

The Chuvash Republic: Overview

The Chuvash Republic is located in the east of East European plain, on the right bank of the Volga River in the interfluvium of the Sura and Sviyaga rivers. In the west the republic borders on Nizhnii Novgorod oblast, in the north – on the Republic of Marii El, in the east – on the Republic of Tatarstan, in the south - on Ulyanovsk oblast, in the southwest - on the Republic of Mordovia. Chuvashia is in the Volga federal district, and is a component of the Volga-Vyatka economic region.

The territory of the republic is 18,300 square kilometers. The population is 1,292,200 people (according to tentative estimation for January 1, 2006). In the Chuvash Republic there are 317 municipal formations - 21 municipal districts, five town districts, 291 settlements: from them - seven town settlements, and 284 rural settlements. The capital is Cheboksary. The population density is 71 persons/ km² (on the average in the Russian Federation – 8.4, in the Volga federal district – 29.8). About 40% of the population lives in the countryside. Cheboksary is situated 650 km to the east of Moscow, that is why Moscow time is used here.

Major highways going to the northern, eastern, southern and central areas of the country and beyond its borders run through the republic. The following highways go through Cheboksary: Iran - Azerbaijan - the Volga region - the North of the European part of Russia (including the bridge over the Volga), the western borders of Russia - Moscow – the Ural Mountains.

The basic automobile freight traffic Astrakhan - Ulyanovsk - Kirov goes through the territory of the republic parallel to the water Volga way. More than 20% of cargoes are carried by river transport. The capital of the republic Cheboksary and the town-satellite of Novocheboksarsk are river ports, places of the big transit on handling of cargo from rails to water and vice versa. Via the Volga and Sura rivers the Chuvash Republic is connected with the national and international network of waterways. From Cheboksary they go in the southern direction to Volgograd, Rostov-on-Don, Astrakhan, the Caspian, the Azov and the Black seas, via the Danube it is possible to get to Europe. In the western direction there is water communication with Nizhnii Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Moscow and the northern regions of Russia.

The national structure of the population of the republic is as follows: Chuvashes – 67.7%, Russians – 26.5%, Tatars – 2.7%, Mordvinians – 1.2%, and other nationalities – 1.8%. In total, citizens of 97 nationalities and nine ethnic groups live in Chuvashia in peace and harmony.

According to the census held in 2002 in the Russian Federation, there are 1,637,100 Chuvashes, 889,300 (54.3%) live in Chuvashia. As a result of migratory processes during centuries

great Chuvash diasporas appeared in Tatarstan - more than 126,500, in Bashkortostan - 117,300, in Samara oblast - 101,400, in Ulyanovsk oblast - more than 111,300. From 10,000 to 30,000 Chuvashes live in Moscow, in Krasnoyarsk krai, Kemerovo, Orenburg, Nizhnii Novgorod, Saratov, Sverdlovsk, Moscow oblasts, in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and in the Ukraine.

Chuvashes are the fifth nation in Russia after Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars and Bashkirs. Today, in the European part of Russia Chuvashes are the only Turkic people professing Orthodoxy.

There are three ethnographic groups of Chuvashes: upper land (viryal, turi) live in the northern and northwestern parts of Chuvashia, lower land (anatri) - in the south of the republic and beyond its borders, middle-lower land (anat yenchi) - in the northeastern and central parts. The Chuvash language consists of two mutually understood dialects: upper land (o-dialect) and lower land (u-dialect).

The National coat of arms of the Chuvash Republic is a bordered heraldic shield of yellow-gold color in the centre of which there is a purple "Tree of life". It symbolizes not only Revival, but represents people of the Chuvash land in a conventionalized manner. The "trunk" and "branches" of the ethnic Chuvashes living in the native land grow from the purple "field – land". From the line parallel to this "field" grow "branches" of ethnic Chuvashes living outside the republic. The branches of people - nations living on the territory of modern Chuvashia are also intertwined in the crone of the "Tree of life". The heraldic shield is crowned with an ancient Chuvash emblem "Three suns" meaning triunity of time - the Past, the Present and the Future, and is framed by a purple gold-edged ribbon, bearing the gold inscription "Чăваш Республики – Чува́шская Респу́блика" and stylized image of hop leaves and cones.

The National flag of the Chuvash Republic is a rectangular panel of yellow-gold color, the lower part is purple meaning the Chuvash land, and in the centre there are the armorial emblems – "Tree of life" and "Three suns".

