



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO

# SLOVENIA



# INSIDE THIS BOOK

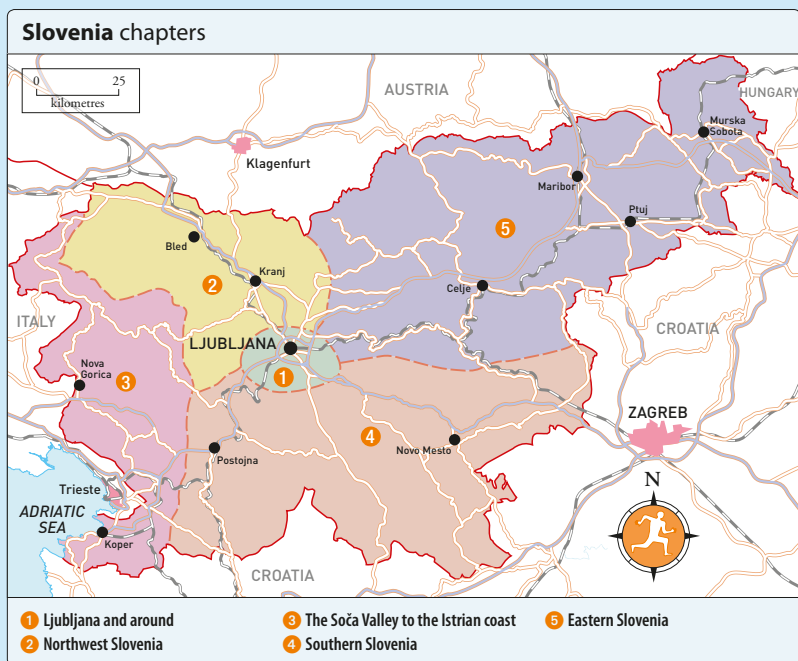
**INTRODUCTION** What to see, what not to miss, itineraries and more – everything you need to get started

**BASICS** Pre-departure tips and practical information

**THE GUIDE** Comprehensive, in-depth guide to Slovenia, with area highlights and full-colour maps throughout

**CONTEXTS** History, recommended books and music, and a useful language section

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO  
**SLOVENIA**

This fourth edition researched and written by  
**Norm Longley**





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## Introduction to **Slovenia**

Slovenia is a tiny country of endless variety, a magical landscape embracing imperious limestone mountains, sparkling lakes and a craggy coastline punctuated with historic coastal resorts. Add to the mix spectacular underground streams and canyons, sweeping vineyards and handsome Baroque towns, throw in a few theatrically sited castles and enchanting wayside villages, and it's clear to see why this nation of just two million people packs a mighty punch. But it is Slovenia's status as one of Europe's greenest and most environmentally sound countries that really sets it apart, something that becomes startlingly obvious the further you explore.

Dominated by Germanic and, to a lesser extent, Hungarian and Italian influences from the Middle Ages until the end of World War I, Slovenia spent the best part of the next seventy years locked into a less than harmonious **Yugoslav federation**. When the federation began to fracture in the late 1980s, Slovenia was the first to secede; save for the so-called **Ten-Day War** of independence in the summer of 1991, the country emerged more or less unscathed from the bloodbath that engulfed Croatia and Bosnia. While entry into the **European Union** in 2004 appears to have made little tangible difference to the lives of most Slovenes – always the most liberal and progressive of Yugoslavia's erstwhile republics, the country settled down to life in the new European order with ease – it did help raise Slovenia's profile in a big way.

Visitors will immediately be struck by the quality of the **tourist facilities** on offer, across the board – whether you're after a chic city break in a boutique hotel in Ljubljana or a restful stay on a rural tourist farm, an adrenaline-fuelled activity holiday or a slap-up feast of regional delicacies. Indeed, the standard of these facilities, allied to the country's excellent infrastructure – driving and cycling are an absolute joy – reflects an atmosphere of friendly order that wouldn't seem out of place in Scandinavia. And, much like Scandinavia, Slovenia's green credentials are impeccable, its pristine environment perfectly in keeping with a strong commitment to sustainable tourism.



## FACT FILE

- With an **area** of less than 21,000 square kilometres (roughly the size of Wales), and a **population** of two million, Slovenia is one of Europe's smallest nations.

- Forty percent of the country is covered by **mountains**, with three major mountain groups: the Julian Alps, the Kamniške-Savinja Alps and the Karavanke mountains. The highest peak is Triglav (2864m) in the Julian Alps. It's the third-most forested country in Europe, after Finland and Sweden, while its **coastline**, at 47km, is among the shortest – only Bosnia's is shorter.

- On June 25, 1991, Slovenia became an **independent republic** for the first time. The 1991 constitution set in place a **parliamentary system** of government, elected every four years, with the prime minister at its head. Elected every five years, the president is head of state. The country became a full member of the EU in 2004 and adopted the euro in 2007.

- **Tourism** is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the Slovenian economy, with alpine, coastal and spa resorts absorbing the bulk of the tourist traffic.

- Slovenia's most important **exports** are vehicles, electrical appliances and pharmaceutical goods, and its main trading partners are Germany and Italy.

- This is the only country in Europe to feature a mountain – Triglav – in its **coat of arms**.

- In 2000, **Davo Karničar** became the first man to ski down Mount Everest, and also the first man to ski down the highest summit in all seven continents.

This little country boasts a growing number of brilliantly conceived eco-resorts, while Ljubljana – named European Green Capital in 2016 – displays impressive forward thinking when it comes to eco issues.

As appealing as many of Slovenia's towns and cities are, especially the lovely capital, **Ljubljana**, the country's greatest asset is its magnificent natural heritage. As one of Europe's greenest nations – more than half the country is forested – Slovenia offers limitless opportunities for **outdoor pursuits**: skiing, climbing and trekking in the mountains, whitewater rafting, kayaking and canyoning on the many rivers, cycling through rolling hills and forests, or riding cross-country on a fine Lipizzaner horse, to name but a few. And with distances so small, in a single day you could be hiking in the Alps in the morning, downing a glass of wine in a local cellar over lunch and relaxing by the beach at the end of the day.

## Where to go

Most visitors to Slovenia begin with a trip to the country's sophisticated capital, **Ljubljana**, whose engaging blend of Baroque and Habsburg architecture, not to mention its lovely riverside cafés and restaurants, could quite happily detain you for a few days. From here it is customary to make a beeline for the stunning alpine lakes and mountains northwest of the capital, namely **Lake Bled**, with its fairytale island church and cliff-top castle, and the even more beautiful **Lake Bohinj**, less than 30km to the west. Both lakes lie on the fringe of the **Julian Alps**, whose magisterial peaks are as popular with climbers and hikers in the summer as they are with skiers in the winter. Most of the Alps are contained within **Triglav National Park**, which extends south to the sublime **Soča Valley**, whose eponymous green-blue river draws adventure-sports enthusiasts to its foaming waters each summer.





## SLOVENIAN WINE

**Slovenian wine** (*vino*) is little known beyond the country's borders, yet vineyards here cover roughly the same area as the Bordeaux region in France and produce about half the quantity of wine of that territory. In addition, much of what is produced is world class. There are three distinct wine-producing regions, each subdivided into separate districts (fourteen in total). The largest is **Podravje** in the northeast, where white wines such as Laški Rizling, Sauvignon and Šipon predominate; if you've only time to get to just one wine destination, make it the bewitching Jeruzalem–Ormož wine road.

**Posavje**, in the southeastern corner of Slovenia, is known for its reds, in particular the rich and velvety Metliška črnina from Bela Krajina and the blended, juice-like Cvicek from Dolenjska. Over to the far west of the country, **Primorje** has four quite distinct wine districts; by far the most celebrated is Goriška Brda, on the border with Italy, which yields a prolific number of both reds and whites, foremost of which are the excellent Merlot, the straw-yellow Zlata ("Golden") Rebula and the dry Tokaj. Further south, the wind-buffed Vipava Valley boasts many outstanding vintners, while no visit to the neighbouring Karst region is complete without a drop of the full-blooded, ruby-red Teran wine.

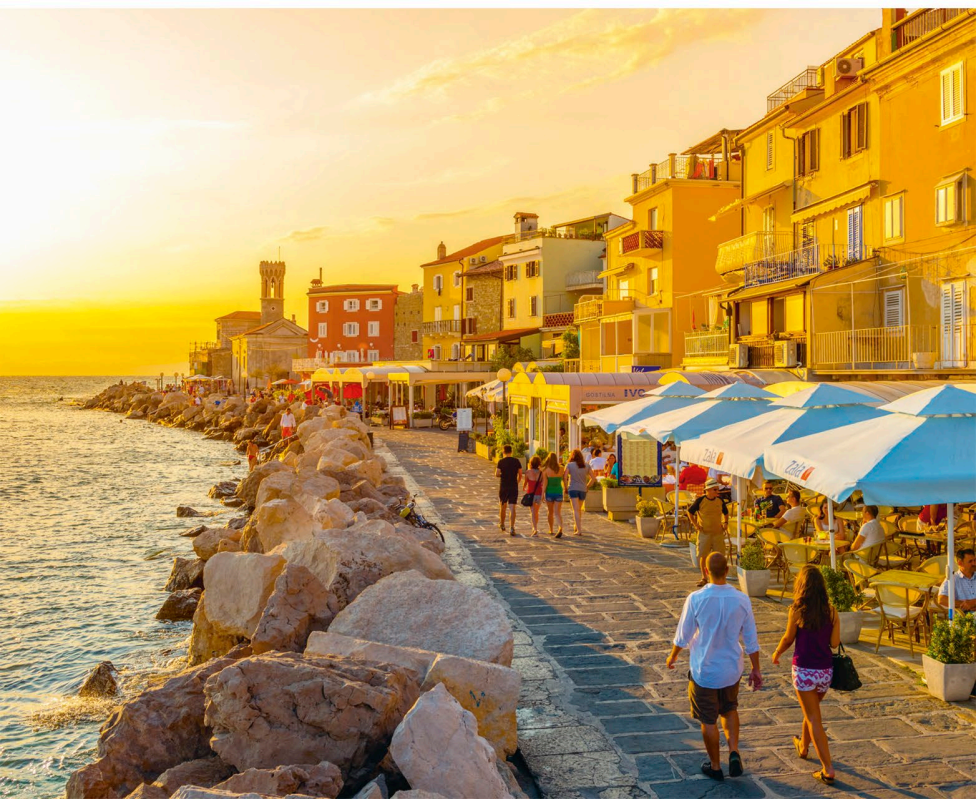
By far the most enjoyable way to sample wine is to take a visit to one of the many **wine cellars** (*vinska klet*) that abound along the country's twenty or so **wine roads** (*vinske ceste*). Alternatively, most towns and cities have a *vinoteka* (wine shop) where you may be offered tastings, while any restaurant worth its salt will list a healthy complement of top-rate Slovenian wines.

