

THE ADRIATIC

Slovenia, Croatia, & Bosnia and Herzegovina

17 days

Created on: 22 Dec, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Arrive in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

Overnight Ljubljana.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Ljubljana - Skofja Loka - 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 Radovljica, a medieval town with a moat and views of the Karavanke Alps and the Julian Alps. We will visit the Pharmacy and Alchemy museum where we will embark on solving "alchemist tasks".

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Bled & Lake Bohinj

Reflecting the high mountain peaks, Lake Bled has always been considered sacred by the locals. Our first visit is to the 11th century castle

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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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Bled - Kluze Fortress - Kobarid

Our journey takes us through the mountain pass of Predil into the Log pod Mangrtom town -- a small town that was devastated by an avalanche in 2000. Our first stop today will be at Kluze fortress situated on the scenic gorge of Koritnica River.

We then drive to the pretty town of Bovec nestled in the Soca Valley and near the Kanin ridge, the highest ski resort in the country. We finish our day just down the road at Kobarid, known for the Battle of Caporetto where the Italian retreat was documented by Ernest Hemingway in his novel 'A Farewell to Arms.'

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.

Overnight in Kobarid.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Kobarid - Predjama - Postojna Caves - Piran

Driving the along the banks of the Soca River, 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.

We continue through the limestone plateau, or "karst" region en route to the Postojna Caves where we have a guided visit. This region was once submerged by a deep sea; today the landscape is characterized by subterranean rivers which have carved out magnificent caves, and by the rich red soil deposits in poljes, the depressions left when caverns collapse. The cave is 27 km (17 miles) long and over 2 million years old, and consists of a series of caverns, halls and passages with enormous stalactites and stalagmites. The caves also have their own unique ecosystem, flora and fauna; the most famous creature endemic to the caves is the so called Proteus Anguinus, or "human fish", a small pink, blind type of salamander equipped with both gills and rudimentary lungs.

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 utilised 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.

Overnight in Piran.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Piran, Slovenia - Porec, Croatia - 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 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 Rijeka.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Opatija - Zagreb: City Tour

Today we travel inland to the capital, Zagreb.

From its intriguing architecture to nearby natural havens, this underrated European capital has something for everyone. Unlike most western European capitals, Zagreb's cityscape is a fascinating mixture of classic Austro-Hungarian architecture and gritty socialist structures. Some of the city's most emblematic buildings include the iconic, colourful roof of St Mark's Church and the twin spires of Zagreb Cathedral which tower above. With an electric mix of Italian, Turkish, and Austro-Hungarian influences, even its coffee culture here is steeped in history.

Zagreb is located on the intersection of several important routes between 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. Perched on two small hills encircled by Renaissance-era walls, Zagreb's oldest district is home to many of the city's main attractions. This picturesque medieval part of the Croatian capital boasts its most impressive architecture and great views over the rest of the city.

Today's city tour* features 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.

In the District of Gradec, we take a funicular from the Lower Town to the Upper, which for centuries has connected the old part of town with Ilica Street, the main shopping area. We will then stroll back down to Kaptol, St Catherine's Cathedral, Church of St Mark, St. Stephen's Church, and Lotrscak Tower.

After our tour you will have time at leisure to explore, shop, relax, visit museums etc.

* PLEASE NOTE: In 2000 the region experienced an earthquake which damaged 2,000 buildings in Zagreb, many of which are still closed off for repairs. This means that many/most of the buildings, including museums have been closed without a clear sense of when they may re-open. This, in part, is why we have included a trip to the nearby town of Samobor during our stay in Zagreb.

Overnight in Zagreb.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Zagreb: Day Trip to Samobor

This morning we depart the capital and travel by bus to Samobor, a charming small village is located just a short drive from Zagreb.

A famous writer, Antun Gustav Matoš, once said that Samobor was the most Croatian of all Croatian towns. This charming little town near the border has officially been a town since 1242 when the King Bela IV awarded it with a charter giving it the status of a free royal market town. A special spirit and atmosphere nurtured in Samobor to his day is largely the result of the efforts made by a number of local people and settlers who felt at home in. After an informal orientation, you will be free to explore on your own and find some lunch before we head back to Zagreb mid-afternoon.

A good place to start is King Tomislav Square, a true highlight of the town. The square dates back to the 19th century, and today this historic square is filled with cafes, boutique shops, and restaurants. Standing tall in the center of town is the beautiful yellow-coloured Parish Church of Saint Anastazija. This church is one of the earliest Baroque style churches in Croatia, and was built in 1675, upon the site of an earlier wooden church that was built in the 14th century. The church is known for its lovely Baroque style, stained glass, and for its famous wounded Christ sculpture. The church is also adjacent to the park Domovinske Zahvalnosti, a nice green space in the town.

Sitting atop Tepec Hill is the ruins of the Samobor Castle. The castle was first built between 1260-1264 by supporters of the Czech King, Ottokar II of Bohemia who was at war with the Hungarian empire. The last residents of the castle left in the 18th century, which has left it to the current state it is in today as castle ruins. To get up to the castle, you will need to hike around 20-30 minutes. The hike is steep and it is necessary to wear sturdy shoes. At the top, you'll have a chance to explore the historic castle ruins, which is a really unique experience.