The name of Chuvashia was given to one of minor planets of the Universe. Inhabitants of Chuvashia are proud of the fact that three Russian cosmonauts - Andriyan Nikolayev, Nikolai Budarin and Musa Manarov were born and grew up on their land. The Chuvash sportsmen won 14 Olympic medals; 48 times they became champions of the world and European competitions. The names – legends of Peter Egorov, an architect, the author and the builder of the fencing of the Summer garden in Petersburg and of some other constructions, a priest Iakinf Bichurin, a scientist-orientalist, translator, friend of Pushkin, Alexei Krylov, an outstanding scientist - ship builder, Nikolai Ashmarin, Turkologist and Chuvash linguist, corresponding member of the USSR Academy of sciences, Maxim Mikhailov and Nikolai Mordvinov, outstanding actors, Nadezhda

Pavlova, a talented ballerina, and those of many other people have forever become part of the history of the Russian state.

Natural resources, climate

Modern landscapes of the republic were formed during the postglacial time. The surface of Chuvashia is a hilly plain divided by erosion, with numerous small lakes and rivers. Most part of the territory (54%) is agricultural land, 80% of which is arable land, and the remaining part is meadows and pastures. Forests occupy another part (33%).

The climate is temperate continental; softening influence of the Atlantic Ocean is weak. The average annual temperature of air is 3° - 3.7°C. Winter is moderately severe, and moderately snowy. The average temperature of January in Cheboxary is -13°C. In the northern part the frost penetration is one meter and more, in the middle and southern parts it is 80-90 cm. Snow lies on the ground five months. The average height of snow cover is 35-45 cm, sometimes it reaches 90 cm, but it may not exceed 15-20 cm, either. Annual precipitation is 450 -700 mm, but it is extremely irregular. Winter precipitation makes about 39%, spring - 16%, summer - 31%, autumn - 14% (Cheboxary). During the last 250 years 32 droughty years and 21 cases of strong flood were registered. Relative humidity in December - January is 80-90%, and in May - June - about 60%. Winds of the southern and western quarter are prevailing. Average monthly speed of wind is about 5 km/ sec. Winds, having speed more than 8 km/ sec., and snowstorms are observed 6 - 12 days a month.

The main river of the republic is the Volga. Its extent within the boundaries of Chuvashia makes 127 km. Many big and small rivers (2,356) fall into the Volga River. In the republic there are 754 lakes, nearly 600 of them are in flood lands, others are basically karstic, and in Zavolzhye they are inter-dune ones.

Woods cover almost one third of the territory. The total area of the wood fund of the republic is 592,000 ha (basically in Prisurye and Zavolzhye). Pine, fur-tree, birch, oak, linden prevail. The share of fur-trees on the general wood area makes about 25%. Oak forests occupy a considerable part. Oak has become a symbol of courage and fortitude in the Chuvash land. This tree is used to name many villages and settlements of the territory. Even the territory of Chuvashia resembles a carved oak leaf on the map. Two dozens of trees, widespread in Chuvashia, have provided place names on the map, which thus form a “visiting card” of the local forests. Before being settled, the territory of modern Chuvashia, except for the southeastern part, had been covered with woods. In 1795, their area made 49%, and in 1926 – 31.2%. Reduction of the wood area

proceeded further, especially during industrialization and the Great patriotic war. As a result of regenerative works, in 2000 the area of woods reached the level of 1926. In separate districts of the republic woods occupy more than 50% of the territory.

A leading position in the structure of the mineral-raw-material basis of the republic is taken by construction and glass sand, as well as tripoli, gypsum, clay for manufacture of building ceramics and haydite, carbonate rocks for liming sour soils, there are deposits of sapropel in the lakes of Zavolzhye and in the valleys of the Sura. Peat is the most widespread combustible mineral. The territory of the republic has oil and gas prospects.

Mineral – raw material basis of underground waters of Chuvashia is characterized by presence of 12 explored deposits of fresh underground waters. Besides, there are own curative and drinking curative mineral waters, including hydrogen sulfide solutions. Resources of mineral waters are practically not limited, their specific structure included. The number of mineral springs is significant, they provide raw materials for a large mud-bath hospital and a sanatorium.

In the capital there is a geological museum, one of the best in the Volga region, where there are more than 3,500 exhibits - samples of rocks and minerals found on the territory of Chuvashia, as well as in other regions of Russia and abroad.