South of the Soča Valley, beyond the captivating **Goriška Brda** and **Vipava Valley** wine-producing regions, you'll find the **Karst**. This rugged limestone plateau is scattered with ancient stone villages, including **Štanjel**, but is famed above all for its dramatic underground rivers, streams and depressions, seen most spectacularly in the **Škocjan Caves**. The Karst is also home to the world-famous **Lipica stud farm**, the original home of the Lipizzaner horse.

Although less than 50km long, Slovenia's **coast** packs in a multiplicity of appealing little resorts. Probably the most enjoyable are **Piran**, a town brimming with Venetian architecture, and **Portorož**, the country's major beach resort. A short way north of these, even the workaday port town of **Koper** conceals an appealing medieval centre.

Returning inland, you will find more subterranean wonders to explore. Few can hold a candle to the breathtaking **Postojna Caves**, which lie within striking distance of another of Slovenia's remarkable natural phenomena, the "disappearing" **Lake Cerknica**. South of here, the dark forests and deep river valleys ranged along the Croatian border offer further opportunities for outdoor pursuits, while anyone seeking cultural diversions can take their pick from a rich tapestry of historical sites – churches, castles and ancient monasteries.

By comparison, the eastern part of the country is much less travelled, and though it might not possess the clear-cut attractions of other regions, there are some hugely rewarding places to visit. Chief among these is Slovenia's most historic and prettiest town, **Ptuj**, which is also the setting for the exuberant pre-Lenten Pust carnival. Just a short ride away is the country's vibrant, if underrated, second city, **Maribor**, and the sprawling **Pohorje massif**, a major summer and winter resort. Eastern Slovenia also abounds in **spas**, the most popular of which are the refined, Habsburg-era resort of **Rogaška Slatina** and the more modern, family-oriented **Čatež**. As you head further east, across the Mura River and towards the Hungarian border, the undulating hills of the **Podravje** wine-producing districts give way to the flat plains of **Prekmurje**, a lovely rural region of smooth fields interspersed with attractive villages distinguished by Hungarian-style farmhouses and little white churches.



## When to go

Most visitors come to Slovenia during the **summer** high season (June to August), when the weather is at its most reliable, all the tourist sights are open and the country's numerous festivals are in full swing. However, many of Slovenia's attractions, including the capital, are just as enjoyable outside the summer months, and in particular during spring and autumn, when the countryside colours are at their most resplendent, hotel prices (at least in the resort areas) are slightly lower and the crowds are a little thinner.

Slovenia's **climate** follows three distinctive patterns. In the northwest, an **alpine** climate predominates, characterized by very cold winters, often with heavy rainfall and snow, and moderately warm summers, occasionally interspersed with short, violent storms. However, with the wide range of pursuits on offer in this region – skiing between December and March, and climbing, hiking and adventure sports between April and September – a visit to the mountains can be enjoyed at pretty much any time of the year. Aside from Kranjska Gora in the winter, and Lake Bled and Lake Bohinj in the height of summer, few resorts get so full that finding accommodation becomes a problem.

The **Primorska region** (from the Soča Valley down to the coast) has a typically **Mediterranean** climate – very warm summers with consistent sunshine, and pleasantly cool winters. This is the one part of the country that can feel a little pressured by crowds, particularly in August when hordes of holidaying Italians arrive from just across the border. Booking accommodation in advance around this time is recommended. Whatever the season, there's a good chance you'll experience the infamous **burja**, a vicious wind that whips down through the Karst on its way to the Bay of Trieste.

The remainder of the country subscribes to a **continental** climate of hot, dry summers – particularly in the south and east of the country – and bitterly cold winters.

### AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>ČRNOMELJ</b>												
Temp °C/°F	1/34	4/40	7/46	11/52	16/61	19/66	21/70	20/68	16/61	11/52	6/43	2/36
Rain (mm)	30	25	30	40	50	70	50	58	35	25	40	40
<b>KOPER</b>												
Temp °C/°F	5/41	6/43	9/48	12/54	17/62	20/68	23/74	23/74	20/68	16/61	10/50	7/46
Rain (mm)	65	60	70	80	85	100	75	90	110	120	105	80
<b>LJUBLJANA</b>												
Temp °C/°F	-1/30	0/33	5/41	9/48	14/57	17/62	19/66	19/66	15/60	10/50	4/40	0/33
Rain (mm)	30	25	30	40	50	70	50	55	35	30	40	40
<b>MARIBOR</b>												
Temp °C/°F	-3/26	-1/30	4/40	9/48	14/57	17/62	19/66	18/64	14/57	9/48	3/37	-1/30
Rain (mm)	40	40	50	60	90	100	110	100	75	60	65	40

# Author picks

Our author has scoured every inch of this fascinating country, from the highest mountain peaks and deepest caves to the most beautiful vineyards. Here he shares a few of his favourite experiences.

**Pečnik-spotting** The great architect's influence can be found throughout Slovenia, from his myriad projects in Ljubljana – such as the Triple Bridge (p.48), the National Library (p.56) and the Market Colonnade (p.49) – to the remarkable Church of the Ascension in Bogojina (p.290).

**Handsome hayracks** From single-stretch (*kozolec*) to double hayracks (*toplars*), the Slovenian countryside is littered with these vernacular structures, used for drying grain – the Studor group is the finest in the country (p.123).

**Salty scenes** The vast, hauntingly beautiful Sečovelje salt pans are still used today for harvesting salt, as well as being a haven for stunning birds and plant life (p.196).

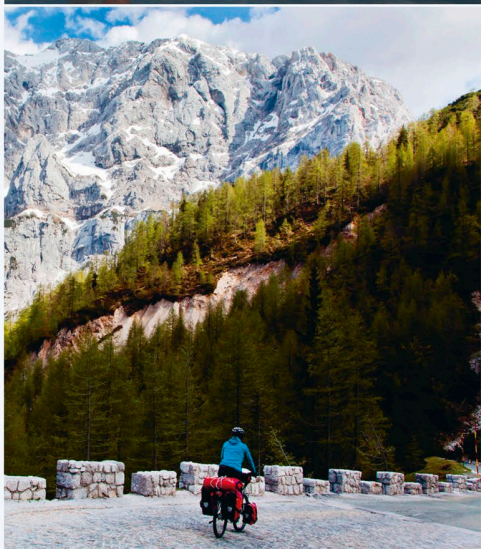
**Tough treks** The Julian Alps abound with top trails. While Triglav may be the loftiest peak, there are other, more demanding, hikes to be tackled here, such as Jalovec, at 2645m (p.131).

**Cosy stays** A good night's sleep is guaranteed at Slovenia's many tourist farms, as is a warm welcome and delicious home-cooked food and wine; *Šeruga* (p.229) and *Lenar* (p.262) are two of the best.

**Cool cave** Don a helmet, flashlight and boots before descending into the forebodingly titled Bear's Corridor, and then venture beyond towards more than twenty shimmering underground lakes (p.212).

**Spectacular drive** Fifty hairpin bends, welcoming roadside huts and spectacular views at every turn will ensure that a trip over the snaking Vršič Pass will live long in the memory (p.133).

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.



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## things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Slovenia has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selective taste of the country's highlights: outstanding architecture, natural wonders and historic sites. All highlights are colour-coded by chapter and have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.





## 1 ADVENTURE SPORTS ON THE SOČA

Page 142

This fabulous, foaming river is first rate for any number of adventure sports, from whitewater rafting and kayaking to canoeing and hydrospeeding.

## 2 PLANICA SKI-JUMPING

Page 130

Enjoy daring feats, beer and music at one of the world's great ski-jumping venues; and when they're not competing, have a go on the world's steepest zip-line.

## 3 THE KARST

Page 173

Explore intriguing dry-stone villages, including pretty hilltop Štanjel, and head underground to a mysterious world of rivers, streams and caverns.

## 4 LAKE BOHINJ

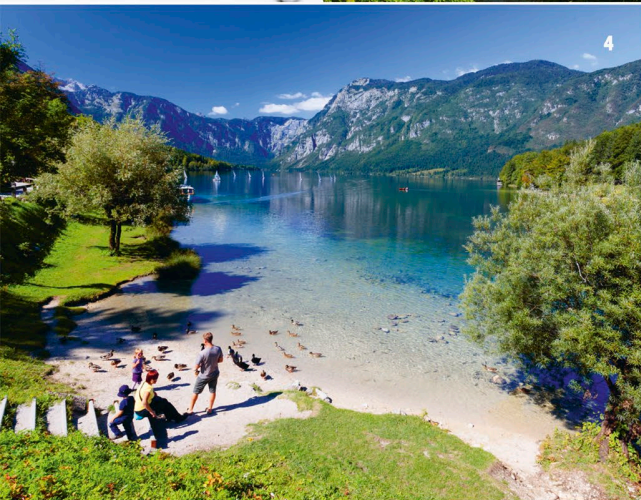
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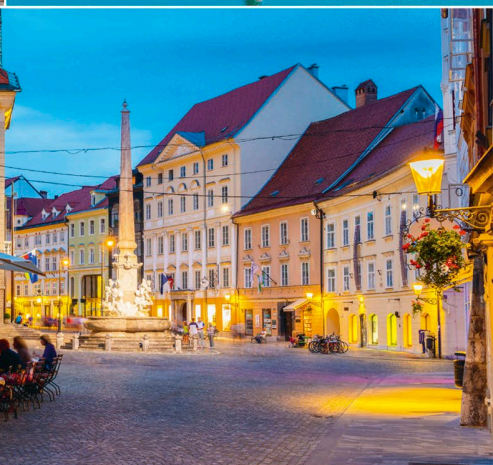
Encircled by majestic mountains, Bohinj is the pearl of the alpine lakes, less visited and more serene than Lake Bled.

