

Slovenia

It's a tiny place – there's no doubt about that – with a surface area of just over 20,000 sq km and only two million people. But 'good things come in small packages', and never was that old chestnut more appropriate than in describing Slovenia (Slovenija), an independent republic bordering Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia.

Slovenia has been dubbed a lot of different things by its PR machine – 'Europe in miniature', 'The sunny side of the Alps', 'The green piece of Europe' – and they're all true. Slovenia has everything, from beaches, snow-capped mountains, hills awash in grape vines and wide plains blanketed in sunflowers to Gothic churches, baroque palaces and Art Nouveau civic buildings. Its incredible mixture of climates brings warm Mediterranean breezes up to the foothills of the Alps, where it can snow in summer. And with more than half of its total area covered in forest, Slovenia really is one of the 'greenest' countries in the world. And in recent years it has become Europe's activities playground.

Among Slovenia's greatest assets, though, are the Slovenes themselves – welcoming, generous, multilingual and broad-minded. Somehow they have managed to combine a Germanic work ethic with an easy-going, Mediterranean *joie de vivre*.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 20,273 sq km
- **Capital** Ljubljana
- **Currency** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.58;
¥100 = €0.67; NZ\$1 = €0.47;
UK£1 = €1.44; US\$1 = €0.78
- **Famous for** mountain sports, Lipizzaner horses, ruby red Teran wine
- **Official Language** Slovene; English, Italian and German widely spoken
- **Phrases** *dober dan* (hello), *živijo* (hi), *prosim* (please), *hvala* (thank you)
- **Population** 2 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 386;
international access code ☎ 00



HIGHLIGHTS

- Experience the architecture, hilltop castle, green spaces and vibrant nightlife of **Ljubljana** (p665), Slovenia's 'Beloved' capital.
- Be astounded at the impossibly picture-postcard setting of **Bled** (p676): the lake, the island, the hilltop castle as backdrop.
- Get outdoors in the majestic mountain scenery at **Bovec** (p681), arguably the country's best outdoor-activities centre.
- Explore the series of karst cave at **Škocjan** (p684) that look straight out of Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.
- Swoon in the romantic Venetian port of **Piran** (p687), with great restaurants, and the nearby resort of **Portorož** (p690).

ITINERARIES

- Three days** Enjoy a long weekend in Ljubljana, sampling the capital's museums and nightlife, with an excursion to Bled.
- One week** Spend a couple of days in Ljubljana, then head northward to unwind in Bohinj or romantic Bled beside idyllic mountain lakes. Depending on the season take a bus or drive over the hair-raising Vrščič Pass into the valley of the vivid blue Soča River and take part in some extreme sports in Bovec or Tolmin before returning to Ljubljana.
- Two weeks** As above, adding a trip to the coast – Koper and, of course, Piran – via Škocjan or perhaps a journey to both Postojna and Predjama.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The ski season lasts mainly from December to March, though avalanche risks can keep the Vrščič Pass closed as late as May. Lake Bled freezes over in winter, but the short coastline has a mild, almost Mediterranean climate. April is often wet, but accommodation is cheaper then, and the flower-carpeted meadows and forests are at their scenic best. May and June are warmer, but during summer hotel prices start to rise, peaking in August, when rooms can be hard to come by at any price in certain parts of the country. Moving into autumn, warm September days are calm and ideal for hiking and climbing, while October and November can be damp.

HOW MUCH?

- 100km by bus/train** €9/5.50
- Bicycle rental (one day)** €4.70/20 to €5.45
- Bottle of ordinary/quality Slovenian wine** €4.20/8.35
- Cup of coffee in a café** €0.85
- Ski pass (one day)** €20.20