Development Perspectives of the Republic

Priority directions and strategic reference points of development of Chuvash Republic for intermediate term perspective are reflected in the Presidential programme of basic social and economic transformations in Chuvash Republic till 2005. The logical development of this Programme is the Strategy of social and economic development of Chuvash Republic till 2010, introduced in the Speech made by the President of Chuvash Republic in the National Council (Parliament) in 2003.

Strategic priorities of economic development of Chuvash Republic are industrial and innovation policy, development of agriculture, development of the basic public infrastructure, investment and personnel policy.

Basic directions of industrial policy are as follows: development of productions, traditional for the branch having perspectives of demand in the internal and external markets; assistance to creation of competitive regional groups of companies capable to attract investments to the specialized branches of the region; development of new branches and productions - "points of growth"; creation of ramified infrastructure of innovation activity. The work is in progress for active development of small business in industry and for creation of "industrial districts". Great attention in the Strategy is paid to development of power base for economic growth, extension of export potential of companies of the republic.

In the sphere of agriculture the basic strategic purposes are formation of effective highly technological and competitive agroindustrial production for improvement of food maintenance of

the population with active promoting of the goods and agricultural raw material made in the republic to the local, inter-regional and foreign markets, complex development of rural area. Traditional branches of agrarian specialization enabling to compete in the all-Russian market, for Chuvashia in the perspective still will be production of hop, potato, vegetables, hemp, dairy and meat cattle breeding, and poultry keeping.

An important strategic priority is accelerated development of the public infrastructure. In the Strategy particular final parameters are determined, which are necessary to realize by 2010 in the field of housing construction, gasification, in the spheres of housing-municipal and road facilities, in development of transport, telecommunications and informatization of the society. So, for example, a task has been put to complete basically gasification of settlements of Chuvashia in the coming two years.

Main purpose of state investment policy is mobilization of available investment resources and attracting new ones in the real sector for maintenance of indispensable rates of economic growth. Particular measures have been determined for further improvement of investment climate, perfecting the legislation of Chuvash Republic on investment activity, effective use of state investments, on support of investment activity of the private sector of economy.

The implementation of the strategic plans of the President and the Government of Chuvashia will ensure steady and dynamic development of the economy; will increase growth of the standard of well being of the population. High estimations, repeatedly given lately to the activity of the President and the Government of Chuvashia on the part of the President of Russia and the Government of the Russian Federation, testify to the fact that the region is not simply developing right way, but in a number of branch directions it is a pilot one for all entities of the federation.

Tourism and Recreation

Chuvashia is a magnificent cosy corner of Povolzhye with an interesting combination of antiquity and modernity. There are excellent natural conditions, pine and oak forests here. The tourist and sanatorium branch in Chuvash Republic is represented by more than 30 tourist companies and by more than 20 sanatoriums and houses of rest that offer practically all kinds of tourism, rest and business meetings. They develop health-improving, cultural, cognitive, pilgrimage, hunting, fishing tours in Chuvashia and Russia, cruises and outings along the Volga River, excursion bus tours to Moscow, St.-Petersburg, Sochi, and Berlin. A unique appearance of the historical part of the capital of Chuvashia, restored relics of orthodox Christianity attract Russian and foreign tourists making boat tours. Only in 2002, by the Volga River more than 50,000 tourists arrived in Cheboxary, including about 5,000 foreign tourists. There is a lot to see in Chuvashia - halls and depositories of the Republican state art museum, of the Chuvash national museum, exhibition halls and art showrooms, galleries, numerous theme museums of the capital and small towns of the republic – the Museum of cosmonautics, Geological museum, Museum of beer, Literary museum, Museum of the Great Patriotic war, Museum of V.I. Chapayev and tens of local lore and ethnographic museums protect unique treasures of the national talent and national wisdom. In the Vvedensky cathedral, a monument of culture of the 17th century, there is a unique relic - icon of the Vladimir God's mother - used by the father Guriy at laying the fortress. A favourable geographic situation and climate create conditions for treatment of many diseases. The Cheboxary regional centre of "Eye Microsurgery" intersectoral research and technology complex, the Republican centre of acupuncture and traditional medicine own unique medical technologies. A high standard of curative effect is achieved in the "Chuvashia" mud-bath hospital, as well as in Cheboxary balneosanatorium. The essential factor for attracting tourists to the republic is the development of

