguese Empire stretched from Brazil to parts of China and, as a result, today almost 300 million people speak Portuguese across the world. And have you ever listened to **fado** music? These emotional songs, usually accompanied by a guitar, are traditional in Portugal.

Portugal is a major footballing nation. **Cristiano Ronaldo**, born on the Portuguese island of Madeira, is one of the biggest football stars in the world. Other popular sports include basketball, futsal, handball and roller hockey.



There are 10.3 million people living in Portugal; the country's capital city is **Lisbon** and the national language is Portuguese.



Portugal uses the euro as its currency. Its 1 and 2 **euro** coins feature the country's castles and coats of arms, with the royal seal in the centre.



Portuguese food usually consists of a lot of fish and meat. Portuguese people enjoy dried and salted '**bacalhau**' (cod fish) and '**camarão**' (prawns). '**Caldeirada**' (fish stew) and 'feijoada' (meat and bean stew) are other examples of traditional dishes. When it comes to desserts, Portugal is especially known for its '**pasteis de nata**' (custard pastry).



Portugal joined the European Union in **1986**.



In 1755, Lisbon was struck by one of the **strongest earthquakes in history** when 85% of the city was destroyed.



The world's **oldest operating bookshop** is in Lisbon. It has been open for almost 300 years!



Portuguese '**azulejos**' are known around the world. These are the typical decorations you can see on walls in Portuguese cities which are made of white tiles featuring blue drawings.



Sardines are the most popular fish in Portugal. Festivals are even held in their honour throughout the summer across the country!



Vasco da Gama was a famous Portuguese explorer and the first European to reach India by sea. Magellan is another famous Portuguese explorer that you may have heard of.

Romania



Romania is in **south-eastern Europe**. It is made up of mountains in the north and centre, farming lands in the south, and in the south-east you can swim in the Black Sea. It also has forests and protected areas, and its medieval towns and wildlife attract many tourists.

We owe some great inventions to Romania: the **fountain pen** and **anti-ageing cream**.

Football is the most popular sport in Romania but handball, volleyball and tennis are also widely played. **Simona Halep** is one of the best female tennis players in the world. Gymnastics is also popular: Romanian **Nadia Comăneci** was the first gymnast ever to score a perfect 10, at the 1976 Olympic Games.



Romania uses the **leu** as its currency. One leu is worth about 21 euro cents.



Romanian cuisine is a blend of Central European and Balkan influences. Traditional Romanian soups are called '**ciorbă**'; they are usually hearty and have a typically sour taste. Cabbage rolls called '**sarmale**' are a popular and traditional dish. '**Papanasi**' is a typical Romanian dessert: a sort of doughnut covered with soft cheese and red fruits.



Romania joined the European Union in **2007**.



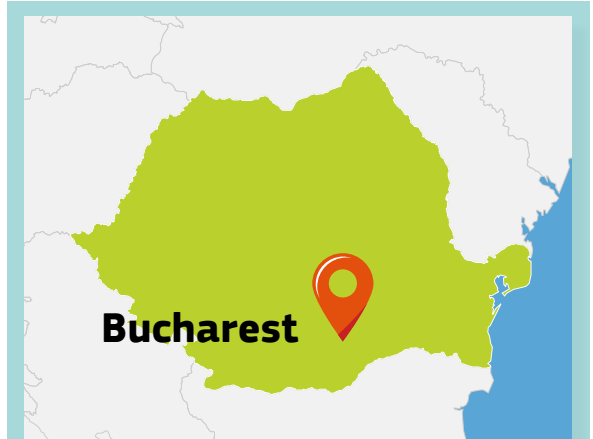
The Palace of Parliament building in Bucharest is the second largest administrative building in the world after the US Pentagon in Washington.



The Romanian city of Timisoara was the second city in the world to have **electric street lamps**, after New York City.



Romanian is a Romance language spoken mainly in Romania and Moldova. The Romanian alphabet, which is used today, is made up of 26 Latin letters and five additional special characters: **ă, â, î, ș** and **ț**.



There are 19.5 million people living in Romania. The country's capital is **Bucharest** and the national language is Romanian.