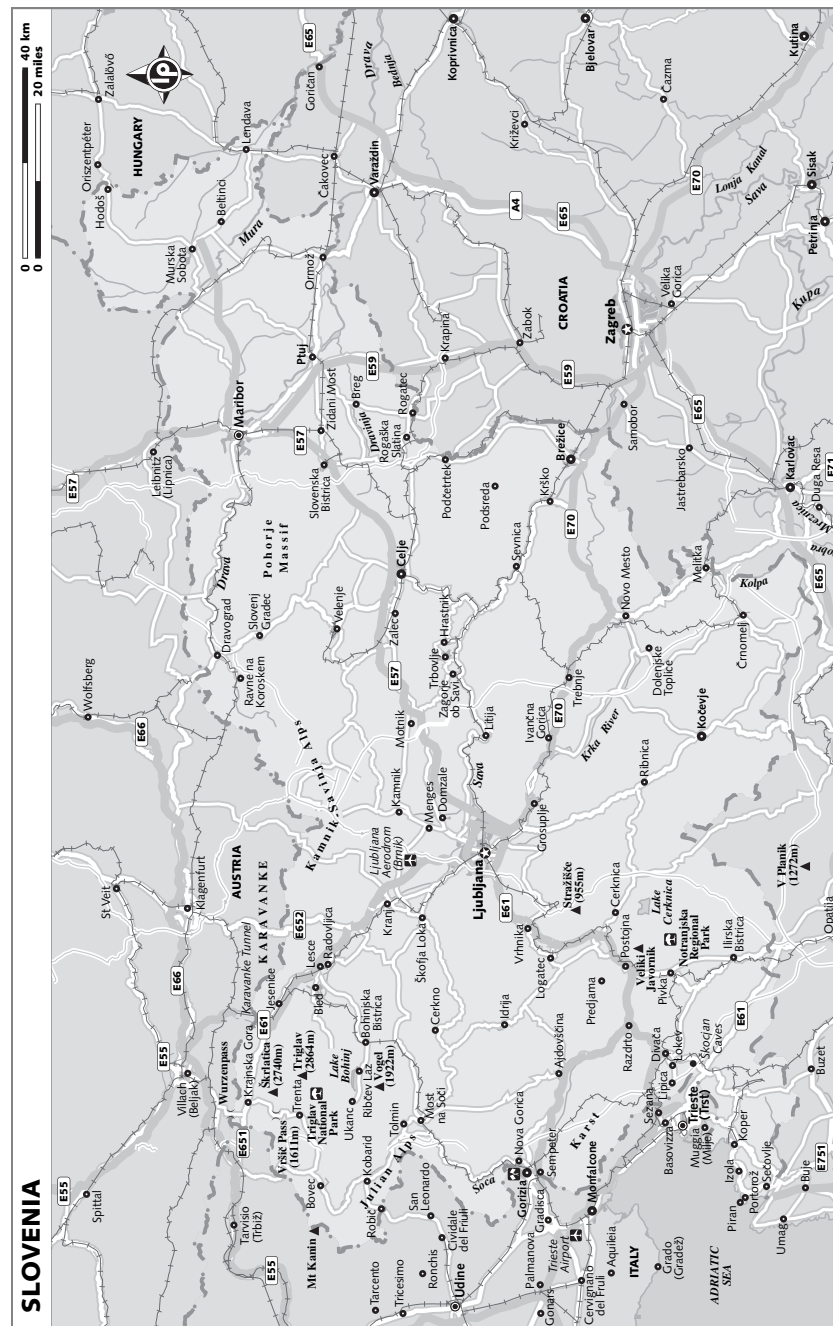
LONELY PLANET INDEX

- Litre of petrol** €1 to €1.05
- Litre of water** €0.60/45 to €0.70
- Half-litre of local beer** €0.95/75 to €1.10 (shop), €1.70 to €2.30 (bar)
- Souvenir T-shirt** €10€8.35 to €12.50
- Street snack (burek)** €1.90 to €2.20/50

HISTORY

Slovenes can make a credible claim to have invented democracy. By the early 7th century their Slavic forebears had founded the Duchy of Carantania based at Krn Castle (now Karnburg in Austria). Ruling dukes were elected by ennobled commoners and invested with power before ordinary citizens. This model was noted by the 16th-century French political theorist Jean Bodin, whose work was a key reference for Thomas Jefferson when writing the American Declaration of Independence. Carantania (later Carinthia) was fought over by Franks and Magyars from the 8th to 10th centuries, and later divided up among Austro-Germanic nobles and bishops, who protected themselves within ever-multiplying castles. By 1335 Carantania and most of present-day Slovenia, with the exception of the Venetian-controlled coastal towns, were dominated by the Habsburgs.