## 5 ŠKOCJAN CAVES

Page 177

Carved out by the thrashing Reka River, the world's largest underground canyon is a staggering natural wonder.







## 6 LENT FESTIVAL, MARIBOR

Page 275

Vibrant and entertaining summer spectacle, comprising music, theatre, dance, food, and loads more.

## 7 LAKE BLEĐ

Page 107

This fairytale lake comes complete with island church and atmospheric castle. Take a dip or a stroll – or just kick back on a gondola.

## 8 LJUBLJANA

Page 40

Enjoy fabulous Baroque and Habsburg architecture, a hilltop castle and leafy riverside cafés in Slovenia's enchanting capital.

## 9 WINE

Page 8

From the sunny Goriška Brda hills in the west to the beautiful Ljutomer–Ormož vineyards in the east, Slovenia produces some surprisingly fabulous wines.

## 10 PIRAN

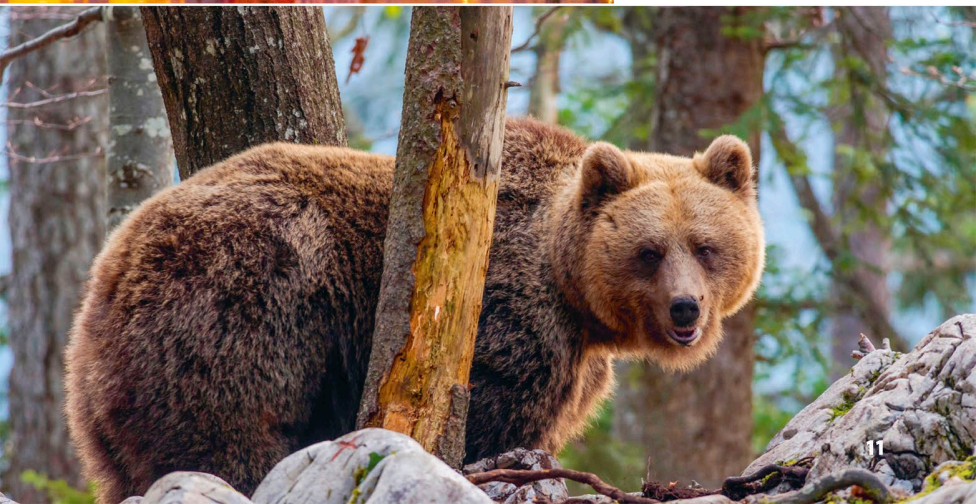
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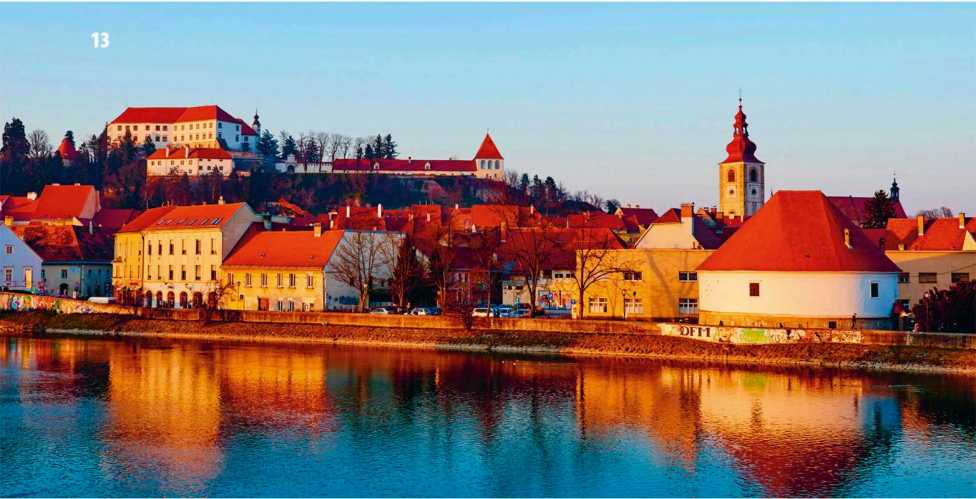
The country's most alluring coastal town, strewn with gorgeous Gothic-Venetian architecture, pretty little churches and quaint squares.

## 11 KOČEVSKI ROG

Page 219

As well as being a terrific rambling spot, this thickly forested Karst plateau shelters one of Europe's largest populations of brown bears.





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**12 HIKING IN THE JULIAN ALPS**

Page 119

Among the most stunning and least spoilt ranges in Europe, these mountain wilds are Slovenia's prime hiking region, with trails for walkers of all abilities.

**13 PTUJ**

Page 277

Slovenia's oldest and most appealing town is run through with more than two thousand years of history.

**14 CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY, HRASTOVLJE**

Page 181

Acquaint yourself with the *Dance of Death* fresco, alongside many other terrific wall paintings, in this sun-baked Romanesque church.

**15 PREKMURJE**

Page 287

Lush green fields, picturesque villages dotted with storks' nests, and a distinct culinary tradition characterize Slovenia's intriguing easternmost region.

**16 SKIING**

Page 128

Take your pick from more than twenty ski resorts, with slopes and facilities to suit anyone from beginners to pros.

**17 LOGAR VALLEY**

Page 261

Impossibly picturesque glacial valley, carpeted with meadows and forests and hemmed in by the raw peaks of the Kamniške-Savinja Alps.



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# Itineraries

Small it may be, but Slovenia packs in an extraordinary number of cultural, natural and historical sites, many of which are covered in our Grand Tour. Visitors with energy to expend should follow the Great Outdoors itinerary – featuring everything from water to wildlife – while our Gastronomic Odyssey presents a feast of fabulous local delicacies and wines.

## GRAND TOUR

Give yourself two weeks, and a car, to sample the very best of Slovenia.

- 1 **Ljubljana** The captivating capital features sumptuous Baroque architecture, a handsome hilltop castle and plenty of leafy riverside cafés; two or three days is perfect. **See p.40**
- 2 **Lakes Bled and Bohinj** Slovenia's twin pearls, the former celebrated for its cliff-bound castle and gorgeous island church, the latter more serene but no less resplendent. Stay in Bled and take a day-trip to Bohinj. **See p.107 & p.117**
- 3 **Soča Valley** Sliced through by one of Europe's great alpine rivers, and littered with abandoned fortifications and World War I monuments, this is the Slovenian landscape at its most magisterial; the handsome town of Kobarid is an ideal base. **See p.141**
- 4 **Karst** Dry, densely forested limestone plateau pockmarked by extraordinary cave systems and disappearing lakes. Stay at a tourist farm or in the pretty village of Štanjel. **See p.173**
- 5 **Piran and the salt pans** Boasting glorious Gothic-Venetian architecture, Piran is the coast's most atmospheric town; spend two days here and visit the eerily beautiful Sečovlje salt pans. **See p.189 & p.196**
- 6 **Postojna** With an underground train, wondrous formations and the enigmatic *Proteus*

*anguinus* – the “human fish” – this magical masterpiece of nature has been enthralling visitors for centuries. **See p.205**

- 7 **Ptuj** Showcasing a raft of architectural and archeological treasures, Slovenia's oldest town also hosts the Kurent, the country's captivating pre-Lenten carnival. **See p.277**
- 8 **Prekmurje** This region of lush green fields, little white churches and stork-populated villages receives relatively few visitors – stay in a tourist farm and enjoy the rural calm. **See p.287**
- 9 **Logar Valley** Abutting the Austrian border, the serrated peaks framing this awesome valley offer superb outdoor activities, and wonderful farm accommodation. **See p.261**

## THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Overground, underground or on the water, Slovenia offers incomparable opportunities for adrenaline sports – and more sedate pursuits. Allow ten days for this tour, and take in the country's most picturesque spots.

- 1 **Hiking the Julian Alps** Extending across northwest Slovenia, these imperious limestone mountains present terrific hiking and climbing, not least the mighty Triglav. **See p.119**
- 2 **Rafting on the Soča** It's a short drive to this awesome alpine river and its water-based activities; Bovec is the ideal base. **See p.142**

➊ **Paragliding in the Vipava Valley** Strap up and get soaring for bird's-eye views with the famous *bora* wind behind you. The wine village of Slap makes a great overnight stop. **See p.162**

➋ **Caving** Continue south to the Karst and a subterranean wonderland of fabulous caving experiences: Babji Zob, near Bled; Vilenica, near Lipica; and, best of all, the Križna water cave near Cerknica. **See p.113, p.177 & p.212**

➌ **Coastal activities** It's a short hop down to the sunny Slovenian coast, where Portorož offers fun-filled diversions, including stand-up paddling and sea kayaking. **See p.195**

➍ **Bear-watching** If you go down to the woods today... a rare opportunity to see these magnificent beasts up close in the wild, thankfully from the safety of a hideout. **See p.218**

➎ **Mountain biking in Koroška** Finally, head north to this mountain wilderness for some wonderfully scenic and challenging trails – you can even bike through a disused mine. **See p.260**

## GASTRONOMIC ODYSSEY

You could spend ten happy days eating and drinking your way around Slovenia, where a new generation of innovative chefs and world-class wines are making their mark.

