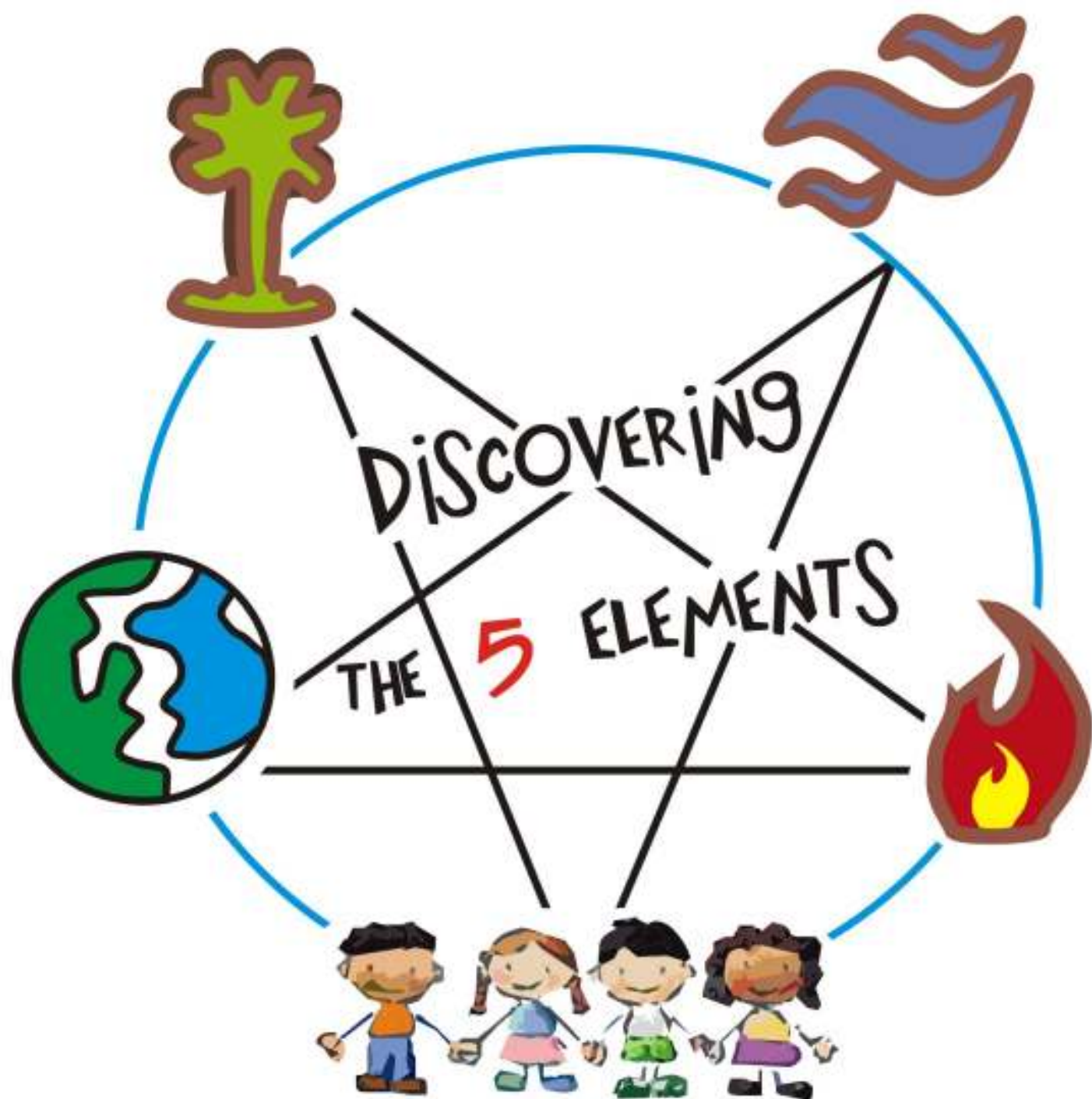


INEX Slovakia INVITES YOU TO ...



