



National Park of High Tatras

Location: Slovakia - Presovsky region

The oldest of our protected areas, the **National Park of Tatras** (TANAP) in the north of Slovakia, was founded in 1949. It covers the high-mountain area of the Tatras and it is the unique protected area of flora and fauna among the **tallest European high mountains situated north of the Alps**.



The National Park of High Tatras was established as the first of its kind in Slovakia. Five years later the Polish side of the Tatras won a similar statute. Along with its Polish part, the High Tatras constitute the **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** since 1993. The administrative headquarters of the National Park is located in Tatranská Lomnica.

The TANAP contains mountain and high-mountain plants such as dwarf pine, pine woods and a wonderful flora. Rare animal species such as the eagle, bear, or marmot live here as well. The **chamois** is the **symbol of Tatras**. It is one of the most precious species, as it developed in isolation since the glacial age. This is the reason why it differs from its relatives living in the Alps or Apennines. Its protection is extremely strict because only 300 animals survive at present.

The tallest mountain of Slovakia is one of the peaks of the High Tatras - [Gerlachovský štít](#) (2,655 m). Symbol of the country though is the mountain **Kriváň**. The Park contains more than **100 alpine lakes** and several **waterfalls**. The biggest and deepest lake of the Tatras is the Veľké Hincovo pleso, while the one situated highest is the lake Modré pleso (2,192 metres above sea level). The most visited lakes are the Štrbské pleso and Popradské pleso. The only cave open to public in the TANAP is the [Belianska jaskyňa](#).



For the sake of security, the **hiking paths in the high-mountain levels** of the TANAP are **closed from 1 November to 15 June**. Visitors accompanied by [mountain guides](#) are allowed to divert or abandon officially marked hiking routes only between 16 June and 31 October.

The [Museum of TANAP in Tatranská Lomnica](#) founded in 1957 provides exhausting information about TANAP and its inhabitants. In fact, it is the best source of information before one visits the mountains, as it offers the natural and overall history of the place. Among the best localities to choose for access to the TANAP is the town [Poprad](#) and the tourist resorts **Starý Smokovec**, **Tatranská Lomnica**, **Štrbské pleso** (the highest situated tourist resort). The mountain ranges of **Západné Tatry - Roháče** are best accessible from tourist centre **Zuberec**.

Fauna and Flora

Inorganic nature

The Tatra Mountains represent from the geological viewpoint a relatively young mountain range. They were folded by mountain building movements in the late Tertiary, i.e. 5-20 million years ago. For the sake of comparison, the low Tatras, the Fatra chain, The Ore Mountains of Spis and Gemer originated at the turn of Mesozoic and Tertiary (about 65 million years ago).

The Tatra Mountain range can be divided into two basic units - **The West Tatras** and The East Tatras. In the geological composition granites and crystalline schist's prevail, especially in the orographic group of **the High Tatras** - in the East Tatras. In the groups Sivy vrch and Cervene vrchy (The West Tatras) and in the Belianske Tatras (The East Tatras) limestones and dolomites prevail. Modeling of the Tatra Mountain surface into a present day shape is due to triple glaciation in early Quaternary. In this way originated characteristic relief features of the Tatra Mountains which are represented by peaks, glaciers, kettles (glacial cirques), and glacial troughs. From among some tens of glaciers the biggest one was in the valley Bielowodska dolina the total length of which was 14 km, the thickness was about 300 m. The glacier recession was accompanied by the formation of moraine drifts and fluvioglacial cones at the Tatra Mountain base. In those times more than 100 mountain lakes originated, the biggest and the deepest being **the lake Velke Hincovo pleso** (20.08 ha, 53.7 m). The limestone parts of the Tatras are characterized by a frequent occurrence of karsts phenomena. To them belong careens, abysses, limestone caves, including the cave **Belianska jaskyna in Tatranska Kotlina** which was made accessible to the public. A great value of inorganic nature rests mainly on the diversity of a very attractive surface relief being concentrated on relatively small area.



Living nature

Diversity of geological composition, surface relief, soil properties and climatic originality of the Tatras gave rise to fauna and flora of Special Mountain and alpine character. Above all in plant associations there is a characteristic differentiation among five vegetation degrees - submontane, mountain, subalpine, alpine, nival.

A similar diversity occurs also in animal kingdom. Many animal and plant species are rare, because they are living witnesses of ancient times. They are called relicts because of their Tertiary or Quaternary glacial descent. From among plant species *Dryas octopetala* L., from among the animals mysovka vrchovska can be mentioned. Of great scientific and cultural value are the plants and animals occurring only on some smaller parts of the Earth. They are called **the Tatra Mountain, West Carpathian and Carpathian endemits**. To the endemits of the Tatra Mountain belong, e.g. ocianka bezostova *Cerastium strictum* L., Tatranian subspecies of chamois and *Marmota marmota* - svist. From among the West Carpathian and Carpathian endemits can be mentioned the following plant species - *Soldanella carpatica*, ostropysk karpatsky, *Dianthus nitidus* and *Delphinium oxysepalum*. The animal endemits are represented by mlok karpatsky, hrabac tatransky.

To a very rare group of plants being more typical in some other mountains, but in Slovakia they occur only in the Tatra Mountains, belong the following plant species and animals - vstavacik alpinsky, vicenec horsky, skalokraska pyrenejska, ziabronozka arkticka and some others.

A Man and nature

Natural beauties of the Tatra Mountains and their inestimable value belong to the cultural heritage and therefore, the great attention paid to the protection of **the Tatra National Park, the first Slovak national park established in 1949**, is justifiable. A man had been interested in the

nature of the Tatra Mountain region even many centuries ago. Nevertheless, this has become more apparent in the last decades. The Tatra National Park serves to people by fulfilling more functions, of great importance is its utilization as an irreplaceable natural laboratory for investigating the natural phenomena and relationships including the anthropogenic impact on the natural components. For about five million visitors a year, the Tatra National Park represents a holiday and health resort, a place for sports and hiking.

A cultivated man utilizes a network of **600 km long pathways** when hiking throughout the Tatra National Park, he respects the natives of this region (animals, plants) and follows the regulations of controlled movement as one of the conditions necessary for protection and preservation of rarities of this region. **The alpine character** and the climatic conditions of the Tatra region require a thorough preparation as far as the suitable gear and the choice of pathways corresponding to one's physical condition is concerned. This approach will result in a reduction of the negative effect due to the excessive visitors' rate to individual localities of the Tatra National Park. Another important problem of the recent years is unfavorable influence of the global air pollution upon the rare plant associations and animal societies. The natural beauties of the Tatra National Park are for the time being relatively well-preserved so that they offer "pleasure and enjoyment" to every emotional visitor.