Have you ever heard of the legend of Dracula? The real **Dracula**, Vlad Dracul, was a Romanian prince. He inspired the Irishman Bram Stoker to write the story of the vampire Count Dracula in 1897.



Romania boasts the largest population of **brown bears** in Europe.

Slovakia



Slovakia is in **central Europe**. The **Tatra mountains** cover the north of the country, while the **Danube River** flows through the south, which is much flatter with thriving farming lands. Brown bears, wolves, chamois and lynxes roam freely in Slovakia's lush **forests**, which cover nearly half of the territory.

Did you know that **the camera lens** is a Slovak invention?

Ice hockey and **football** are the most popular sports in Slovakia. In winter, people like to ski or snowboard in the mountains. Did you know that the famous cyclist **Peter Sagan**, nicknamed 'Peter The Great', is from Slovakia?



Slovakia uses the euro as its currency. The 1 and 2 euro coins depict a double cross on three hills, as featured in the country's national emblem.



Slovak cuisine is typically central European. '**Bryndzové halušky**' (potato gnocchi with sheep's cheese) and '**kapustnica**' (sour cabbage soup) are just two of the country's traditional dishes. And for dessert, Slovaks – like their Hungarian and Czech neighbours – enjoy **pancakes**, usually served with jam.



Slovakia joined the European Union in **2004**.



There are 5.4 million people living in Slovakia; the country's capital city is **Bratislava** and the national language is Slovak.



Did you know that the capital city Bratislava lies directly on the borders with Austria and Hungary?



A four-wheeled pushcart from the period around **1600 BC** was discovered on an archaeological site near Kosice.



More than **7 000 caves** have been discovered in Slovakia so far!



Castles are part of the landscape in Slovakia and Spiš Castle is one of the most famous. Slovakia claims to have the **most castles per capita** in the world. There are nearly 600 castles in Slovakia.



Spiderman's co-inventor, Steve Ditko has Slovak origins.

Slovenia



Slovenia is a **central European** country. Although small, Slovenia has a diverse landscape that goes from Alps to seaside: there are many rivers, caves, gorges and forests, as well as a lot of green plains and vineyards.

The country's caves are home to the **olm**, also nicknamed the 'human fish' – an endangered and odd-looking type of salamander.

Slovenia has its share of record setters: extreme skier **Davo Karničar** was the first to ski down Mount Everest; **Benka Pulko** was the first woman to travel by motorbike to all seven continents; and **Martin Strel** swam the entire length of the River Amazon!



Slovenia uses the **euro** as its currency. An image of Primož Trubar, author of the first book printed in Slovene, appears on the 1 euro coin.



Typical Slovenian dishes include '**jota**' (sauerkraut and bean stew) and '**štruklji**' (rolled dumplings). '**Potica**' (a thinly rolled yeast-dough cake) is a traditional Slovenian pastry. It is most commonly filled with walnuts, tarragon, cracklings or poppy seeds.



Slovenia joined the European Union in **2004**.



There are 2 million people living in Slovenia; the country's capital city is **Ljubljana** and the national language is Slovene.



With its 40-kilometre underground flows, the Reka River is one of the largest sunken rivers in the world. It springs in Croatia and flows into the Adriatic sea in Italy, after crossing Slovenia for 51 km, almost completely underground!



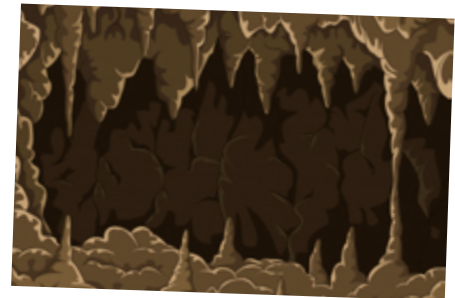
Slovenians love bees! In a country of just 2 million people there are around **10 000 beekeepers!** 20 May became the World Bee Day following a Slovenian initiative.



Some scenes from the '**Chronicles of Narnia**' were filmed in the Soča Valley.



Ski jumping is one of the most popular individual sports in Slovenia. Football, basketball, ice hockey and handball are all popular team sports.