COORDINATORS OF THE PROJECT AND OF THE BROCHURE:  
OLGA JERMACHKOVA AND ROBERTA LOMBARDI

## CONTENT

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. INTRODUCTION .....   | 1  |
| 2. PARTNERS .....   | 1  |
| 3. FIVE ELEMENTS .....  | 2  |
| 4. THE METHOD .....   | 2  |
| 5. DIARY OF BOARD .....   | 2  |
| 14.08.2011 - Arrival day in Bratislava .....                    | 2  |
| 15.08.2011 - Welcome to Slovak Paradise .....                   | 3  |
| The Slovak evening.....   | 3  |
| 16.08.2011 - The Fire day, written by the Latvian team.....     | 3  |
| The Fire Barometer .....  | 3  |
| Workshop on recycled materials .....                            | 4  |
| Latvian evening .....   | 5  |
| 17.08.2011 - The Earth day, written by the Belgian team.....    | 5  |
| Ice cave visit .....  | 5  |
| Workshop on flora, fauna and soil.....                          | 6  |
| Workshop of INEX messenger .....                                | 6  |
| Belgian evening .....   | 7  |
| 18.08.2011 - The Culture day, written by the Italian team ..... | 7  |
| Trip to High Tatras.....  | 7  |
| The Tanabata Action .....                                       | 7  |
| Team buildings .....  | 7  |
| Cultural game, “Code da Vinci” .....                            | 8  |
| Italian evening.....  | 8  |
| Burkina Faso in Italy .....                                     | 9  |
| 19.08.2011 - The Water day, written by the Slovak team.....     | 9  |
| Biele Vody .....  | 9  |
| Youth in Action Program.....                                    | 10 |
| Art Kruh workshop .....   | 10 |
| 20.08.2011 - The Air day, written by the Slovak leaders .....   | 10 |
| Air and water workshop.....                                     | 11 |
| Art Kruh workshop on juggling .....                             | 11 |
| 21.08.2011 - Goodbye Stratena.....                              | 11 |
| Evaluation of the project .....                                 | 11 |
| 22.08.2011 - Goodbye Slovakia .....                             | 12 |
| 6. THE LOCATION, PLACES AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM .....           | 12 |
| The national park „Slovak paradise“ .....                       | 12 |
| The High Tatras .....   | 13 |
| Dobšinská Ice Cave.....   | 14 |
| 7. RESULTS AND FOLLOW UP .....                                  | 15 |
| 8. ABOUT INEX SLOVAKIA, THE HOSTING ORGANIZATION .....          | 16 |
| 9. CONTACTS OF THE PARTNERS.....                                | 17 |

## **YOUTH EXCHANGE** **"DISCOVERING THE FIVE ELEMENTS"**

14 – 22 of August 2011  
Stratena, Slovakia

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

"Discovering the five elements" is a youth exchange of twenty young people from four different countries who are interested in protection of the environment and want to learn how to live in an eco-friendly way.

That's why the location for this project has been chosen among the most beautiful and respected natural places in Slovakia: Stratena, a little village in the heart of the National Reserve "Slovak Paradise".

The aim of this brochure is to spread ideas, methods and outcomes of this project to future generations and to those who want to realize activities in the field of the environment.



### **2. PARTNERS**



The protagonists of this project were first of all our participants from Slovakia, Italy, Latvia and Belgium who had the possibility to participate to this exchange thanks to our partners: the Latvian association "ODIN/VITA", the Italian "Servizio Civile Internazionale" and the Belgian "Compagnons Batisseurs".

The promoter and organizer was INEX Slovakia, the non-profit and non-governmental organization which is mainly engaged in projects for young people

focused on youth mobility, non-formal education and international volunteering.

### **3. FIVE ELEMENTS**

The best way to learn how to respect the nature is to be in contact with it, to explore it in all its aspects and features. This discovery goes across the exploration of four classical elements - water, air, earth and fire, plus the fifth one - culture, which is intended to be a bridge between the human being and the environment.



So, every day has been sacred to the investigation of one of the elements through visiting the nature in the Slovak Paradise and various workshops. Afterwards, across some thematic workshops, our participants have had the possibility to reflect on the differences between the uncontaminated nature of Slovak Paradise and their home towns. Moreover they have been encouraged to share ideas and suggestions concerning the ways how to reduce this gap.

Thanks to hiking and the experience of vivid contact with the nature, the participants had chance for a individual part of this “discovery”. They could feel the emotions of this contact in a very personal way- , the workshops and the fifth element – the culture – have helped in the following phase of confrontation and reflection.

### **4. THE METHOD**

The method used to reach the goal of our project was the result of a very good combination consisting of: contact with the nature, participation in workshops based on non-formal learning and intercultural exchange through national evenings.