Indeed, Austria ruled what is now Slovenia until 1918, apart from a brief but important interlude when Napoleonic France claimed the area among its half-dozen 'Illyrian Provinces' (1809–13) and made Ljubljana the capital. Though he razed many castles, Napoleon proved a popular conqueror, as his relatively liberal regime de-Germanised the education system. Slovene was taught in schools for the first time, leading to a blossoming of national



consciousness. In tribute, Ljubljana still has a French Revolution Square (Trg Francoske Revolucije).

Fighting during WWI was particularly savage along the Soča Valley – what would later become known as the Isonzo Front, which was occupied by Italy then dramatically retaken by German-led Austrian-Hungarian forces. Many fighters' tunnels are still visible around Kobarid (p682). WWI ended with the collapse of Austria-Hungary, which handed western Slovenia to Italy as postwar reparations. Northern Carinthia, including the towns of Beljak and Celovec (now Villach and Klagenfurt), voted to stay with Austria in a 1920 plebiscite. What little was left of Slovenia joined fellow south (*jug*) Slavs in forming the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia.

Nazi occupation in WWII was for the most part courageously resisted by Slovenian partisans, though after Italy capitulated in 1943 the anti-partisan Slovenian Domobranci (Home Guards) were active in the west and, in a bid to prevent the communists from gaining political control in liberated areas, began supporting the Germans. The war ended with Slovenia regaining Italian-held areas from Piran to Bovec, but losing Trst (Trieste) and part of divided Gorica (Gorizia).

Slovenia, with only 8% of the national population, was the economic powerhouse of Tito's postwar Yugoslavia, producing up to 20% of the GDP. By the 1980s the federation was becoming increasingly Serb-dominated, and Slovenes, who already felt taken for granted economically, feared losing their political autonomy. After free elections and careful planning, Slovenia broke away from Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991. A 10-day war that left 66 people dead followed; rump Yugoslavia swiftly signed a truce in order to concentrate on bashing Croatia instead. Slovenia was admitted to the UN in May 1992 and in May 2004, together with nine other 'accession' countries, became a member of the EU. In January 2007 Slovenia became the first of these 10 new EU states to adopt the euro, which replaced the tolar as the national currency.

PEOPLE

The population of Slovenia is largely homogeneous. Some 83% is ethnic Slovene, with the

remainder being Croats, Serbians, Bosnians and Roma; there are also small, long-term enclaves of Italians and Hungarians, who have special deputies looking after their interests in Parliament. Slovenes are ethnically Slavic, typically multilingual and extroverts.

ARTS

Far and away Slovenia's best-loved writer is the Romantic poet France Prešeren (1800–49), whose statue commands Ljubljana's most central square (p670). Prešeren's patriotic yet humanistic verse was a driving force in raising Slovene national consciousness. Fittingly a stanza of his poem *Zdravljica* (A Toast) is now the national anthem.

Many of Ljubljana's most characteristic architectural features, including its idiosyncratic recurring pyramid motif, were added by celebrated Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), who cut his professional teeth working on Prague's Hradčany Castle.

Slovenia has some excellent modern and contemporary artists, including Rudi Škočir, whose Klimt-with-muscles style reflects a taste for Viennese Art Nouveau that continues to permeate day-to-day Slovenian interior design. A favourite sculptor-cum-designer is Oskar Kogoj.

Postmodernist painting and sculpture has been more or less dominated since the 1980s by the multimedia group Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) and the artists' cooperative Irwin. It also spawned the internationally known industrial-music group Laibach, whose leader, Tomaž Hostnik, died tragically in 1983 when he hanged himself from a *kozolec* (see the boxed text, p679), the traditional Slovenian hayrack. Slovenia's vibrant music scene embraces rave, techno, jazz, punk, thrash-metal and *chanson* (torch songs from the likes of Vita Mavrič); the most popular rock band in Slovenia at present is Siddharta. There's also a folk-music revival: listen for the groups Katice and Katalena, who play traditional Slovene music with a modern twist. Terra Folk is the quintessential world music band.

One of the most successful Slovenian films in recent years was Damjan Kozole's *Rezerni Deli* (Spare Parts; 2003) about the trafficking of illegal immigrants through Slovenia from Croatia to Italy by a couple of embittered misfits living in the southern town of Krško, site of the nation's only nuclear power plant.