➏ **Open Kitchen, Ljubljana** Weather permitting, *Odrpta Kuhna* is the perfect

introduction to Slovenia's culinary delights, with many of the country's finest restaurants serving sample portions from their menus. **See p.71**

➐ **Hiša Franko, Kobarid** Between Ana's kitchen and Valter's cellar, you're assured an exquisite dining experience at *Franko's* – arguably Slovenia's best restaurant. **See p.150**

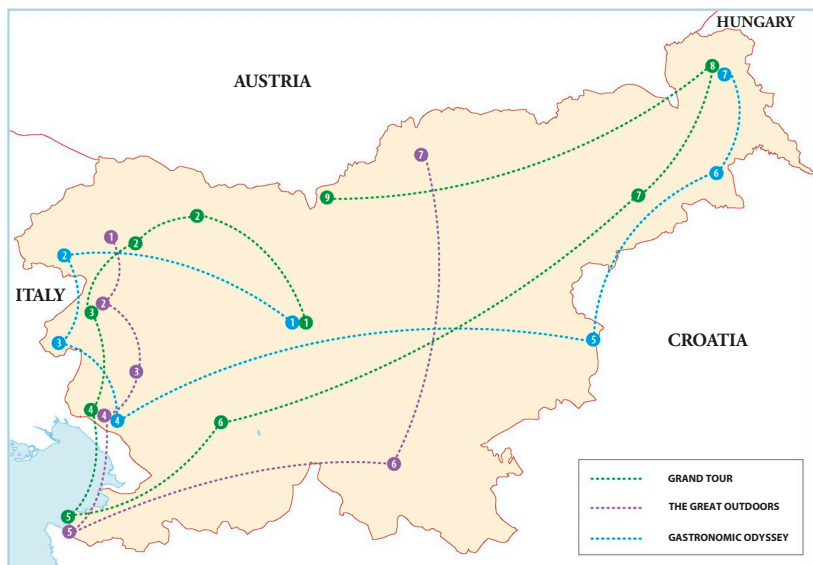
➑ **Goriška Brda wine** From *Franko's* it's an easy drive south to Slovenia's most celebrated – and picturesque – wine-growing region, producer of superlative reds. **See p.160**

➒ **Pršut and teran, Karst** Wherever you travel in the Karst you should sample a few slices of *pršut* (dry-cured ham) with a glass of *Kraški Teran*, a full-bodied tippie that takes its blood-red colour from the local iron-rich soil. **See p.173**

➓ **Repnice, Brezovica** Head to the other side of the country, where beautifully patterned sand caves, dug deep into the flint stone hills, make for a unique wine-tasting experience. **See p.236**

➔ **Wine, Jeruzalem** Further north you will find the lush, terraced vineyards of this lovely wine road. A leisurely drive will allow you to taste a host of sumptuous whites; sleep it off at a welcoming tourist farm. **See p.285**

➕ **Prekmurje cuisine** While *bograč* and *gibanica* are the region's staple dishes, few meals here are complete without a drizzle of deliciously nutty pumpkinseed oil. **See p.287**





MOUNTAIN HUT, TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK

## Basics

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## Getting there

**Flying is the easiest way to reach Slovenia, with several airlines now operating direct from airports in the UK. Flying from North America, Australasia or South Africa will entail one or more changes. Travelling overland from the UK is another option, though this inevitably takes longer and usually works out far more expensive.**

If **flying**, you may be able to cut costs by going through a specialist flight agent, who in addition to dealing with discounted flights may also offer student and youth fares and travel insurance, rail passes, car rental, tours and the like.

### Flights from the UK and Ireland

Flying to Slovenia from the UK takes approximately two hours. **Adria Airways** (✉adria.si/en), the Slovenian national carrier, operates flights from London Gatwick to the capital, Ljubljana; **easyJet** (✉easyjet.com) from Stansted and London Gatwick to Ljubljana, and **WizzAir** (✉wizzair.com) from Luton to Ljubljana. Another possibility is to fly into one of the neighbouring countries, from where you can continue the onward journey by bus or train; options here include Venice and Trieste in Italy, and Zagreb in Croatia, all of which are close to the Slovenian border.

**Prices** depend on how far in advance you book, although **season** is also a factor. High-season flights (June–Aug, Christmas and New Year) will cost more than at other times, unless you book very well in advance; it is also generally more expensive to fly at weekends. Book far enough in advance with a low-cost airline and you can pick up a ticket for around £60–70 return, even in summer; book anything less than three or four weeks in advance and this could triple in price. **Flight search engines** such as ✉skyscanner.net, ✉kayak.co.uk or ✉momondo.com are invaluable for researching the best connections and prices.

### Flights from the US and Canada

As there are **no direct flights** from North America to Slovenia you will need to fly into a major European hub and continue the journey from there. From the east coast of the **US**, expect to pay around US\$700 low season and US\$1000 high season; and from the west coast around US\$1100 low season and US\$1400 high season. From **Canada**, you're looking at around Can\$1300 low season from Toronto (Can\$1700 high season) and Can\$1900 low season from Vancouver (Can\$2300 high season).

### Flights from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

There are **no direct flights** from Australia or New Zealand to Slovenia. It is possible to change airlines, either in Asia or Europe, but the best option is to fly to a Western European gateway for a connecting flight. A return fare from eastern **Australia** is around Aus\$2200 low season and Aus\$2700 high season. From **New Zealand**, it's around NZ\$2500 low season, and NZ\$3000 high season.

It's not possible to fly direct to Slovenia from **South Africa**, so you'll have to change airlines at one of the main European gateways. A standard return fare from Johannesburg to Ljubljana, via Frankfurt or Vienna – with South African Airways (✉flysaa.com) or a leading European airline – is around ZAR9000 low season and ZAR11,000 high season.

### Trains

Travelling by **train** to Slovenia is likely to be considerably more expensive than flying. The shortest journey from the UK takes about eighteen hours, with a standard second-class return ticket, incorporating Eurostar, costing around £200, if you book early. From London St Pancras International, take the Eurostar to Paris Gare du Nord, then walk over to Gare de l'Est for a train to Munich, where you change for Ljubljana.

#### A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are carbon-offset, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.

**Deutsche Bahn** is the best option for making seat reservations on continental trains and its website is an excellent resource for checking timetables, while **The Man in Seat Sixty-One** is invaluable on most aspects of rail travel in Europe.

## Rail passes

If you're taking in Slovenia as part of a more extensive trip around Europe, it may be worth buying a rail pass.

**InterRail** passes are available to European citizens and residents only. They come in first- and second-class over-26 and (cheaper) under-26 versions.

The passes can cover a combination of countries for five days within a fifteen-day period (£225 second class, £170 under-26), seven days within one month (£268 second class, £210 under-26) and ten days within one month (£318 second class, £249 under-26); other options cover travel for fifteen consecutive days (£352 second class, £288 under-26), 22 consecutive days (£412 second class, £318 under-26) or one month unlimited (£533 second class, £408 under-26). Pass holders also receive a discounted rate on the Eurostar service.

Another InterRail scheme, the **One-Country Pass**, allows you to travel for a certain number of days during a one-month period. For Slovenia, eight days in one month costs £126 for over-26s/£91 for under-26s; six days in one month £107/£80; four days £81/£59; three days £67/£49.

Non-European residents qualify for the **Eurail Pass**, which must be bought before arrival in Europe, or from RailEurope in the UK. The pass allows unlimited first-class travel in 28 European countries, including Slovenia, and is available in various increments: for example, a fifteen-day continuous pass costs US\$685 for over-26s/\$449 under-26s, 22 days (US\$883/\$576), and one month (US\$1084/\$707). Other Eurail options include a One-Country Pass and a Select Pass, which allows you to travel in two-, three- or four neighbouring countries.

## By car from the UK

**Driving to Slovenia**, a distance of some 1500km from London, is really only worth considering if you are planning to travel around Slovenia extensively (see p.24) or want to make stopovers en route.

Once across the channel – the easiest way being the drive-on drive-off shuttle services operated by **Eurotunnel**, or by **ferry** from Dover to Calais – the most direct route to Ljubljana (around 30hr at a leisurely pace with plenty of stops) is via Brussels, Stuttgart, Munich and Salzburg before crossing into Slovenia at the Karavanke Tunnel border.

**Route plans** can be obtained from the websites of Michelin ([viamichelin.com](http://viamichelin.com)), the AA ([theaa.com](http://theaa.com)) or the RAC ([rac.co.uk](http://rac.co.uk)).

## Agents and operators

There are a good number of tour operators offering holidays in Slovenia, most of which are geared towards **adventure activities** and the outdoors. Hiking and cycling trips are the most sought after, though ski and spa breaks are also gaining in popularity.

## RAIL CONTACTS

**Deutsche Bahn** [bahn.de](http://bahn.de).

**Eurail** [eurail.com](http://eurail.com).

**European Rail UK** [020 7619 1083](tel:+442076191083), [etrains4u.com](http://etrains4u.com).

**Eurostar UK** [08432 186186](tel:+4418432186186), international [+44 \(0\)1233 617575](tel:+441233617575), [eurostar.com](http://eurostar.com).

**Interrail** [interrail.eu](http://interrail.eu).

**Man in Seat Sixty-One** [seat61.com](http://seat61.com).

**Rail Europe UK** [0844 848 5848](tel:+4418488485848), [uk.voyages-sncf.com](http://uk.voyages-sncf.com).

## FERRIES/CHANNEL TUNNEL

**DFDS Seaways UK** [0871 522 9955](tel:+4418715229955), international [+44 330 333 0245](tel:+443303330245); [dfdsseaways.co.uk](http://dfdsseaways.co.uk).

**Eurotunnel UK** [0844 335 3535](tel:+4418443353535), international [+33 \(0\)321 002061](tel:+330321002061), [eurotunnel.com](http://eurotunnel.com).

**P&O Ferries UK** [0800 130 0030](tel:+35316869467), Ireland [+353 1 686 9467](tel:+35316869467); [poferies.com](http://poferies.com).

**Stena Line UK** [0844 770 7070](tel:+4418447707070), [stenaline.co.uk](http://stenaline.co.uk).

## TRAVEL AGENTS

**North South Travel UK** [01245 608291](tel:+44101245608291), [northsouthtravel.co.uk](http://northsouthtravel.co.uk).

Friendly travel agency offering discounted fares worldwide. Profits are used to support projects in the developing world, especially the promotion of sustainable tourism.

**STA Travel UK** [0333 321 0099](tel:+4418003333210099), [statravel.co.uk](http://statravel.co.uk); US [1 800 781 4040](tel:+18007814040), Australia [1 34782](tel:+61134782), New Zealand [0800 474400](tel:+64080474400), South Africa [0861 781781](tel:+270861781781). Worldwide specialists in independent travel; also student IDs, travel insurance, car rental, rail passes and more. Good discounts for students and under-26s.