The concrete tools were workshops and activities that are presented in a more detailed description included in part “Diary of board” prepared by our participants themselves.



### **5. DIARY OF BOARD**

#### **14.08.2011 - Arrival day in Bratislava**

The best way how to welcome our participants was to let them discover something about Slovakia, showing them its urban part, Bratislava.

To make this discovery more interactive, it has been organized a game for them, named „Ahoj Bratislava“, consisting of various interesting tasks and questions, for



example: they had to find monuments in the historical centre or to ask locals about meanings of Slovak words.

This first contact with the urban environment was of course accompanied by various “getting know-each-other” games, ice breakers and by a short presentation of our program.

## 15.08.2011 - Welcome to Slovak Paradise

After visiting Bratislava our participants could finally breathe the pure air of Stratená. This corner of the Paradise immediately impressed them and they started to feel the difference between the urban environment of Bratislava and present nature.

### The Slovak evening

Finally we began with our program and the intercultural learning was inaugurated by the Slovak team, through a very nice national evening, with a typical food, presentation of the country, national clothes, songs, and the description of the national flag.



## 16.08.2011 - The Fire day, written by the Latvian team

“The Fire is a powerful element that can unite and help, but, if it’s mistreated, than it can destroy everything to cinder.”

Today was the fire day. We went hiking into the forest. No river or broken trees, high bridges or ladders or wild animal tracks could stop us until we had reached our destination.

### The Fire Barometer



There, our leaders offered us an interesting game connected with fire. They read metaphors about it and we had to think about them and to say if we agree, disagree or if we don’t have opinion. During this game interesting discussion broke out. Here are the statements and the most important opinions from everyone:

1. „Fire doesn’t have holidays“

- Fire doesn’t have a holiday because it’s never resting – we are using it in everyday life.

- Fire can be strong but also weak. When it's weak it's having a rest, a holiday.

2. "Fire, water and government never say „thanks“

- The nature says thanks even though it doesn't have its own mind. If you treat nature badly and you don't respect it, it won't respect you. Everything depends on how you behave in the nature.

3. "When fire can be a pleasure?"

- The fire is the place where everyone can gather around and talk, sing and enjoy the warm pleasure of its flames.

- Also everyone has to keep the fire inside them alive, because people without fire can't live their life with pleasure. People can keep the fire by enjoying the life through things they like.

4. „Don't let your dreams go in a smoke-paradise. Practice the fire safety“.

- Its not bad to dream as a lion as you know the moment when to stop and start to make your dreams a reality. Don't get stuck in your dreams, because you live in a real world, but at the same time, it doesn't mean that dreaming is bad.

- You have to be careful with the fire because it's dangerous. Don't play with the fire.

5. „The Time is the fire which we burn“

- The Time is as fast as the fire – we can't control it as we want, it burns all the time and we are responsible how bright will be the flame of our fire, our life.

- The Fire can transform, but it also can destroy everything on its path.

- Every second counts, because as small action can create a huge reaction, that can result in a much bigger result.

- The Fire's meaning depends very much on the person's point of view, religion, nationality and country.

The discussion was very interesting; a lot of people shared their point of view. It was a very useful activity.



## Workshop on recycled materials



After an amazing morning, we had a very interesting afternoon which started with energizers and continued with a workshop on recycled materials.

Thanks to this activity we learnt how to re-use things that we would normally throw in the rubbish, like for example the plastic bottles.

We created a lot of nice things from them, such as candlesticks, piggy-money box and pencil holders. Everyone worked in teams, realized the idea they liked the most and after presented it, in a nice competition context.

The winners of this unusual competition were two Italian guys, with their piggy-bank „Jony“ and their funny presentation.

After the workshop national teams had evaluation of the day. So that the national team leaders, together with both Youth exchange leaders, could discuss how to improve the next days of the project.

### Latvian evening



After dinner, our team, the Latvian one, presented our country.

First we showed a video from Latvia. Then it was time to go outside where bonfire waited for us. We started to tell about our national summer festival “Ligo”. After that we made everybody taste some typical food from our country, while singing Latvian songs and inviting them to join the chorus. The evening got exciting with the presentation of one of our traditional dances that we tried to teach.

And finally... the best part of Latvian summer festival – jumping over the bonfire! Some brave ones started and later others

joined. With every jump they made a wish and hoped that it will come true!