ENVIRONMENT

Slovenia is amazingly green; indeed, 57% of its total surface area is covered in forest. It is home to some 3200 plant species – some 70 of which are endemic. Triglav National Park (p679) is particularly rich in indigenous flowering plants. Living deep in karst caves, the endemic 'living fossil' *Proteus anguinus* is a blind salamander that can survive for years without eating (see the boxed text, p683).

FOOD & DRINK

It's relatively hard to find such archetypal Slovenian foods as *žlikrofi* ('ravioli' filled with cheese, bacon and chives) served with *bakalca*, a lamb-based goulash, *mlinci* (corn pancakes) often served with goose and *ajdovi žganci z ocvirki* (buckwheat porridge with the savoury pork crackling/scratchings). An inn (*gostilna* or *gostišče*) or restaurant (*restavracija*) more frequently serves pizza, *rižota* (risotto), *klobasa* (sausage), *zrezek* (cutlet/steak), *golaž* (goulash) and *paprikaš* (piquant chicken or beef 'stew'). Fish (*riba*) is usually priced by the *dag* (100g decagram or 0.1kg). Freshwater trout (*postrv*) generally costs half the price of other sea fish, though grilled squid (*lignji na žaru*) doused in garlic butter is a ubiquitous bargain at around €6.25 per plate.

Also common are Balkan favourites, such as *cevapčići* (spicy meatballs of beef or pork), *pleškavica* (meat patties) and *ražnjiči* (shish kebabs). Add €1.50 to €2.10 for the *krompir* (potatoes).

You can snack cheaply on takeaway pizza slices or slabs of *burek* (€1.90 to €2.50), flaky pastry sometimes stuffed with meat but more often cheese or even apple. Alternatives include *štruklji* (cottage-cheese dumplings) and *palačinke* (thin sweet pancakes).

Some restaurants have bargain-value *dnevno kosilo* (four-course lunch menus), including *juha* (soup) and *solata* (salad), for around €6.25. This can be less than the price of a cheap main course, and usually one option will be vegetarian.

Tap water is safe to drink; people drink it everywhere. Distinctively Slovenian wines (*vino*) include peppery red Teran made from Refošk grapes in the Karst region and Cviček, a dry light red – almost rosé – wine from eastern Slovenia. Slovenes are justly proud of their top vintages, but cheaper bar-standard 'open wine' (*odprto vino*) sold by the decilitre (0.1L) are often pure rot-gut.

TOP FIVE CAFÉS

- **Café Teater**, Piran (p690)
- **Kavarna Cacao**, Portorož (p690)
- **Kavarna Zvezda**, Ljubljana (p673)
- **Loggia Café**, Koper (p687)
- **Slaščičarna Šmon**, Bled (p678)

Beer (*pivo*), whether *svetlo* (lager) or *temno* (dark), is best on draught (*točeno*).

There are dozens of kinds of *žganje* (fruit brandy) available, including *češnovec* (made with cherries), *sadjavec* (mixed fruit), *brinjevec* (juniper), *hruška* (pears, also called *viljamovka*) and *slivovka* (plums).

Na zdravje! (Cheers!).

LJUBLJANA

📍 01 / pop 254,200

Ljubljana is by far and away Slovenia's largest and most populous city. It is also the nation's political, economic and cultural capital. In many ways, though, the city whose name almost means 'beloved' (*ljubljen*) in Slovene does not feel like an industrious municipality of national importance but a pleasant, self-contented town with responsibilities only to itself and its citizens. You might think that way, too, especially in spring and summer when café tables fill the narrow streets of the Old Town and street musicians entertain passers-by on Čopova ul and Prešernov trg. Then Ljubljana becomes a little Prague without the heavy crowds or a Paris without the attitude. The Slovenian capital may lack the grandeur or big-name attractions of those two cities, but the great museums and galleries, atmospheric bars and varied, accessible nightlife make it a great place to visit and stay awhile.

HISTORY

If Ljubljana really was founded by Jason and the Golden Fleece–stealing Argonauts as the city would have you believe, they left no proof of their stay. However, legacies of the Roman city of Emona – remnants of walls, dwellings and early churches – can still be seen throughout the city. Ljubljana more or less took its present form as Laibach under the Austrian Habsburgs,

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but it gained regional prominence in 1809, when it became the capital of Napoleon's short-lived Illyrian Provinces. Some fine Art Nouveau buildings filled up the holes left by a devastating earthquake in 1895.