Slovenia has many caves! The Postojna and Škocjan caves are among the most popular ones and attract many tourists. The Škocjan caves are also crossed by a special river.

Spain



Spain is in **southern Europe**. The **Pyrenees** mountain range marks the border with France in the north. There are also mountains in the west and south of the country. Spain is also home to the **Almeria desert** – Europe's only desert! – and the Teide, the highest volcano in Europe.

With its 52 reserves, Spain is the country with the highest number of biosphere reserves in the world, as registered by UNESCO in 2019.

Spain has a strong **artistic and cultural tradition**. Maybe you have heard of **Salvador Dali** and **Pablo Picasso**, two of the most innovative painters of the 20th century. Famous Spanish sportsmen include one of the world's best tennis players, **Rafael Nadal**, and the six times MotoGP World Champion, **Marc Márquez**.



There are over 47 million people living in Spain; the country's capital city is **Madrid** and the national language is Spanish.



Spain uses the **euro** as its currency. Its euro coins feature three designs with effigies of the King, the writer Miguel de Cervantes and the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.



'**Churros**' (tubes of fried dough to be dipped in chocolate) is a well-known Spanish snack.



Spain joined the European Union in **1986**.



Spain is the closest **EU country to Africa**. Did you know that it only takes 35 minutes on a ferry to get there?



Spanish is the **second most-spoken language** in the world, after Mandarin Chinese.



What do the lollipop and the classical guitar have in common? They are both Spanish inventions!



Flamenco is one of the traditional national dances of Spain. The female dancer is accompanied by guitars and hand clapping.



With an area of 505,944 km², Spain has a very diverse gastronomy. Two of the most famous traditional Spanish **dishes** are paella (rice with seafood or meat and vegetables), and **tapas** – a mix of finger foods such as chorizo sausage, 'tortilla de patatas' (egg, onion and potato pie) and olives. The latter has become more sophisticated with time and can make up a full meal nowadays.

Sweden



Sweden is in **northern Europe** and is the third largest EU country. While much of southern Sweden consists of **low-lying farmland**, the north is more **mountainous** and **forests** cover more than half of the country!

There is a good chance that some of the furniture in your bedroom comes from the famous Swedish furniture shop **IKEA**.

Swedish people love sports, with **football** being the most popular. Have you heard of the international footballer **Zlatan Ibrahimović** or swimmer **Sarah Sjöström**? Famous musicians include **Robyn, Zara Larsson** and **The Hives**.



There are 10 million people living in Sweden; the country's capital city is **Stockholm** and the national language is Swedish.



Sweden uses the **krona** as its currency. One krona is worth about 10 euro cents.



A famous Swedish dish is **meatballs** (served with mashed potatoes and lingonberries). The **princess cake** (layered sponge cake covered in green marzipan) is one of Sweden's favourite cakes and is traditionally eaten on special occasions.



Sweden joined the European Union in **1995**.



'**Brännboll**' is a popular sport in Swedish schools. It is similar to rounders or baseball.

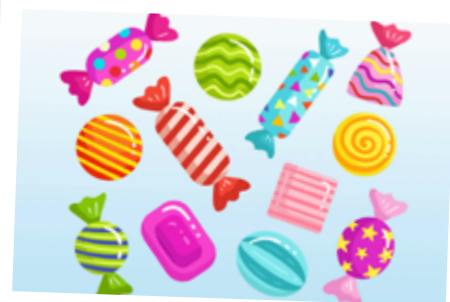
Did you know that **Anders Celsius**, who gave his name to the temperature scale, and Alfred Nobel, founder of the **Nobel Prize**, were both Swedish?



Parents in Sweden have to ask the 'Skatteverket' (the government tax agency) to approve the name they choose for their new baby. Names that you are not allowed to call Swedish children include Superman, Metallica, and IKEA, as they are considered not suitable as a first name and could cause embarrassment for those carrying them.



The remarkable fictional character Pippi Longstocking was created by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren.



Swedish people love sweets but for the sake of their teeth many Swedish children have 'lördagsgodis' which means they can only eat sweets on Saturdays.