Samobor Museum is located in the town center and is a small museum with artifacts about Samobor's history. It doesn't take very long to visit this museum, but is a nice stop to learn more about the area.

One of the big draws of Samobor is food! The region offers a variety of dishes, including local trout, sausages, salami, special mustard, mushrooms, pork chops, kotlovina (meat prepared outdoors in a cast iron pot), and local miners' cake - greblica. The town is most famous for its kremsnita cream cake. Although you can sample this delicious custard cream cake all over Croatia, the Samobor version is fluffy and airy, and you eat it while its still slightly warm.

Return to Zagreb.

Overnight in Zagreb.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Zagreb - Plitvice Lakes

This morning we depart for Plitvice, a UNESCO World Heritage site and a breathtaking natural wonder, renowned for its stunning cascade of 16 terraced lakes, each more mesmerizing than the last.

As we delve deeper into the park, we'll be surrounded by lush, verdant forests, where towering pines, beeches, and firs create a serene and awe-inspiring ambiance. The lakes, formed over millennia by the gradual deposition of calcium carbonate, shimmer in various shades of blue and green, creating a truly magical spectacle.

Our leisurely walk will take us along well-maintained wooden pathways, offering panoramic views of the cascading waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes. We'll explore both the Upper and Lower Lakes, each with its own unique charm. The Upper Lakes are characterized by their smaller size and numerous waterfalls, while the Lower Lakes are larger and more tranquil, perfect for a peaceful boat ride across the largest lake.

As we wander through this natural wonderland, we'll have the opportunity to encounter a diverse array of flora and fauna. Keep an eye out for the park's 120 bird species, including majestic eagles and elusive owls. The lakes are also home to a variety of fish species, such as trout and carp, as well as various mammals like deer and wild boar.

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

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Tour Leader.

Overnight in Plitvice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Plitvice Lakes - Zadar - 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 13th century Saint Lawrence Gothic cathedral in Trogir, esteemed as a masterpiece. Then it's on 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Hvar: Walking Tour

Hvar, often called the "Croatian Riviera," is a stunning island in the Adriatic Sea, renowned for its sun-kissed beaches, picturesque towns, and rich history. The island's capital, also named Hvar, is a charming coastal town with a vibrant atmosphere.

Our morning tour offers a glimpse into Hvar's historical and cultural heritage. The 15th-century Franciscan Monastery is a particularly fascinating site, housing a Renaissance cloister and a collection of rare manuscripts and books. The church within the monastery boasts an

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impressive collection of paintings. St. Stephen's Cathedral is another highlight, showcasing the island's architectural and religious significance.

The afternoon is yours to explore Hvar at your own pace. You could wander through the town's narrow, winding streets, admiring the Venetian-style architecture and boutique shops. Or, for the more adventurous, a hike up to the Venetian castle offers breathtaking panoramic views of the town and the surrounding islands.

Overnight in Hvar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Hvar, Croatia - Pocitelj, Bosnia-Herzegovina - Mostar

Today we embark on a scenic route from the sun-kissed island of Hvar to the enchanting city of Mostar. Our adventure begins with a ferry ride to the charming coastal town of Drvenik. From there, we'll wind our way along the picturesque Dalmatian coast, taking in breathtaking views of the Adriatic Sea.

As we approach the border crossing at Metkovic, we'll turn inland and enter the captivating region of Herzegovina. Our first stop will be the historic town of Pocitelj, a true gem nestled along the Neretva River. This picturesque town is a fascinating blend of Mediterranean and Oriental influences, evident in its stunning architecture, including the iconic Ottoman-era fortress and the charming old bazaar.

After exploring the timeless beauty of Pocitelj, we'll continue our journey to Mostar, a city that has captivated visitors for centuries. Despite the significant damage it suffered during the recent wars, Mostar has undergone remarkable restoration efforts and has reclaimed its position as one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most iconic destinations.

Upon arrival in Mostar, we'll be greeted by the enchanting sight of the iconic Stari Most (Old Bridge), a magnificent Ottoman-era bridge that spans the emerald-green Neretva River. This historic bridge, along with the charming old town, is a testament to the city's rich cultural heritage and resilience.

Overnight in Mostar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 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. We also include the Museum of War and Genocide Victims, a poignant memorial dedicated to the victims of the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Through harrowing exhibits, personal accounts, and multimedia displays, the museum sheds light on the atrocities committed during the conflict.

After our tour of Mostar, we will begin our journey to Dubrovnik with a stop in the fortified town of Ston en route. 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 (just outside Old Town).

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Included Meal(s): 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 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.

We also walk the walls of Dubrovnik, considered by many to be a highlight of our visit. 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!

Your afternoon is free to enjoy this memorable place.

Overnight in Dubrovnik.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Departure

Departure from Dubrovnik.

SRETAN PUT!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast