TOUR CODE

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ADVENTURESABROAD

THE ADRIATIC

Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina & Montenegro

17 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Ljubljana, Slovenia***

Arrive in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

NOTE: This tour has changed since the printing of our general catalogue.

Overnight Ljubljana. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Ljubljana: City Tour***

Today we enjoy a walking tour of "Bela Ljubljana". This was the nickname given to this delightful city after it was entirely rebuilt following a major earthquake in 1511. A walk through the streets of this charming city reminds one of Vienna and Prague. However, Ljubljana is tiny in comparison, and easily visited on foot. We go up to the highest point of the city to visit the 16th century castle; the castle today houses a Virtual Museum, which gives a superb overview of the city's history, and a climb up the main tower affords a wonderful panorama of the town and surrounding mountains.

We then visit the old town by foot, stopping along the way to see the Parliament building, university, beautiful squares, and unique bridges. We also see the city's Cathedral, with its modern bronze doors commemorating the history of Slovenia and its struggle towards independence. A tour of Ljubljana would not be complete without a stroll through the great outdoor markets, where locals come to buy fresh mountain herbs and flowers, wild mushrooms, and fresh fruit and vegetables from nearby farms.

Overnight Ljubljana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Ljubljana - Skofja Loka - Kropa - Bled***

Today we drive through the countryside, with small hamlets and farms scattered across the green rolling hills. This area has some of this new nation's oldest inhabited settlements, three of which we will visit today. Our first stop today is Skofja Loka, or "Bishop's Meadow," one of the most charming towns in Slovenia with its historic streets, houses and its castle perched high above. We will wander the Mestni Trg, the main street of the town, see the Granary, St. James' Church, Homan house, and visit the 13th century castle, which today houses the finest ethnographic museum in the country.

Our drive continues through small hamlets, with traditional farmhouses and steepled churches, where crops of potatoes, corn, turnips and hay are grown. Our next stop is Kropa, a tiny town on the Kroparica River which was historically famous for its iron forging industry. The forges here produced iron objects of all kinds were traded throughout Europe. From the huge spikes which were used in the construction Venice, to the tiny tacks used in Austrian mountaineering boots, Kropa produced over 130 varieties of nails.

We drive through spectacular scenery to Bled, where we will spend two nights. Bled is located on the edge of an

emerald green glacial lake. The views upon approach are stupendous, with the town's castle perched above, Bled Otok, the small island with a church in the center of the lake, all set against the spectacular backdrop of the Karavanke Mountains and Julian Alps.

Overnight in Bled. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Bled - Lake Bohinj - Bled*

Reflecting the high mountain peaks, Lake Bled has always been considered sacred by the locals. Our first visit is to the 11th century castle which houses a small museum and provides magnificent views of town, lake and mountains. After our visit we will catch a small traditional boat, or pletna, to visit the country's only island, Bled Otok. On the island we will visit the Church of St. Mary of the Assumption, also known as "Our Lady of the Lake". Legend has it that if you make a wish while ringing the bell your wish will come true.

This afternoon we drive through lush green valleys to Bohinj, one of the gateways to the Julian Alps. The name Bohinj refers to the entire valley and its numerous small settlements. Lake Bohinj is the largest permanent lake in Slovenia, and protected from development. It is fed by the Savica waterfall, which Slovenia's greatest poet, Francis Preseren celebrated in his poem "Baptism at the Savica Waterfall". We will visit the Church of St. John the Baptist, famous for its beautiful frescoes, located on the lake's edge in the charming town of Bohinjska Bistrica.

Further along the lake's shores we will take a cable car which climbs 1537m / 5,072 ft up to Mt Vogel, the only mountain ski resort within Triglav National Park. On a clear day we can view the peaks of the Julian Alps, some of the highest in the country, and see Mt. Triglav, a holy mountain and national symbol of Slovenia. There is also a spectacular panorama of Lake Bohinj and basin.

Upon our return to Bled, you may choose to walk around the shores of Bled, or even swim (!); an excellent path takes you on a 6km (3.75 mi) walk around the lake.

Overnight in Bled. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Bled - Bovec*

This morning travel to Triglcav National Park. Our First stop will be at Kranjska Gora, popular winter and summer tourist resort for a short walk. Then continue via Italy and the mountain pass of Predil into the Log pod Mangrtom town -- a small town that was devastated by an avalanche in 2000. From there continue to Kluže fortress situated on the scenic gorge of Koritnica River.

We turn left in one of the most beautiful valley of the region -- the Trenta Valley and follow the Soca River to Trenta Museum at the bottom of the pass, dedicated to the geology, flora, fauna and history of Triglav National Park. It also has an exhibit dedicated to the mountain guides, shepherds and woodsmen of the region.

After our visit, we drive to the pretty town of Bovec nestled in the Soca Valley and near the Kanin ridge, the highest ski resort in the country.

Overnight in Bovec. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Bovec - Kobarid - Predjama - Piran*

Today we continue to Kobarid and the excellent Kobarid Museum. Since its inauguration in 1990, it won the Council of Europe prize in 1993 for Best Museum, and draws over 60,000 visitors annually. The museum is dedicated to the Isonzo or Soca Front, which witnessed some of the greatest mountain battles in history. Hundreds of thousands were killed here during 1915-1917; Earnest Hemingway described the Italian retreat in his book, "A Farewell to Arms".

After the museum, we will go up to the Italian Charnel house and Church of St. Antony, located on a hill above Kobarid town. It houses the bones of over 7,000 Italian soldiers killed here during World War I. The church was redesigned in the 20th century by an Italian architect, when the bones were gathered from the surrounding valleys and placed here; Mussolini himself dedicated the Church and Charnel house in 1938.

Driving the along the banks of the Soca Rriver, we make our way out of Alpine territory to the region and plateau of Primorska. The Soca is a valley of wonderful colours, full of waterfalls, pools, ravines and canyons, with its own distinct flora and fauna. The impossibly blue-green Soca River flows over white gravel and through a fairy-tale landscape with a stunning vista at every turn.

Our next stop is Predjama Castle, located in the middle of a 123m (403 ft) high, overhanging, limestone cliff, in the entrance of a cave. The cave was utlitised by a robber baron from centuries ago to become his stronghold. It's been described as a "masterpiece of medieval ingenuity, courage, cunning and defiance". Its white walls, roofs, turrets and chimneys jutting from the mountainside, built onto solid rock, make it the most unique and picturesque fortress you will ever come across in Europe.

We continue to Piran, Istria, beautifully located on the Adriatic. The town resembles a large open-air museum, with medieval architecture and a rich cultural heritage. Narrow streets and compact houses give the town its special charm. Depending on our timing today, we will have a leisurely walking tour of Piran either today or tomorrow morning.

Overnight in Piran. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Piran, Slovenia - Porec, Croatia - Rovinj - Pula - Opatija*

We depart Piran and continue by road across the border into Croatia where our first stop is Porec, a pretty seaside town dating back to the Roman period. We will walk through the ancient narrow lanes, see the ruins of the Roman Temple of Augustus, and visit the Euphrasian Basilica. This church houses some of the finest Byzantine mosaics in the world, comparable to those in Ravenna. The Basilica is listed among many other Croatian masterpieces of art and architecture, as a protected UNESCO World Heritage site.

We continue to the historic town of Rovinj where we have a break for lunch. The population of the this beautiful fishing town still speaks Italian as well as Croatian. Shops lining the streets of the old town sell Istrian specialties, including fine wines, olive oils, and truffles. We visit the church of St. Euphemia, the largest Baroque building in Istria, and walk through the picturesque vegetable and fruit market at the base of the citadel.

We also stop in Pula, called Pola by the first Illyrian settlers and Polensium by the Romans. We visit one of the most impressive sites in town, the amphitheater, located near the harbour. Built entirely of local limestone, the amphitheater was designed to host gladiatorial contests and could accommodate up to 22,000 spectators.

We finish our day in Opatija, the oldest established and still one of the most popular Croatian resorts. A Rijeka businessman built the first villa here in 1844, and after a visit by the trend-setting wife of the Austrian Emperor, the town was promoted as a handy health resort for aristocratic Austrians.

(Depending on hotel availability, we may overnight in Opatija or continue the short distance to Rijeka.)

Overnight in Opatija or Rijecka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Opatija - Zagreb: City Tour*

Today we travel inland to the capital, Zagreb and have a city tour on arrival, including Governor Jelacic Square, undoubtedly the very heart of the capital. Located in Zagreb's center, the square is dominated by the statue of Josip Jelacic who became the governor of the triple Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia on the 23rd of March, 1848.

Zagreb is located on the intersection of several important routes betwen the Adriatic coast and Central Europe. It offers visitors the Baroque feel of the Upper town, picturesque open-air markets, and various kinds of shops.

Overnight in Zagreb. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Zagreb - Plitvice Lakes*

This morning we depart for Plitvice, where 16 lakes, each at a different level, join each other in a series of cascading waterfalls. Surrounded by dense woods, this is a region of unique beauty. The travertine terraces have been continuously reforming themselves over 10,000 years as calcium carbonate dissolves and settles, forming barriers and cascades. The lakes are also home to a huge variety of flora and fauna including 120 species of birds and a variety of mammals and fish species. The entire area is protected as one of UNESCO's Natural World Heritage Sites.

Wooded paths at the edge of pine, beech and fir forests follow the successions of lakes and waterfalls which we will follow on our walk* around the Lower and Upper Lakes, ending with a short boat ride across the largest lake.

* Good walkers will have no trouble with the well-maintained trails. If you have concerns about your suitability, please have a word with your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Plitvice. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Plitvice Lakes - Zadar - Trogir - Split*

Today we travel to the coast via Zadar, the ancient capital of Byzantine Dalmatia.

This large city has its historic center crowded on a small piece of land jutting into the Adriatic When it was occupied by the Germans in 1943, Allied bombings destroyed about 60% of the city. Zadar was rebuilt one more time, as it had been many times over its tumultuous history; it is for this reason that one can find a variety of architectural styles, from Roman Corinthian columns to Romanesque churches. We enter the city through one of the Venetian gates and proceed to the Roman Forum, the Church of St. Donatus and Cathedral of Anastasius, and visit the Archaeological Museum, with a fine collection of artifacts dating from Roman and medieval times. NOTE: In the event that the Archaeological Museum is closed, due to erratic opening hours, the Museum will be replaced with a visit of the Treasury, a collection of relics attended to by the order of Benedictine nuns in the Church and Nunnery of St. Mary.

We continue on to the medieval town of Trogir, one of the most beautiful and popular towns of the Dalmatian Coast. The heart of this Venetian walled town is Narodni Trg, with its white stone paved square, Cathedral, Communal Palace and Loggia. We visit the Cathedral of St. Lawrence, built between the 13th and 15th centuries by Slavic masters. The entire town has been preserved as yet another UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We continue to Split (ancient Spalato), the second largest city of Croatia. The historic city center actually lies in the walls of the enormous retirement Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, built between 295-305 AD. The palace

served as a palace, military fortress, and later, a fortified town. The city is enclosed by huge walls, pierced by 4 main gates, one on each side of the rectangular plan. Later you may wish to walk the promenade along the harbour when it comes alive with locals taking an evening stroll or relaxing in the seaside cafes outside the ancient palace walls.

Overnight in Split. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Split - Hvar*

This morning we have a walking tour through the heart of ancient Split. We will visit the cryptoporticus (underground vaults) of the Palace, the Mausoleum and Church of St. Donatus, the Peristyle court, and explore the ancient narrow streets still paved with the lustrous white stone of Brac Island. We will also exit the Golden Gate of the palace to see the huge bronze statue of St. Gregory of Nin made by Ivan Mestrovic, the most celebrated sculptor of modern Croatia.

Later we take a short ferry ride to the island of Hvar. En route we will pass the island of Brac, which provided the lustrous white stone for the construction of the Cathedral of Sibenik, Diocletian's Palace at Split, the Cathedral of Liverpool, and the White House in Washington, DC.

The island of Hvar receives 2,724 hours of sunshine per year, more than anywhere else in Croatia, and is thus called the "Island of the Sun". Greeks from Paros first settled on the island in the 4th century BC in Pharos, the modern town of Stari Grad. In the 13th century, the capital of the island was transferred to the town of Hvar (a mutation of Pharos in Slavic) and prospered during the 3.5 centuries of Venetian rule. This picturesque town and marina is alive with the constant hum of activity.

Overnight in Hvar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Hvar: Walking Tour*

This morning we have a walking tour through narrow streets to the 15th century Franciscan Monastery, visit the Renaissance cloister, the old rectory that today houses a collection of lace, manuscripts and books; and the church with its remarkable collection of paintings. We visit St Stephen's Cathedral, the Arsenal, a thick walled fortress overlooking the harbour. Europe's oldest community theater, opened in 1612, is located inside the Arsenal.