Everyone had a lot of fun. After few hours it was time to go to bed and time to stop the fire. Some moments after the fire was over, another light impressed us – the moon! And it was beautiful like you will never see it in a city!

The Latvian national evening was over, everyone looked pleased and happy. Tired but with a smile on their faces, participants went to bed waiting for the next „element day“.

### 17.08.2011 - The Earth day, written by the Belgian team

We started the day with a breakfast followed by an energizer like usual. As it was the Belgian day too, we played some famous Belgian games such as “bouche-bouches”, “Eper vier” and “Petit Poisson Rouge”.

### Ice cave visit

To “celebrate” the earth day and to reflect on the importance of protecting it, we went to visit Dobšinská ľadová jaskyňa ICE CAVE, the second ice cave in the world with electricity inside.



After reading all the boards on the path to the cave, we eventually started the visit. It was supposed to be minus something but it wasn't as cold as expected... probably because it is summer.

The cave was really spectacular and impressive! It is protected by UNESCO and it shows how wonderful can be the nature in its different forms. It is still so beautiful because men understood that it was very important to preserve it.

After the visit, we started to hike back to Stratena. It was a long and a little bit difficult path with lot of steep hills and big rocks. Therefore people decided to help the ones who were in difficulties...team work! It was really an occasion to get to know people better and to be closer.

### Workshop on flora, fauna and soil



After a good lunch and a break, we started with a nice energizer and a workshop.

The workshop of the day was very interesting; it was about soil, fauna and flora. We were divided in 3 groups and we had one of the above subjects to talk about,

explaining how it was in the past, comparing it with the present situation and imaging how it will be in the future and what we can do to change the critical situations.

We think the most interesting points to discuss were the present and the future. In fact, in this way we discovered remarkable things, for example that a country like Latvia behaves in a much more conscious way than Belgium, that's very surprising!

Then, it was also very stimulating to think about what we could do in the future.

### Workshop of INEX messenger

After that, we had a workshop/presentation about volunteering with Virginia, a Spanish girl, doing a short-term EVS at INEX. We had to say and write what volunteering means for us: to help the others, to do something good, to give something to somebody and get new experience and personal growth from it.





## Belgian evening

Our team chose a different and unconventional way to present our country, which could be funny and could involve the participants actively.

The aim was to show that Belgian people are very different and they behave in diverse ways. That's why we decided to play the famous game "Werewolf" but performing some Belgian famous characters.

During the game everybody enjoyed eating Belgian sweets such as Speculoos and Belgian chocolate that we brought.



## 18.08.2011 - The Culture day, written by the Italian team

### Trip to High Tatras



To connect the culture's subject to the natural elements, our leaders decided to take us to a very special place in Slovakia, the mountains of High Tatras.

This place symbolizes the union between Slovak people and their wonderful nature. They respect and enjoy this place, and made it part of their culture by spending their free time there.

So, we visited one of the various small towns which are in this area, the lovely Starý Smokovec, characterized by typical nice buildings. There we went hiking to the top of a hill where we took marvelous photos.

### The Tanabata Action

When we went back to Stratena we participated in the „Tanabata action“, an initiative which was born in Japan in 2008. It consisted of writing on a special paper three good things that we would like to do to reduce the environment pollution.

### Team buildings

After this we did a very funny activity...we were divided into three groups and we had to paint something related to the nature but using just one



brush. It was difficult but it helped us to be cooperative and to work in team. It was another way to get closer and to destroy the intercultural barriers. Another very interesting teambuilding game was „The net“. We had to carry each other through a „net“. The members of all groups had to cooperate to carry everybody from one side to the other one, without touching the net. It was very important again to work as a team and to help each other in order to success in the game. Somebody was afraid to be carried by other participants, but after he/she improved their sense of a faith and security.



### Cultural game, “Code da Vinci”



The finally activity was an amazing „Quiz“.

We were divided in 3 groups. We decided the name of the groups: „Mozzarella“, „Cupido“, and „Mumaci“.

The aim of the game was to answer to cultural questions about famous people, geography and stereotypes, and to collect the highest number of correct answers.

This was a funny and informal way to learn something new about other cultures and to fight against stereotypes.

### Italian evening

In the evening our team, the Italian one, prepared a national evening.

It started with a good dinner made of pasta with pesto. After that, to see how people from other countries see Italian people and their habits, we involved everybody in a game. They had to perform a situation, for example the lunch time, but two times. The first had to be as they usually live this situation in their own country, and the second as they imagine the same in Italy.