**Trailfinders UK** [020 7368 1200](tel:+44102073681200), Ireland [021 464 8800](tel:+35310214648800);

[trailfinders.com](http://trailfinders.com). One of the best-informed and most efficient agents for independent travellers.

**Travel CUTS Canada** [1 800 667 2887](tel:+18006672887), US [1 800 592 2887](tel:+18005922887);

[travelcuts.com](http://travelcuts.com). Canada-based youth and student travel firm.

**USIT Ireland** [01 602 1906](tel:+3531016021906), [usit.ie](http://usit.ie); Australia [1 800 092499](tel:+611800092499);

[usitaustralia.com.au](http://usitaustralia.com.au). Student and youth travel specialists.

## SPECIALIST OPERATORS

**Balkan Holidays UK** [0207 543 5555](tel:+44102075435555), [balkanholidays.co.uk](http://balkanholidays.co.uk).

Southeastern Europe specialists, offering package deals to Bled, Bohinj, Kranjska Gora and Portorož. Ski packages, too.

**Crystal Holidays UK** ☎ 020 8939 0739, 🌐 [crystalholidays.co.uk](http://crystalholidays.co.uk).

Flight-only deals and summer and winter (ski) package deals to Bled, Bohinj, Bovec, Kranjska Gora and the Adriatic coast.

**Eastern Eurotours Australia** ☎ 1800 242353, 🌐 [easterneurotours.com.au](http://easterneurotours.com.au). Week-long escorted tours taking in the country's star sights, and a biking/hiking tour of eastern Slovenia.

**Explore Worldwide UK** ☎ 01252 883967, 🌐 [explore.co.uk](http://explore.co.uk). Eight-day tours of the alpine lakes and an eight-day cycling trip from Venice to Porec (Croatia).

**Just Slovenia UK** ☎ 01373 814230, 🌐 [justslovenia.co.uk](http://justslovenia.co.uk). UK's premier Slovenia specialist, offering tailor-made holidays, plus flights, accommodation (including tourist farms), sports and activity tours and car rental.

**Thermalia Travel UK** ☎ 01843 864688, 🌐 [thermaliaspas.co.uk](http://thermaliaspas.co.uk). Spa holiday specialists offering a range of treatment programmes at the Laško, Rogaška Slatina, Šmarješke Toplice and Strunjan spas.

**Vamos Travel UK** ☎ 01926 330233, 🌐 [vamostravel.com](http://vamostravel.com). Excellent Central and Eastern Europe specialist offering tailor-made tours to Ljubljana and Bled, multi-activity adventure holidays, ski breaks and more.

## ACTIVITY TOUR OPERATORS

**Activities Abroad UK** ☎ 01670 789991, 🌐 [activitiesabroad.com](http://activitiesabroad.com).

Week-long multi-activity holidays in the Julian Alps and Soča Valley, including canyoning, caving, cycling, kayaking and rafting.

**Exodus UK** ☎ 0203 733 8382, 🌐 [exodus.co.uk](http://exodus.co.uk). Wide range of eight-day tours, with multi-activity holidays in the Julian Alps, trekking and climbing trips (including an ascent of Mt Triglav), self-guided cycling holidays in the Alps and the Adriatic and family adventure holidays.

**Headwater UK** ☎ 01606 369418, 🌐 [headwater.com](http://headwater.com). Eight- and ten-day guided walking and cycling holidays (easy to moderate) in the Julian Alps and Adriatic.

**Hooked on Cycling UK** ☎ 01501 740985, 🌐 [hookedoncycling.co.uk](http://hookedoncycling.co.uk). Seven- to ten-day guided cycling trips, including the Julian Alps, the spa and wine regions of eastern Slovenia and a road trip that takes in Croatia.

**Intravel UK** ☎ 01653 617001, 🌐 [intravel.co.uk](http://intravel.co.uk). Seven- and fourteen-day walking holidays in the Julian Alps and lakes, plus trips that take in Italy too.

**Saddle Skedaddle UK** ☎ 0191 265 1110, 🌐 [skedaddle.co.uk](http://skedaddle.co.uk). Twelve-day self-guided cycling tours of the Julian Alps and Croatia's Dalmatian coast.

**Wilderness Travel US** ☎ 1800 368 2794, 🌐 [wildernesstravel.com](http://wildernesstravel.com). Eleven-day hiking trip (moderate to difficult) through western Slovenia, taking in the Julian Alps, Logar Valley, Soča Valley and Piran.

# Getting around

**Whether you travel by train, bus or car, almost any journey you take around Slovenia will be wonderfully scenic, and the country's tiny scale means that you'll never have to travel long distances. On the whole, trains and buses are clean, reliable and inexpensive, the latter**

**covering a far greater number of destinations. All that said, the country's overwhelmingly rural nature is perfect for driving, and brings the obvious advantages of allowing you to visit pretty much anywhere you please, and in your own good time.**

## By train

**Slovene railways** (*Slovenske železnice*) runs a smooth, efficient and inexpensive service, covering a modest 1200km, almost half of which is electrified. All the key lines, as well as international trains, run through Ljubljana.

**Trains** (*vlak*) are divided into **slow trains** (*lokalni potniški*, abbreviated to "RG" or "LP"), which stop at every halt; **intercity trains** ("IC"), which are faster, more comfortable, and stop at fewer stations; and the very fast **Inter City Slovenia** ("ICS") three-carriage tilting trains, which run between Maribor and Ljubljana (1hr 50min), stopping at Pragersko, Celje and Zidani Most – at weekends between mid-June and August there is also a daily ICS service between Maribor and Koper. Inter City Slovenia trains are air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible, with buffet cars. To Most na Soči there is also the car train from Bohinjska Bistrica (see p.114) and the museum train from Jesenice (see p.158). There are no domestic overnight trains.

Although there are no special carriages, **bicycles** (*kolo*) can be carried on all trains (except the ICS) for an extra €3.40.

Most **timetables** (*vozni red*) have translations in English; the yellow boards titled *Odhodi* are departures, the white boards titled *Prihodi*, arrivals. Timetable leaflets, which only indicate routes that trains from that particular station take, are often available from counters, but you can also check train information on the website 🌐 [slo-zeleznice.si](http://slo-zeleznice.si), which has good English explanations.

There are **left-luggage lockers** (*garderoba*); typically €2–3 for 24hr) at all the larger stations.

## Tickets

**Tickets** can be bought at the station (*železniška postaja*) up to two months in advance; staff invariably speak a high level of English. **Fares** are calculated by distance travelled, with a return ticket (*povratna vozovnica*) exactly double that of a single (*enosmerna vozovnica*). For example, a journey of 50km (on an Intercity train) costs around €7 (€10 first class), and a journey of 100km, €9.50 (€13.50 first class). ICS trains are more expensive; the second-class fare for the

journey between Ljubljana and Maribor (156km) is around €16.50 (€24.50 first class). **Concessionary fares** on domestic services are available for children under the age of 6 (free), and for children aged between 6 and 12 (half-price).

**Seat reservations** (*rezervacije*; €3.60) are obligatory for services marked on a timetable with a boxed R (in effect all ICS trains and some international services), and optional for those designated by an R.

If you board a train without a ticket (for a good reason) you will have to pay a supplement of €2.50. Otherwise, fare dodging will cost you €40. Most stations now accept credit cards, though on trains, payment can only be made using cash.

## By bus

Slovenia's **bus network** consists of a slightly confusing, but generally well-coordinated, array of small local companies. On the whole, buses are clean, comfortable and, except for some departing on a Friday evening, rarely crowded. They are able to reach significantly more destinations than trains, and services tend to be more frequent. That said, services, particularly those on rural routes, are dramatically reduced (or even nonexistent) at weekends, and especially on Sundays.

Towns such as Ljubljana, Maribor and Koper have large bus **stations** (*avtobusna postaja*) with computerized booking facilities where you can buy your tickets hours (if not days) in advance. Otherwise, simply pile onto the bus and pay the driver or conductor. If you need to store items of baggage in the hold you'll be charged a little extra. Like trains, **fares** are calculated according to distance travelled; typical fares are around €6 for 50km and €12 for 100km.

## By car

All things considered, **driving** in Slovenia is a joy. Despite the country's high level of car ownership, Slovenia's well-surfaced roads often seem blissfully

traffic-free, and you'll be endlessly distracted by the scenery. Neither is driving likely to tire you out, such are the short distances between destinations. If driving in the **mountainous regions**, bear in mind that some of the higher passes, such as the Vršič Pass in the Julian Alps, are often closed for days or weeks at a time during periods of heavy snowfall.

The country is crossed by two **motorways** (*avtocesta*): the A1 which runs in an east-west direction from Šentilj, just north of Maribor, down to Koper on the coast, and the A2 which runs north-south from the Karavanke Tunnel on the Austrian border to Obrežje on the Croatian border (and continuing down to Zagreb); both these motorways pass through Ljubljana. There are three other, shorter, motorways: A3 (Divača to Fernetiči), A4 (Slivinca to Draženci) and A5 (Dragučova, near Maribor, to Pince, on the Hungarian border). Expressways, of which there are six, are the same as motorways but without emergency lanes. Lesser **highways**, linking the major centres, are numbered with a single digit, while secondary or tertiary roads are identified by two- or three-digit numbers. In order to travel on motorways and expressways, you need a **vignette** (sticker); these are supplied if you are renting a car within Slovenia, but if you rent a car in a neighbouring country (or are bringing in your own), you will have to buy one; they cost €15 for a week and €30 for a month, and are sold at petrol stations and post offices, and general stores at the border crossings. Stiff fines are levied for travelling on a motorway without one.

**Petrol stations** (*bencinska črpalka*) can be found everywhere, even in the most rural backwaters. Although most open from around 6 or 7am to 9 or 10pm, there are quite a few 24-hour service stations, usually located on the outskirts of larger towns and cities, and around resort areas. Lead-free fuel (*neosvinčen bencin*) currently costs around €1.25 per litre. Credit cards are accepted at most stations.