The afternoon is free for independent exploration on this beautiful island. For those interested, there is an excellent hike up to the Venetian castle above town.

Overnight in Hvar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Hvar, Croatia - Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina*

Today we depart Hvar by ferry to Drvenik from where we drive along the coast to Opuzen where we turn inland to the border crossing at Metkovic. After crossing into Bosnia, we drive to Pocitelj where we have a chance to stop and discover the exquisite blend of Mediterranean and Oriental architecture. From Pocitelj we will continue our drive to Mostar arriving in the afternoon.

Despite great damages suffered in the last war, the city on the emerald green River Neretva has preserved a great part of its authentic Oriental architecture and the way of life conceived on the boundaries of civilizations.

Overnight in Mostar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina: Walking Tour - Dubrovnik, Croatia*

We begin our day with a walking tour of Mostar. Our tour will include a visit to the ancient city dating to the 16th/17th centuries, a visit inside a traditional house dating to this period, and a visit to the recently rebuilt Mostar Bridge, the emblem of the city. After our tour of Mostar, we will begin our journey to Dubrovnik. En route we will stop at the historic, fortified town of Ston. We arrive into Dubrovnik in the late afternoon.

The history of Dubrovnik, or ancient Ragusa, begins in the 7th century, when it was under the protection of the Byzantine Empire. In the 12th century Ragusa, formerly an island, merged with mainland settlements and the channel between was filled in with carted-in material. Today this area is the main street of the old city named the Placa or Stradun. After shaking off the yoke of Venice in 1385, Ragusa became an independent republic. It remained one of the most powerful maritime powers in the Mediterranean for over four centuries (until 1808). Ragusa was the link between the Mediterranean and the Balkans and hence developed into an important centre of trade and shipping. Dairy products, wax, honey, timber, coals, salt, silver, lead, copper, wine, oil, fish and slaves were all traded. During the "Golden Age" of Ragusa in the 16th century, she had the 3rd largest merchant fleet in the world and consulates in over 50 countries. After changing hands a number of times, the city was finally ceded to Croatia (former Yugoslavia) and in 1918 the Slavic name of Dubrovnik was officially adopted.

Overnight in Dubrovnik (outside Old Town). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Dubrovnik - Montenegro - Dubrovnik*

Our encounter with one of Europe's newest countries begins in Boka Kotorska, the only fjord in the Mediterranean, a bay of 32 km / 20 miles cut deep into the stone tissue of the Orjen and Lovcen mountains. We will drive along the coast to Kotor, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. En route to Cetinje, the old royal capital, we will stop to sample the famous local cured meats, cheeses, and honey. Cetinje, the cultural centre of Montenegro, will be our next stop. Our last stop will be the small town of Budva, presumed to have been founded by the Phoenicians, and today the main tourist centre on the Montenegrin coast.

Return to Dubrovnik in the evening.

Remember your passports for today's excursion!! Border delays are possible and are taken into account when planning the content and pacing of today's programme.

Overnight in Dubrovnik. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Dubrovnik: Walking Tour*

This morning features a walking tour of Dubrovnik's historic center. Dubrovnik has been called "Croatian Athens" and the "Pearl of the Mediterranean" for its astounding beauty, sophisticated history and culture, and prosperity.

Over the course of its tumultuous history, the city had to be extensively reconstructed; the earthquake of 1667 destroyed much of the city; and in recent memory, the town was bombarded by over 2,000 shells in 1991-2. After great international efforts, the city has been restored to its former glory, with its towering fortifications, magnificent medieval architecture, red tiled roofs, winding paved streets and picturesque harbours.

Today we visit the Franciscan Monastery, housing Europe's first pharmacy, the Rector's Palace, the Cathedral and

Sponza Palace; en route we will see many famous landmarks including Onofrio's fountain, the Clock Tower, Roland's Column and the Church of St. Blaise, the patron saint of Dubrovnik.

Your afternoon is free to enjoy this memorable place. You may wish to walk the walls of Dubrovnik, considered by many to be a highlight of our stay. The total circuit is nearly 2km / 1.25 mi, and from the bastions you will have magnificent views of the city's monuments, including the Minceta Tower, Revelin Tower, and the mighty fortress of St. Lawrence, with walls 12m / 40 feet thick!

Overnight in Dubrovnik. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Departure*

Departure from Dubrovnik.

SRETAN PUT! Meal plan: Breakfast.