In the meanwhile they could taste some Italian typical biscuits.

But the Italian evening was still full of surprises and an unexpected thing...in fact...suddenly the light switched off and somebody appeared!

Sergio dressed as Dante Alighieri - the famous Italian writer - appeared!



So we started to talk about Italian culture and in particular about the most important figures in the history of Italy, as Leonardo Da Vinci.

As a tribute to the beautiful mind of this scientist, and to be coherent with the theme of the exchange, Erica showed two experiments of environmental education. These experiments demonstrated the natural effects of „erosion“ and „energy“ using boxes with soil and water, candles and a special metal box to create a „special machine“.

Afterwards, we gave to the other participants some brochures about „Marche“, one Italian region, to show some pictures of Italian beauties.

## Burkina Faso in Italy



Finally, Omar, our participant from Burkina Faso, did a very interesting and beautiful presentation of his country of origin and spoke about the situation of African immigrants in Italy. His discourse opened a window on a world that not everybody knows. He gave us a vivid and true evidence of a reality that is often misunderstood.

He also recognized the high tolerance and the good feelings that he found among the participants of our youth exchange, as one of the best example of respect for diversity and peaceful cohabitation.

## 19.08.2011 - The Water day, written by the Slovak team

### Biele Vody

For the water day we went to a very special path, where we could feel the water all around us... a path with ladders and amazing waterfalls. We were one unique thing with the nature.

To make this hiking more active and to focus the attention on the water, we were asked to take nice pictures along the path. It was a real competition among three different groups.

It was not difficult to do it since the scenery was spectacular and there were a lot of nice places where we could take our funny photos. Hiking was really very interesting because of ladders and chains that we found along the way.

In the afternoon we chose the best group photos with water and introduced them to the others. All the photos were funny and original.



## Youth in Action Program

After evaluation of the photo competition our leaders organized a workshop about The Youth in action program. We gained much new information about how to participate in Youth exchanges and how to become an EVS volunteer.



## Art Kruh workshop



After this, a surprise was waiting for us. From the backyard we could hear drums and ethno music. There were 5 young people, a boy from Slovakia and the others from Bulgaria and Poland. They introduced themselves and we started to play various games connected with the “5 elements”.

It was strange for us to play such kind of games. We were moving like water, fire, air. The last game was a kind of physical exercise. It gave us a really great feeling!

After all the activities we went to have a dinner. We had “pirohy” filled with potatoes and bryndza. It is a typical Slovak dish and that’s why it was something new for people from abroad. I think most of people liked it.

After dinner we had a dance party. We played a lot of funny dancing games. Everybody was enjoying it and having great time together. The Latvian team presented souvenirs for memory.

It was a great day just like the previous ones!



## 20.08.2011 - The Air day, written by the Slovak leaders



Our last task in Stratena...to discover the purest air and feel it on the pick of a rock, in Havrania Skala!

Of course it’s not easy to reach the highest and the most beautiful parts of the nature, but our adventurous spirit and well trained bodies, after several days of hiking, managed to do it!

After one and half hour of walking though the forest we reached the peak... a marvelous view was waiting for us! The silence, the pure air and the sense of power that we got from that place was really unique.

Our participants could really appreciate this moment, comparing it with the chaotic and polluted environment of the cities.

### **Air and water workshop**

In the afternoon we had our daily workshop on the elements, this time focusing the attention of our youngsters on the AIR and WATER.

They had to make a brainstorming in groups and reflect about the actual situation of the air and water pollution, suggesting possible actions to reduce it.

### **Art Kruh workshop on juggling**

Our partner Art Kruh offered us the last activity to use our body in an unusual way. And it was a very interesting juggling workshop. Our participants were happy to try something completely new for them.



### **21.08.2011 - Goodbye Stratena**

The time ran out very fast during our week in Stratena and the sad moment of our return to Bratislava arrived.

Everybody left the magic Slovak paradise with a feeling of melancholy, but with the consciousness to have learnt many things during this experience.

### **Evaluation of the project**

So finally they could express these feelings in our non-formal and formal evaluation that we had during the day.

Across a metaphoric game, we made our non-formal evaluation, during which all of them could say to the others what they gained from the project, what they would have liked to change and what they didn't like.

After that, the formal evaluation with a questionnaire allowed them to answer more specific questions about various aspects of the exchange.



The general opinion was really positive and we could be very satisfied with our job!

## 22.08.2011 - Goodbye Slovakia

The very last day was the moment of the definitive departure of our participants, while the Slovak leaders were in charge of some logistic arrangements.

### 6. THE LOCATION, PLACES AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Extremely important for the success of “Discovering the five elements” was the choice of the location and of the places to visit. These factors have been decided according to the aim of our project and have required an advanced visit. All this preparation was crucial in order to give coherence to our program and to enrich it thanks to the possibilities offered by the location. Here we want to offer a brief description of these places, whose function during the project has already been shown in the previous paragraphs.



### The national park „Slovak paradise“

Slovak paradise is one of the nine national parks in Slovakia, situated in the East of Slovakia. The National Park protects the area of the Slovak Paradise mountain range, which is located in the north of the Slovenské rudohorie Mountains (Slovak Ore Mountains).

The National Park covers an area of 197.63 km<sup>2</sup> (76.3 mi<sup>2</sup>), and the buffer zone around the park covers an area of 130.11 km<sup>2</sup> (50.2 mi<sup>2</sup>); 327.74 km<sup>2</sup> together. Eleven national nature reserves and eight nature reserves are situated in the park. The park offers about 300 km of hiking trails, often equipped with ladders, chains and bridges.



The Slovak Paradise contains about 350 caves, but only the Dobšinská Ice Cave, which is since 2000 a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is open to the public.

Park creation and history

The first protected reserve in the area

of the Slovak Paradise was founded in 1890. The first protected plant was the Edelweiss in 1936.

The name Slovenský raj first appeared in 1921 in the Krásy Slovenska magazine and replaced many names used until that period. The 21st of August 1964 the first protected landscape area in Slovakia was established in the Slovak Paradise.

#### The Geography

The National Park is situated in the Banská Bystrica Region. It has borders with Low Tatras (Nízke Tatry) in the west, and with the central part of Slovenské rudohorie Mountains in the south (Stolické vrchy and Volovské vrchy) and Hornád basin (Hornádska kotlina) in the north and north east.

The rivers and streams have formed many gorges, canyons, valleys, caves, and waterfalls in the Slovak Paradise, with the Hornád River being most important to the area. The most famous gorges are Veľký Sokol, which is also longest at 4.5 km, Suchá Belá, Piecky, and Kysel', all of which have numerous waterfalls. Prielom Hornádu is the longest canyon at 11,7km, and it also contains the greatest diversity of species.



The highest waterfall is Závojový vodopád (literally Veil Waterfall) at 70 m. The largest water reservoir is Palcman'ská Maša, finished in 1956, which covers an area of 0.85 km<sup>2</sup>. It is used for swimming, water sports, fishing and other recreational activities.

The highest peak is Predná hoľa at 1,545 m. Havrania skala (literally Raven Rock) at 1,153 m offers a panoramic view. A rock shelf known as Tomášovský výhľad is popular among climbers and visitors for its unique view situated at 680 m. The lowest point is at the Hornád's surface at 470 m.

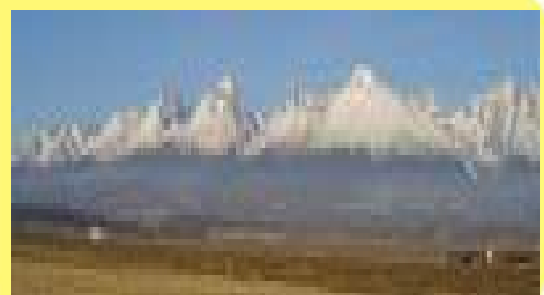
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## The High Tatras

The High Tatras (Slovak: Vysoké Tatry, Polish: Tatry Wysokie) are a mountain range on the borders between Slovakia and Poland. They are a part of the Tatra Mountains. The High Tatras, with their 17 peaks over 2500 m, are, together with the Southern Carpathians, the only mountain ranges with an alpine character in the



whole 1200 km length of the Carpathian Mountains.



The major part and all the highest peaks of the mountains are situated in Slovakia. The highest peak is Gerlachovský štít at 2,655 m.

Many rare and endemic animals and plant species are native in the High Tatras. Large predators, such as the bear, Eurasian lynx, marten, wolf and fox live there.