In cities, **parking** in white zones (marked with white lines) is permitted for up to two hours (typically €0.60/€0.80, though it will cost more down on the coast), while you can stay in a "blue zone" for thirty minutes or one hour for free. *Brezplačno* means free parking. Parking in car parks (*parkirišče*) normally costs around €1 per hour, slightly more in resorts like Portorož. Most hotels have free parking for guests.

For information on any aspect of driving within Slovenia, including up-to-the-minute information on traffic conditions, the website of the **Automobile**

### BUS TIMETABLES

Bus timetables can be difficult to comprehend, as there's often little by way of English translation. The following letters indicate those days that buses operate: V (daily); D (Mon–Fri); D+ (Mon–Sat); SO (Sat); N (Sun); NP (Sun & holidays); ŠP (school days).

**Association of Slovenia** (Avto-moto zveza Slovenije or AMZS; [www.amzs.si](http://www.amzs.si)) is excellent. They also publish a 1:270,000 tourist road map of Slovenia.

In the event of a **breakdown**, call AMZS's Assistance-Information Service (SPI) on the 24-hour emergency number **1987** or **386 1 530 5353**. There are 24-hour technical centres in Celje, Koper, Kranj, Ljubljana, Maribor, Otočec and Postojna, with technical units (open 7am–8pm) in the other major towns; the addresses and telephone numbers of all centres can be found on the AMZS website. All accidents should be reported to the police on **113**.

### Rules of the road

Traffic drives on the right and **speed limits** for vehicles are 130km/h on motorways, 110km/h on expressways, 90km/h on secondary and tertiary roads, and 50km/h in built-up areas. Otherwise, the most important rules are the prohibitions against sounding the horn in a built-up area (unless to avert accidents) and using a hand-held mobile while driving. It is compulsory for driver and passengers to wear seatbelts, to use dipped headlights when travelling on all roads at all times, and to keep a triangular breakdown sign in the car. Between mid-November and mid-March you're required to carry snow chains.

If you are stopped by the police – you'll often see police vehicles on approaches to villages and built-up areas – you'll be required to show all your **documents**, so make sure you have them in the car at all times. The police are extremely hot on road traffic violations and any offence committed (speeding, not wearing a seatbelt, illegal parking and the like) is subject to a fine, which can be anything between €40 and €1200 depending on the offence; any fine must be paid at a post office or bank. It goes without saying that **drinking and driving** is a very bad idea; the permitted blood-alcohol level for drivers is 0.05mg per 100ml of blood, although you may still be liable to a €300 fine if caught with this amount. Any amount over this will incur a fine of anything up to €600.

### Car rental

**Renting a car** is simple enough, provided you are 21 or older, and hold a valid national driving licence. The **cheapest deals** are almost always online: expect to pay around €35–40 for a day's rental and around €180 for a week.

Most of the major companies have an outlet in Ljubljana, including the airport, as well as in some of the major towns and cities. You may find that

local companies, such as the excellent ABC Cars in Ljubljana ([www.europcar.si](http://www.europcar.si)), offer better deals. You may be able to take the car into neighbouring countries, although most companies charge extra for this.

### By bike

Slovenia's wonderfully varied topography presents endless opportunities for **cycling**. From the tough mountain climbs in Triglav National Park to the iron-flat landscapes of Prekmurje, there are a number of well-organized recreational routes and trails all over the country. Otherwise, cycling is permitted on all roads except motorways and expressways. Most urban centres have, to a greater or lesser degree, well-integrated cycle lanes or paths, though the traffic in towns and cities is rarely threatening. On a practical note, bikes can be taken onto trains, except ICS, for a small fee, while some buses might allow you to store your bike in the luggage compartment.

## Accommodation

**Slovenia has a terrific range of accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets; hotels abound and there is an increasing number of good-value pensions and guesthouses. Private rooms are also a good option, particularly along the coast and in star resorts like Bled and Bohinj, while a stay on a tourist farm provides an attractive, affordable and peaceful alternative. There's a decent spread of fabulous campsites, and some great hostels, many of which are distinctive and unusual.**

Whichever kind of accommodation you choose, **reservations** are advisable during high season in the capital and more popular places (June–Aug, or Dec–Feb in the ski resorts), or if you're heading somewhere with limited possibilities. Details of all Slovenia's hotels, private rooms, tourist farms, hostels and campsites are listed at [www.slovenia.info](http://www.slovenia.info).

### Hotels and pensions

Generally speaking, **hotel prices** in the capital, along the coast and in the major resorts, such as Bled and Bohinj, are substantially higher than elsewhere, especially in high season (June–Aug); similarly, in ski resorts such as Kranjska Gora, prices are ramped up between December and February.

## ACCOMMODATION ALTERNATIVES

Useful websites that provide alternatives to standard hotel and hostel accommodation include:

**Airbnb** @airbnb.com.

**CouchSurfing** @couchsurfing.org.

**Vacation Rentals by Owner** @vrbo.com.

Slovenia's city **hotels** tend to be heavily geared towards business travellers – in Ljubljana, for example, budget or mid-priced hotels are few, a situation common to other places like Maribor, Celje and Nova Gorica. Many of the hotels in key resorts such as Bled, Bohinj or Portorož are aimed squarely at package tourists – the same goes for the many spa hotels in Slovenia. That said, there are an increasing number of **family-run hotels and pensions** (*penzion*) which, in most cases, offer much better value than a hotel of a similar price and invariably come with a more personal touch. Some pensions are more commonly known as **gostišče** (not to be confused with a *gostilna*, which is an eating establishment), but these are usually found in smaller towns and more rural areas.

Just about every hotel now has free wi-fi, and most hotels include **breakfast** in the price. This is not always made clear, however, so it's worth checking when you book.

## Private rooms and apartments

Hostels aside, taking a **private room** (*zasebne sobe*) is the cheapest option, particularly if there are two of you sharing. Few towns and cities offer many private rooms, but there are plenty in the busier lake and coastal resorts. Rooms are usually **categorized** with either one or two stars; a one-star place is pretty basic and comes with shared shower and toilets – prices start at around €30 for a double in high season. A two-star (from €40 in high season) usually has private shower and toilet, and sometimes a television and air-conditioning. Breakfast, and tourist

tax (around €1.50/person), are not included in the price, and in some places, prices are subject to a thirty percent surcharge if you stay fewer than three nights.

Rented out in the same way as private rooms, **apartments** (*apartmaji*) are a reasonably cheap alternative, particularly if there are a few of you. A standard two-bed apartment (sleeping four) in Bohinj or on the coast will cost in the region of €75–85.

With the odd exception, for example in Bohinj, very few tourist offices deal with bookings for private rooms; these are usually handled by local agencies. Larger agencies such as Kompas (Kkompas.si), represented in several towns and resorts, also take advance bookings – we've listed the major branches in the Guide.

## Tourist farms

**Farm tourism** (*turističnih kmetij*) is a thriving sector in Slovenia, and if you're looking for a restful night, then these rural retreats are perfect. Note, though, that their very isolation means that they can often be difficult to reach if you don't have a car.

Despite a **classification system** (denoted by apples), there is often little distinction between the highest grade (four apples) and a lower grade, though most farms offer reasonably sized, modestly furnished rooms with bathroom. Farms with four apples invariably have larger, slightly better furnished rooms, sometimes with television. Although there are no hard and fast rules regarding **pricing**, as a guide a double room on a farm with three or four apples will cost around €50–60, two apples around €35–45, and one, or unclassified, farms around €30. All prices include breakfast, which is a wholesome affair, typically consisting of tea, coffee, juice, cereal, home-made bread, jam, cheese and ham; in some places you may also get a cooked breakfast. Most farms offer half board for about €8–10 extra, which is exceptional value given that the cooking is invariably superb – many also produce their own wine.

## ACCOMMODATION PRICES

We give a room price for all establishments reviewed in this Guide. Unless otherwise stated, this represents the price for **the cheapest available double or twin room in high season** (June–Aug, or Dec–Feb in the ski resorts). Consequently, at other times of the year, or during special promotions, you'll often find a room for a lower price than we quote. For **hostels** we give the price of the cheapest dorm bed – and, where appropriate, double room – in high season. At **campsites**, the price listed is for two adults, a pitch and a vehicle in high season, unless otherwise stated.

Activities, such as horseriding, cycling and tennis, are offered at some farms, while others allow you to help out – from baking bread or making jam to milking the cows or feeding the calves. The Association of Tourist Farms of Slovenia has an excellent website ([W farmtourism.si](http://farmtourism.si)) that lists and describes every one of the country's tourist farms.

## Mountain huts

There are some 175 **mountain huts** (*planinarski domovi*) scattered across Slovenia's hills and mountains, ranging from the most basic refuges with huge dorms and cold running water to more comfortable alpine villas offering cosier rooms, hot water and other amenities (see box, p.85). In any case, most huts are convivial places, where hikers share a beer or two and exchange information about trails or the weather before pushing on.

The majority of huts, especially those at higher altitudes, are open between June and September, while some are open a month or two longer than this, and a few year-round; if you're planning to spend any length of time in the more popular hiking areas, for example around Triglav, you'd be wise to book ahead. Depending on the type of hut and its location, you'll pay anything between €10 and €20 for a bed; UIAA-affiliated members are entitled to a discount. The website of the Alpine Association of Slovenia ([W pzs.si](http://w.pzs.si)) lists every hut, together with routes and approaches to the next lodge.

## Hostels and dorms

Slovenia has a decent spread of **youth hostels** (*mladinski hoteli*), which are invariably excellent and offer comprehensive amenities. As well as several innovatively designed hostels in Ljubljana (see p.69), notably *Celica* and *Tresor*, there are some superb hostels elsewhere, such as *Hostel Soča Rocks* in Bovec, *Hostel Situla* in Novo Mesto and *Hostel Pliskovica* in the Karst, to name just three. Most charge around €15–20 per person, sometimes with breakfast included, with discounts for HI card holders. The website [W youth-hostel.si](http://W.youth-hostel.si) lists most, though not all, of Slovenia's hostels.

Another possibility is **student dorms** (*dijaški dom*), which are generally of a decent standard, but usually only open in July and August once the students have packed up. Quite a few keep some beds aside during the rest of the year, but these are usually available at weekends only. Expect to pay around €10–15 for a bed.

### TOP FIVE CAMPSITES

**Adrenaline Check Eco Place**, Bovec. See p.143

**Camp Koren**, Kobarid. See p.150

**Lucija campsite**, Portorož. See p.195

**Podzemelj ob Kolpi**, Metlika. See p.242

**Ramšak**, Maribor. See p.274

## Camping

Slovenia has a healthy spread of **campsites** (*kampi*) across the country, almost all of which, whatever their size, are clean and well appointed. Sites are categorized with between one and three stars; the better ones, such as those in Bled, Kobarid and Portorož, have excellent amenities – more often than not with restaurants, shops, sports facilities and children's play areas. In addition, there are now some superb **glampsites** around the country, variously incorporating wooden cabins, huts or pods, lean-tos (open-sided huts with bed and mattress inside) and treehouses.

Expect to pay around €8–12 per person per night (slightly more at better sites); more often than not, there is no extra charge for pitch or car, but where there is, expect to pay an additional €1–2. Prices are slightly higher in July and August. The majority of sites are open from April or May to September or October, with a handful open year-round. Note that **camping rough** is illegal.

## Food and drink

**Slovenia straddles several culinary cultures, absorbing Austrian, Balkan and Mediterranean influences. Despite increasing internationalization of restaurants and cafés, there remains a strong native Slovene tradition based on age-old peasant recipes, while a new generation of exciting young chefs is redefining modern culinary trends. You'll find a list of food and drink terms in our language chapter (see pp.316–319).**

### Types of restaurant

You'll find plenty of eating options in the larger towns and resorts – smaller towns, however, may have few places to eat, of any description. The most common type of eating establishment is a **restavracija** (restaurant), of which there are plenty

**TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS****Gostišče Kapušin**, Krasinec. See p.243**Hiša Franko**, Kobarid. See p.150**Gostilna Krištof**, Predoslje, Kranj. See p.97**Majerija**, Slap. See p.165**Strelec**, Ljubljana. See p.72

in the larger towns and cities, especially in Ljubljana and Maribor. Invariably more atmospheric is a **gostilna**, an inn-type place that is usually, but not always, located on the outskirts of town and in more rural areas; along the same lines, a **gostišče** serves food and also has some accommodation. At most of these places you'll come across *malica*, a filling two- or three-course meal with drink, usually served from 11am or noon until 3pm, and costing around €4–6.

If possible, don't pass up the opportunity to eat on a **tourist farm**, where you'll find Slovenian home cooking at its finest, with ingredients usually harvested on the farm itself; make sure to call in advance, as many only open for non-guests at weekends.

Generally speaking, wherever you eat you'll find **service** exceptional, with courteous and friendly waiting staff who can speak good English.

**Breakfasts and snacks**

**Breakfast** (*zajtrk*) in an average hotel typically consists of cereal, bread or rolls with jam or marmalade, cheese and salami, and coffee from a machine – only in the better places will you be offered a full buffet, with cooked food (sometimes to order), pastries or croissants, fresh fruit and yoghurt, and filter coffee. Breakfast on a tourist farm is invariably an enjoyable, wholesome affair, with everything from bread and milk to jams and cheeses prepared on site. If you've not been offered breakfast at your lodging, head for a **bakery** (*pekarna*), most of which sell a decent range of croissants and sandwiches, or a *slastičarna* (patisserie).

The best places for **snacks** are *okrepčevalnice* (snack bars) and street kiosks, which dole out *burek*, a flaky and often very greasy pastry filled with cheese (*burek z sirom*) or meat (*burek z mesom*) and sausages – the latter come in various forms, by far the tastiest of which are *kranjska klobasa* (thick, spicy and slightly smoked).

Slovenia's **supermarkets** (*trgovina*) and delicatessens (*delikatesa*) are good places to stock up on sandwich and picnic ingredients, including local cheese (*sir*) and salami. You can buy fresh fruit and

vegetables here too, but, if possible, try to get your produce from outdoor markets (*tržnica*) or roadside stalls, and to buy your bread at a bakery.

**Slovenian cuisine**

As a rule, menus are dominated by **meat** dishes (*mesne jedi*), mostly schnitzels (*zrezek*), beef (*govedina*), pork (*svinjina*) and veal (*teletina*). One Slovene **speciality** is horse steak (*žrebičkov zrezek*), and neither are Slovenes squeamish about offal – liver (*jetra*) and grilled or fried brains (*možgani*) are popular in cheaper restaurants. The majority of menus in classier restaurants will often feature game, with Slovenes particularly partial to bear (*medved*), venison (*srna*), pheasant (*fazan*) and rabbit (*zajec*). In addition, the tasty southern Balkan meats *čevapčiči* (grilled rolls of minced meat) and *sarma* (cabbage stuffed with meat and rice) frequently make their way onto menus.

**Soup** (*juha*) is a standard **starter** – in Primorska try *jota* (beans and sauerkraut), and in Štajerska, *kisla juha* (pigs' knuckles and head with sour cream) – while **pasta** dishes, including numerous variations of home-made *njoki* (gnocchi), appear on many restaurant menus. One of the most **traditional Slovene dishes**, and once the staple diet of rural Slovenes, is *ajdovi žganci*, a buckwheat or maize porridge seasoned with crackling and usually served with sauerkraut.

On the coast you'll find plenty of **fish** dishes (*ribje jedi*), in particular mussels (*školjke*), shrimps (*škampi*) and squid (*lignji*). If you're anywhere near the Soča Valley (and in particular Kobarid, which has some of the country's best restaurants), do try the fabulous freshwater trout (*postrvi*) from the local Soča River, the king of which is the superb, and much sought-after, marble trout. The **Karst**, too, has its own unique culinary traditions, and is renowned above all for its fantastic dry-cured meats, such as *pršut*, which goes down a treat with the local Teran wine.

In Prekmurje, near Hungary, the most prominent dish is, unsurprisingly, goulash (*golaž*), a variant of which is *bograč*, a thick, spicy stew served in the eponymous copper pot; *segedin* is goulash with lashings of sauerkraut. Other fantastically tasty local dishes to look out for include *žlikrofi* from Idrija, small, boiled dumplings filled with potato, onion and bacon; and *frika*, a deliciously gooey, fried potato and cheese pie, typically prepared in the Tolmin region.

The Primorska region has a rich history of harvesting **olive oil**. Its groves are among the furthest north in Europe, and the oils typically have

a stronger, more pungent taste; producers regularly pick up awards from around the world. One of the most distinctive tasting olive oils, however, comes from northeastern Slovenia: pumpkin seed oil (*bučno olje*), whose rich, nutty taste and stunning dark green colour is quite something – it's delicious on ice cream.

The two most traditional Slovene **sweets** are *potica*, a doughy roll filled with nuts, tarragon and honey; and, from the Prekmurje region, *gibanica*, a delicious layered pastry that includes poppy seeds, walnuts, apples and cream. Otherwise, you'll find both strudel and *štruklji* (dumplings with fruit filling) on most menus; of the latter, the most delicious is the walnut-and-raisin-filled *Kobariški štruklji* from Kobarid. You're unlikely to leave Bled without wolfing down a portion of *kremšnita*, a substantial cream cake comprised of vanilla and whipped cream and topped with a layer of flaky pastry. Otherwise, you can't go wrong with *palačinke*, pancakes with a choice of fillings, or ice cream (*sladoled*), which is usually wonderful.

## Vegetarian food

While still not hugely exciting, options for **vegetarians** in Slovenia have improved markedly in recent times, though it goes without saying that you'll have a far better time of it in the better restaurants. Slovenian salads can be exceptional, matching perfectly the country's exquisite range of olive oils; a firm favourite is *regrad*, dandelion salad, which is much tastier than it sounds. Otherwise, Slovenian specialities to look out for are *štruklji* (dumplings with cheese or fruit filling), *ocvrti sir* (cheese fried in breadcrumbs) and *gobova rižota* (mushroom risotto) – the last is usually excellent; in the better restaurants, you'll find upmarket variations on the above and usually one or two other dishes.

## Drinking

When it comes to **drinking**, most Slovenes will head for a **café-bar**, or *kavarna*, where a range of cakes, pastries and ice cream is generally on offer, too. Coffee (*kava*) is usually served espresso-style – coffee with milk is *kava z mlekom* – though cappuccinos are invariably hit-and-miss, ranging from good to little more than a regular coffee with a dollop of whipped cream on top. A refreshing accompaniment, particularly on a hot day, is a glass of mineral water (*mineralna voda*), by far the most popular of which is Radenska, from the spa town Radenci. Tea (*čaj*) drinkers are in a minority here,

although there are a couple of fantastic little teahouses (*čajna hiša*) in Ljubljana and Maribor.

As well as café-bars, evening drinking also takes place in a more traditional *pivnica* (pub or beer hall) or *vinoteka* (wine cellar). There are an increasing number of dedicated wine bars (which often double up as shops), where you can taste and buy.

**Slovene beer** (*pivo*) has a good reputation. The two main breweries are Laško, based in the town of the same name and producer of Zlatorog (named after the mythical chamois), and the Ljubljana-based Union; once separate companies, these are now both owned by Heineken. Both also produce *temno pivo* (literally "dark beer"), a Guinness-like stout. More recently there has been a mushrooming of **micro-breweries** throughout the country, which put out an exciting, and refreshingly original, range of craft beers, including pale ales, IPAs, stouts and so on; breweries to look out for include Pelicon from Ajdovščina, Reservoir Dogs in Nova Gorica and Humanfish from Vrhnika just outside Ljubljana.

It is **wine** (*vino*), however, where Slovenia truly excels (see p.160, p.163, p.242 and p.273), and although it remains little known abroad – mainly due to the relatively small amounts produced, and limited amounts exported – it is superb. Any restaurant of decent standing will have a first-class wine list.

You shouldn't leave the country without trying one of the fiery **brandies**: *slivovka* (plum brandy), *vijamovka* (pear brandy), *sadjevec*, a brandy made from various fruits, and the gin-like juniper-based *brinovec*. And finally, look out for *medica*, a gorgeous honey liqueur from Carniola.