medical tourism on the basis of mineral waters. For some time past tens of thousands inhabitants of the republic and other regions of Russia, countries of the CIS took recreation course in the republican houses of rest. Unique environment of Chuvashia - climate, rivers and lakes, forests specially protected natural territories, vast ecologically pure territories of the state reserve "Prisurskii", "National park "Chavash varmane (Chuvash forest)", five hunting sanctuaries are objects of ecological and hunting tourism. Due to availability of hydrogen sulphide sources, which by their qualities are not inferior to Mazesta mineral waters in a number of regions of Chuvashia and medical mud, in 1985 on the left coast of the Volga, in the reserved zone of the natural park "Zavolzhye", the sanatorium complex "Chuvashia" for 350 beds was constructed. Today, balneosanatorium "Chuvashia" is one of "the pearls" of Povolzhye. Treatment and preventive maintenance of locomotor diseases, of nervous and cardiovascular systems, post scald keloid hems, predisposition to allergic processes, consequences of unfavourable ecological factors are successfully carried out in the sanatorium. In the resort it is possible to make a set of different medical diagnostics. By the results of 2001, JSC "Sanatorium complex "Chuvashia" became the winner of the competition "Resorts of Russia – stars of Native Land" and won the 1st degree Diploma. In the sanatorium "Volzhskiiye zori" located on the picturesque coast of the Volga river, the natural health-improving factors and other non-medicinal methods are successfully applied for treatment and preventive maintenance of diseases of the blood circulation system, nervous system, respiratory organs, and endocrine system. The indications for climate-therapy and climate-prophylaxis of this sanatorium are recognized as the best among the Russian health resorts of a wood zone. Mineral water "Volzhskiiye zori" is a medal-winner of the Russian and international exhibitions-fairs. The tourist complex "Volzhanka", also located on the coast of the Volga River in the sanatorium zone of Chuvashia, 17 km from Cheboxary, offers magnificent rest on miscellaneous routes. Year-roundly for you is the "Volga family" route, the "Volga equestrian" route will invite you to a horseback riding in summer and in winter - on a sledge. The "Volga mountain-skiing" route will please you by unexpectedly interesting route in any winter weather. And the "Volga water" and the "Volga boat" routes all the summer round offer the travellers fishing and fish soup tours, camp-fire evening hours and spending the night in a hunting hut. The sanatorium – dispensary "Nadezhda" invites you to have a rest and to restore your health. It offers a number of treatment services of gastrointestinal tract diseases, diseases of liver, nervous and cardiovascular systems, of locomotor apparatus and skin, lung and respiratory diseases, metabolism disorders, and diabetes. Swimming pools and sauna, exercise rooms, cosy bars and rooms are at your disposal here. People of "the land of hundred thousand words, hundred thousand songs and hundred thousand embroideries" are of great interest for tourists and are of the largest value on Chuvash land. They have managed to keep the original culture, traditions, crafts and trades - unique embroidery, exotic costumes, ceremonial holidays connected with ancient beliefs of pagan Chuvashes, with preparation of the national drink - Chuvash beer. Chuvashes try to keep all the significant of the past: in the republic under state protection there are 655 monuments of history and culture, including 177 monuments of archaeology, 120 - of history, 346 – of architecture, and 12 – of art. The towns of Cheboxary, Alatyry, Mariinskii Posad, Tsvil'sk and Yadrin are included in the list of the historical settled places of the Russian Federation. Valuable buildings - monuments, cultural layer, and units of ancient design have been preserved here. These ancient towns of the Russian province are of great interest in development of tourist-excursion routes in the Volga region. The government of the republic is striving to develop this sphere, new to Russia, - in Chuvashia there have been adopted the law "On tourism" and the Concept of tourism development. Conditions for good rest and treatment, for hunting and fishing, river travels, horse riding and mountain skiing allow speaking about Chuvash Republic as one of perspective tourist zones of Russia. Republican higher schools conduct training of managers for tourist business. A network of comfortable hotels of the capital offers a high level service. Souvenir production is developing in

the sphere of trade.

Culture and confessional peculiarities

The Chuvash Republic cherishes its cultural property, keeping, enriching and increasing it. Today, there are six state professional theatres (Chuvash and Russian drama, opera and ballet, young spectator, doll and experimental theatres), a philharmonic society, academic ensemble of song and dance, academic choir, two state museums with seven branches, seven municipal, 36 public (26 of them have the rank “national”) and 10 departmental museums, 959 clubs, 671 public libraries, 57 music and art schools, and eight recreation parks.

The Chuvash Republic was one of the first regions in the Russian Federation to start searching for the new integrated forms of rural clubs. Nowadays, in the republic there are 132 multi-profile establishments uniting under one roof establishments of leisure type, sports and educational ones. In the towns and villages of the republic there are 6,026 clubs uniting over 80,000 people. Over 63,000 participants are engaged in 4,702 collectives of amateur art creativity. From year to year, talented and original art collectives successfully participate in various international, All-Russian, inter-regional, republican shows-competitions and festivals, representing the multinational culture and traditions of the republic in proper manner.

Chuvashia is rich in monuments of history and culture, their number being 655 (45 of them are of federal significance), including: 346 monuments of architecture and town planning, 177 - archeology, 120 - history, and 12 - arts. The monuments of cult architecture are of great interest. The cathedral of the Presentation of the blessed virgin (the 17th century) in Cheboxary, the Kiev-Nikolayev convent (the 18th century) in Alatyř, the Tikhvin convent (the 18th-19th centuries) in Tsvil'sk, the Ascension church (the 19th century) in the village of Semeyonovskoye of Poret'skii district belong to unique monuments. Merchants' mansions (House of Kadomtsev, House of Solovtsov, the Salt office (the 18th century) and private residences of the Efremovs (the 19th-20th centuries) in Cheboxary, House of Baryshnikov (the beginning of the 20th century) - in Yadrin are to be mentioned as the samples of civil architecture. On the territory of the republic there is a monument of archeology of federal significance widely known outside Chuvashia, it being the Tigashevo archeological complex (the 10th-12th centuries).

Chuvashia is a magnificent cozy corner of the Volga region with an interesting combination of antiquity and modernity. The tourist and sanatorium branch in the Chuvash Republic is represented by more than 80 tour agencies and more than 20 sanatoria and rest houses which offer practically all kinds of tourism, recreation and business meetings. They organize health improving,

cultural, cognitive, pilgrim, hunting, and fishing rounds in Chuvashia and Russia, cruises, the Volga river strolls, as well as excursion bus tours both in the Chuvash Republic, and in Russia and Europe.

A unique appearance of the historical part of the capital of Chuvashia, the restored relics of orthodox Christianity attract Russian and foreign tourists who make boat tours. There are a lot of things worth seeing by tourists in Chuvashia - halls and depositories of the Republican state art museum, the Chuvash national museum, showrooms and art salons, galleries, numerous thematic museums of the capital and small towns of the republic - museum of cosmonautics, geological museum, museum of beer, literary museum, museum of military glory, V.I.Chapayev museum and dozens of local lore and ethnographic museums keep unique treasures of the national talent and wisdom. In the cathedral of the Presentation of the blessed virgin, a monument of culture of the 17th century, there is a unique relic - the icon of Vladimir God's mother. Tourists are mostly interested in the Chuvash national originality. One can see wedding ceremonies, ceremonies of seeing conscripts off to the army supported by folklore ensembles and many other things in the system of rural and ecological tourism. Tourists are accommodated in guest houses with all conveniences, they are offered services in organization of tours to pick mushrooms and berries, to go for motorcycle and bicycle rides, to go horseback riding, sledging, and to go for "Buran" snowmobile driving. Hospitable hosts will invite their guests to table where they may taste pies and meat dishes prepared in the Russian oven, fresh milk, house cheese, ecologically sound products from the farm facility. The spicy spirit of birch and oak broom will remain in one's memory for a long time after a session in the "white" and "black" baths.

The traditional Chuvash belief was represented by a natural-pagan one. Christianization of Chuvash people began in 1551, when Chuvash land voluntarily joined the Russian state. Now, 95% of the population adheres to orthodox religion, 3% - Islam, 1% - Protestantism, 1% - other religions and denominations. During the last 10 years 157 monasteries, churches and mosques were revived and newly constructed in the republic, financial assistance was rendered to restore five monasteries, 44 temples and nine mosques. 15 cult buildings were transferred to the property of the Cheboxary - Chuvash diocese, more than 300 objects of religious purpose were returned from the funds of state museums of the republic to cult establishments. Nowadays, there are 261 religious organizations on the territory of Chuvashia.