The area is well known for winter sports. Ski resorts include Štrbské pleso, Starý Smokovec and Tatranská Lomnica in Slovakia and Zakopane in Poland. The town of Poprad is the gateway to the

Slovak Tatra resorts. The first European cross-border national park was founded here—Tatra National Park—Tatranský národný park in Slovakia in 1948 and Tatrzański Park Narodowy in Poland in 1954.

Parts of the Eragon movie were filmed here. 😊

## Dobšinská Ice Cave

Dobšinská Ice Cave is a part of the Stratená Cave System. The cave reaches the length of 1,483 m and vertical span of 112 m.

The main part of the cave is represented by a giant cavity descending from the entrance to the depth of 70 m, which was formed by breakdown of rock columns between the passages formed by ponor palaeoflow of Hnilec in several development levels. At present, the most of its volume is filled with glacier,

sometimes up to the ceiling, by which it is divided into different parts (Great and Small Hall, Ruffiny's Corridor and Ground Floor). The Collapsed Dome (Zrútený dóm) is partly glaciated, and its edge reaches as far as under the Duča breakdown. Original oval shapes of river modeling are almost entirely destroyed by collapses and frost weathering.



The upper non-glaciated parts of the cave are formed prevalingly by horizontal passages and halls with typical oval shapes and ceiling channels. There are also some forms of flowstone fills in the non-glaciated parts of the cave (stalagmites, stalactites, flowstone crusts, layers of moon milk).

Conditions for glaciations arose probably in the middle Quaternary period after the breakdown of ceilings between the Dobšinská Ice Cave and Stratenská Cave, by which the cave obtained





sack-like character with stagnation of cold air that penetrated into the cave through the upper opening formed by collapse of the ceiling part (present entrance to cave). Freezing the percolating rainfall waters caused glaciation of the underground space. The beginnings of ice formation go back to the Riss ice age (approx. 300- to 140-thousand years ago), or until the end of the Mindel ice age.

Average annual temperature of air in the glaciated Great Hall reaches  $-0,4$  to  $-1,0$  °C (in February  $-2,7$  to  $-3,9$  °C, in August around  $+0,2$  °C). The temperature in the bottom parts of the cave remains under the freezing point all the year round. Relative air humidity in non-glaciated parts is mostly 75 to 90 %, sometimes over 90 %.

The cave stands for the most important wintering place of the Whiskered Bat (*Myotis mystacinus*) and Brandt's Bat (*Myotis brandtii*) in the central Europe. From among 12 species that were found in the cave important is the occurrence of the Pond Bat (*Myotis dasycneme*) and Natterer's Bat (*Myotis nattereri*), which belong among the rarest bat species in Slovakia.



## 7. RESULTS AND FOLLOW UP



The Youth Exchange “Discovering five elements” has raised awareness of 20 young people from Europe about environmental problems.

It helped them to recognize and appreciate the differences between the uncontaminated nature and urban environment, playing an active role during the whole period. In fact they have experienced a new eco-friendly lifestyle, avoiding the waste of water and electricity, separating rubbish and respecting the natural paths.

Moreover they learnt from the interactive workshops thanks to the confrontations with peers from other countries.

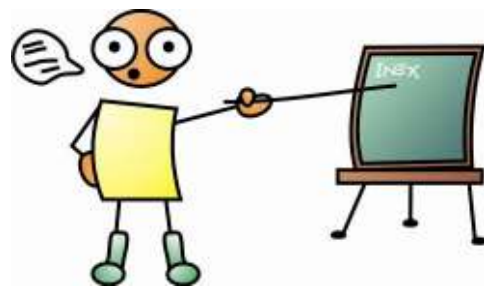
Finally, they increased their tolerance, broke their stereotypes thanks to the contact with other cultures and appreciated the differences among them.

The partnership among the associations participating to the project has been strengthened and will open a way to future cooperation.

## 8. ABOUT INEX SLOVAKIA, THE HOSTING ORGANIZATION

INEX Slovakia is a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 1993. Its main aim is to play an active role within the international youth exchange that promotes international understanding, intercultural learning and tolerance.

INEX Slovakia organizes activities that are focused on youth mobility and non-formal education and international volunteering. We organize different voluntary activities like international voluntary workcamps, trainings, seminars, various activities on national level, regular meetings of non-formal groups, workshops, activities for children with difficult background etc. We are a sending and hosting organization within European Voluntary Service. These activities provide an opportunity for young people of different national and cultural background to live and work together; facilitate personal growth and a personal responsibility.



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