# Festivals

**The Slovenian calendar is studded with some marvellous festivals and events. While a good number take place in the larger cities such as Ljubljana and Maribor, there's an excellent spread of local events throughout the rest of the country. Neither are these entirely confined to the summer: Slovenia has several strongly rooted seasonal traditions, none more so than the Pust pre-Lenten carnival in February, which is perhaps the most uniquely Slovenian celebration.**

Most cities, and many of the larger towns, stage some form of **summer festival**, which invariably incorporates a colourful mix of classical and contemporary music, art and theatrical performances. There is also a terrific range of **music**


**festivals**, from jazz and rock to classical, the last being particularly prominent, both in the capital and elsewhere; a number of the country's castles stage classical music concerts on summer evenings. The **mountains**, too, are the setting for a handful of splendid events, be they related to Slovenia's outstanding natural heritage or its local customs.


The country's strong wine-growing tradition is honoured in its many **wine-related events**, which occur throughout the major wine-producing centres, such as Brda and Jeruzalem, between May and September; the main collective wine celebration is St Martin's Day, on November 11. Aside from the festivals listed below there are dozens of other, more local, events across the country, as well as festivals for the LGBT community (see p.34) and children (see p.37); we've mentioned the best in the Guide.

## A festival calendar

### JANUARY TO MARCH

**King Matjaž Snow Castle Festival** Črna na Koroškem, last weekend Jan. Hugely popular ice-castle-building competition in the Koroška mountains. See p.260.

**Kurentovanje Ptuj** Sun before Shrove Tues, and Shrove Tues;  [kurentovanje.net](http://kurentovanje.net). The most famous of Slovenia's pre-Lent Pusts, or carnivals, featuring riotous displays of masked revelry; the other major Pust carnivals take place in Cerklno and Cerklnica. See p.171 & p.209.

**World Ski-Jumping Championships** Planica (Kranjska Gora), end March;  [planica.si](http://planica.si). A high-octane weekend of top-class sport, music and lots of beer. See p.130.

### APRIL AND MAY

**Chocolate Festival Radovljica**, third weekend April;  [radolca.si](http://radolca.si). This two-day gathering is a chocolate-lover's dream. See p.102.


**Salt pans Festival Piran and Sečovelje**, end April. Taking place in town and at the salt pans themselves, this action-packed festival features exhibitions, parades and guided tours of the salt pans to celebrate the start of the salt-making season. See p.183.


**Druga Godba Ljubljana**, end May for one week;  [drugagodba.si](http://drugagodba.si). Superb alternative/world music festival. See p.74.

**International Wild Flower Festival Bohinj**, end May for two weeks. Celebrating the wild flowers of the Julian Alps, this colourful event features exhibitions, workshops, a flower market, and tours of flowers in their natural habitat. See p.124.


### JUNE

**Ljubljana Jazz Festival** Ljubljana, end June;  [ljubljanajazz.si](http://ljubljanajazz.si). Five-day festival of world-class music. See p.74.

**Festival Lent Maribor**, end June for two weeks;  [festival-lent.si](http://festival-lent.si). Massive arts gathering, comprising everything from street theatre to ballet. See p.275.

**Festival Seviq Brežice** Brežice and other venues across Slovenia, end June to end Aug;  [seviq-brezeice.si](http://seviq-brezeice.si). Prestigious Baroque music

festival, starring some of Europe's finest singers, orchestras and musicians. See p.234.


**Ljubljana Festival** Ljubljana, end June to mid-Sept;  [ljubljanafestival.si](http://ljubljanafestival.si). Top-notch opera, classical music, ballet and theatre in the capital's key cultural happening. See p.74.

### JULY

**Ana Desetnica Street Theatre** Ljubljana, early July. Colourful and enjoyable street theatre performances in the Old Town and around. Similar events take place in a dozen or so other towns and cities throughout Slovenia. See p.74.

**Beer and Flowers Festival Laško**, mid-July;  [pivo-cvetje.si](http://pivo-cvetje.si). More beer than flowers, which is not surprising given that it's home to the eponymous beer, plus good music to boot. See p.255.

**Bled Days Bled**, third weekend July. Fair and crafts stalls down by the lake, culminating in a spectacular fireworks display and thousands of candles on the lake. See p.111.

**Okarina Festival Bled**, last week July for two weeks;  [festival-okarina.si](http://festival-okarina.si). High-class international and domestic folk and world music gathering. See p.111.


**Metaldays Tolmin**, end July;  [metaldays.net](http://metaldays.net). Popular, small-scale, week-long metal-fest, starring bands from both home and abroad. See p.151.

**Primorska Summer Festival Izola, Koper and Portorož**, July to Aug. Open-air stage and street theatre performances, some of which take place in unusual locations such as a disused railway tunnel and the Sečovelje salt pans. See p.183.

### AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

**TrnFest** Ljubljana, throughout Aug. Cracking, small-scale arts festival. See p.74.

**Festival Radovljica** Early to mid-Aug;  [festival-radovljica.si](http://festival-radovljica.si). Well-regarded festival of ancient classical music. See p.102.

**Days of Poetry and Wine Ptuj**, end Aug;  [versoteque.com](http://versoteque.com). Superb, week-long gathering of international poets, alongside musical performances and wine tastings.


**Tartini Festival Piran**, end Aug;  [tartinifestival.org](http://tartinifestival.org). Two weeks of top-class classical fare in honour of the town's most famous former resident. See p.183.

**National Costumes Festival Kamnik**, second weekend Sept. Song, dance and colourful finery from Slovenia's multifarious regions. See p.81.

**Kravji Bal (Cow's Ball)** Lake Bohinj, second or third weekend Sept. Mass booze-up to celebrate the return of the cows from the mountains. See p.124.

### OCTOBER TO DECEMBER

**Festival of the Old Vine Maribor**, early Oct until Nov 11. Superb gastronomic offerings in this lively affair celebrating the ceremonial harvesting of the world's oldest vine. See p.275.

**St Martin's Day Countrywide**, Nov 11. Nationwide wine celebrations. **Lliffe** Ljubljana, mid-Nov;  [liffe.si](http://liffe.si). The Ljubljana International Film Festival is Slovenia's premier film gathering, showcasing domestic and international movies. See p.74.

**Christmas Celebrations Countrywide**. A month of yuletide celebrations kicks off on Dec 6 (St Nicholas's Day) with the giving of gifts to children.

# Sports and outdoor activities

**Given its small size and limited resources, Slovenia's sporting pedigree is impressive, many of its sportsmen and women having achieved notable successes in a number of sports since the split with Yugoslavia in 1991.**

The most high-profile sporting event in the Slovenian calendar is the **World Ski-Jumping Championships** at Planica in March (see p.130), and the country has produced a legion of fine **skiers** and **ski-jumpers** – the Yugoslav national ski team was almost always made up exclusively of Slovenes, and today Slovenia rates a number of world-class exponents in this field. The current superstar of Slovenian skiing is double Olympic gold medallist Tine Maze, while the extraordinary Peter Prevc is currently the world's greatest ski-jumper.

Away from the slopes, the country's finest moment came at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, when it captured its first-ever gold medal courtesy of the rowers Iztok Čop and Luka Špiš; indeed, **rowing** has been Slovenia's most prominent summer sport since the times of the former Yugoslavia, and now, as then, several major regattas are held on Lake Bled. The country's first ever track and field gold medallist was hammer thrower, Primož Kozmuž, at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The most popular **team sports** are **basketball**, **handball** and **ice hockey** – all traditionally very strong sports in the former Yugoslavia – and while Slovenia has been left somewhat in the slipstream of Serbia and Croatia, its teams still manage to perform creditably at European level.

In spite of a desperately weak domestic league, Slovenia's **footballers** have massively overachieved in recent years, qualifying for the 2002 World Cup in Japan and the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

## Outdoor activities

There are few more **active** nations in Europe than Slovenia, most of whose inhabitants begin trekking, climbing and skiing at a very early age. The country's mountains, forests, hills, rivers and lakes offer unlimited potential to indulge in a wide range of **outdoor pursuits** – hiking and skiing in the Julian Alps, whitewater rafting or kayaking in the Soča Valley, cycling through the rolling hills of Dolenjska,

### TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES

**Hiking** Julian Alps and Kamniške Alps.

See p.119

**Mountain biking** Kranjska Gora. See p.130

**Paragliding** Vipava Valley. See p.162

**Skiing** Vogel, Krvavec and Maribor

Pohorje. See p.128 & p.277

**Whitewater rafting** Soča River. See p.142

riding through the Logarska Dolina Valley, to name just a few. Moreover, just about any of these activities can be done as part of an organized group, usually with gear supplied.

### Skiing

First popularized in Slovenia in the seventeenth century, **skiing** unequivocally remains the nation's number-one sport. Uniformly well equipped, efficient and safe, the country counts more than a dozen major resorts (and many smaller ones), the best and most popular of which are Kranjska Gora, a good family resort and international competition venue near the Austrian border, Krvavec, near Kranj (very popular with weekenders from Ljubljana), Vogel, near Bohinj, and Pohorje, on the outskirts of Maribor – this the country's largest skiing area. Most resorts also offer good **snowboarding** facilities, while **cross-country skiing** is another Slovene institution, the main venue being the Pokljuka Plateau near Bled. We've covered the practicalities of local skiing with individual accounts in the Guide.

### Hiking and climbing

Slovenia is traversed by more than 7000km of marked paths; for the majority of **climbers and hikers** the main destination is the **Julian Alps**, at the heart of which is **Mount Triglav** (2864m), the country's highest peak. Along with the Julians, the **Karavanke mountains** and the **Kamniške-Savinja Alps** (both of which count numerous peaks topping the 2500m mark) offer the country's most varied and challenging climbs and hikes. For the less energetic, there's more moderate walking in the non-alpine tracts of the **Pohorje massif** near Maribor, and the **Snežnik hills** south of Postojna along the Croatian border. There's also gentler rambling territory south of Triglav National Park in the sub-alpine hills of Cerkno and Idrija, and in the deep forests of Dolenjska. There is more detail on the practicalities of hiking in Slovenia throughout the Guide.