ORIENTATION

Prešernov trg, on the left bank of the Ljubljanica River, is the heart of Ljubljana. Just across delightful Triple Bridge (p670) is the picturesque – if bite-sized – Old Town, which follows the north and west flanks of looming Castle Hill. The bus and train sta-

tions are 800m north of Prešernov trg up Miklošičeva c.

The airport, Ljubljana Aerodrom, is at Brnik near Kranj, some 27km north of Ljubljana.

Maps

Excellent free maps, some of which show the city's bus network, are available from the various tourist offices. The more detailed 1:20,000-scale *Mestni Načrt Ljubljana* (Ljubljana City Map; €7.05) published by Kod & Kam is available at newsstands and bookshops.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Geonavtik (☎ 252 70 27; www.geonavtik.com, in Slovene; Kongresni trg 1; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat) Stocks Lonely Planet guides and books about Slovenia.

Kod & Kam (☎ 200 27 32; www.kod-kam.si; Trg Francoske Revolucije 7; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Map specialist.

Internet Access

Web connection is available at virtually all hostels and hotels, the **Slovenian Tourist Information Centre** (right; €1.05 per half-hour) and **STA Ljubala café** (right; €1.05 per 20 minutes), as well as the following:

Cyber Café Xplorer (☎ 430 19 91; Petkovškovo nabrežje 23; per 30min/hr/5hr €2.40/4/11; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 2-10pm Sat & Sun) Ljubljana's best internet café, with 10 superfast computers and wi-fi.

DrogArt (☎ 438 72 70; Kolodvorska ul 20; per 15min/hr free/€1.70; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the train station.

Portal.si Internet Kotichek (☎ 090 42 30; Trg OF 4; per hr €3.75; ☎ 7am-8.30pm) Located in the bus station.

Laundry

Washing machines are available, even to non-guests, at the **Celica Hostel** (☎ 230 97 00; www.hostel.celica.com; Metelkova ul 8) for €5 per load, including washing powder. Commercial laundries, including **Chemo Express** (☎ 251 44 04; Wolfova ul 12; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri), charge from €3.75 per kg.

Left Luggage

Bus station (Trg OF 4; per day €1.80; ☎ 5am-9.30pm)

Train station (Trg OF 6; per day €2.10; ☎ 24hr) Coin lockers on platform No 1.

Ljubljana Card

The excellent-value Ljubljana Card (€12.50), valid for three days (72 hours) and available from the tourist offices, offers free admission to many museums, unlimited city bus travel, and discounts on organised tours, accommodation and restaurants, hire cars etc.

Medical Services

Clinic – Emergency Medical Assistance Clinic (Klinični Centre – Urgenca; ☎ 232 30 60; Bohoričeva ul 9; ☎ 24hr)

Medical Centre (Zdravstveni Dom Center; ☎ 472 37 00; Metelkova ul 9; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) For nonemergencies.

Money

There are ATMs at every turn, including in both the train and bus stations, where you'll also find **bureaux de change** (☎ 6am-10pm) that will change cash for no commission but not travellers cheques.

Abanka (☎ 471 81 00; Slovenska c 50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat)

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (☎ 425 01 55; Trg Republike 2; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) Headquarters of the nation's biggest bank.

Post

Main post office (Slovenska c 32; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Holds poste restante for 30 days.

Post office branch (Trg OF 5; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 7am-6pm Sat) Due west of the train station.

Toilets

Two convenient public toilets (€0.20) are in the **Plečnikov podhod**, the underpass/subway below Slovenska c linking Kongresni trg with Plečnikov trg, and on **Hribarjevo nabrežje** below Pločnik (p674) on Prešernov trg.

Tourist Information

Ljubljana Tourist Information Centre (TIC; ☎ 306 12 15; www.ljubljana-tourism.si) Stritarjeva ul (Kresija Bldg, Stritarjeva ul; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, 8am-7pm Oct-May); Train Station (☎ 433 94 75; Trg OF; ☎ 8am-10pm Jun-Sep, 10am-7pm Oct-May)

Slovenia Tourist Information Centre (STIC; ☎ 306 45 76; www.slovenia-tourism.si; Krekov trg 10; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, 8am-7pm Oct-May) Internet and bicycle hire also available.

Travel Agencies

Erazem (☎ 430 55 37; www.erazem.net; basement, Miklošičeva c 26; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Jun-Sep, noon-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) Popular with backpackers and students. Staff make flight and train bookings, and sell ISIC, ITIC and IYTC cards.

STA Ljubljana (☎ 439 16 90; www.staljubljana.com, in Slovene; 1st fl, Trg Ajdovščina 1; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Offers discount airfares for students and its café has internet access.

SIGHTS

Ljubljana Castle crowns a wooded hill that forms the city's focal point. It's an architectural mish-mash, including fortified walls dating from the early 16th century, a 1489 chapel and a 1970s concrete café. Admission to the central courtyard and some north-facing ramparts is free, but there are even better 360-degree views from

LJUBLJANA IN TWO DAYS

Begin your first day at **Ljubljana Castle** (p690) to get an idea of the lay of the land. After a seafood lunch at **Ribca** (p673), explore the Old Town then cross the Ljubljana via St James Bridge and walk north along bust-lined Vegova ul to **Kongresni trg** and **Prešernov trg** (below). Over a fortifying libation at **Pločnik** (p674), plan your evening: low key at **Jazz Club Gajo** (p675), raucous at **Funfactory** (p674) or **D'Place** (p674), or alternative at one of the **Metelkova** (p674) venues.

On your second day check out some of the city's excellent **museums** and **galleries** (below), and then stroll through **Park Tivoli** (below) to the **Museum of Contemporary History** (below) before returning to dine at **Aska in Volk** (p673) in the Old Town.

the 19th-century **Belvedere** (adult/student & senior €3.30/2; ☎ 9am-9pm May-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Apr); admission includes a visit to the Virtual Museum, a 20-minute 3-D video tour of Ljubljana and its history. The fastest way to reach the castle is via the new **funicular** (not yet open at the time of writing), which ascends from Vodnikov trg, though you can also take the hourly **tourist train** (adult/child €2.50/1.70; ☎ 9am-9pm mid-Jun-Sep, 11am-6pm Apr-mid-Jun, 9am-7pm Oct, 11am-3pm Nov-Mar) from Prešernov trg. You can also reach it on foot in about 15 minutes from the Old Town.

Central Prešernov trg is dominated by the salmon pink **Franciscan Church of the Annunciation** (1660; ☎ 6.40am-12.30pm & 3-8pm) and the **Prešeren monument** (1905), in honour of the national poet France Prešeren. Furtively observing Prešeren from a terracotta window at Wolfova ul 4 is a bust of his unrequited love (and poetic inspiration), Julija Primic. Wander north of the square to admire the fine **Art Nouveau buildings** along Miklošičeva c, including the **Grand Hotel Union Executive** (p672) at No 1, built in 1905, and the colourful **former Cooperative Bank** (1922) at No 8.

Leading southward from Prešernov trg is the small but perfectly formed **Triple Bridge**; prolific architect Jože Plečnik (p664) added two side bridges to the original span (1842) in 1931 to create something truly unique. The recently renovated baroque **Robba Fountain** stands before the Gothic **Town Hall** (1718) in **Mestni trg**, the 'City Sq', that leads into two more: **Stari trg** (Old Sq) and **Gornji trg** (Upper Sq), which has become something of a centre for Slovenian fashion boutiques. The squares wind picturesquely around the castle bluff and are sprinkled with inviting cafés and restaurants.

East of the Triple Bridge, the 18th-century **Cathedral of St Nicholas** (☎ 10am-noon & 3-6pm) is filled with pink marble, white stucco, gilt and a panoply of baroque frescoes. Behind the cathedral is a lively open-air **market** (p673)

selling both foodstuffs and dry goods, the magnificent riverside **Plečnik Colonnade** and the **Dragon Bridge** (Zmajski Most; 1901), a span guarded by four of the mythical creatures that have become the city's mascots.

The grand if rather pompous main building of **Ljubljana University** (Kongresni trg 12) was the regional parliament (1902) under Habsburg rule. The more restrained **Philharmonic Hall** (Filharmonija; Kongresni trg 10) dates from 1898 and is home to the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1701. South of the university building is the **National and University Library** (Gosposka ul 14; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), Plečnik's masterpiece completed in 1941, and its stunning **main reading room**. Diagonally opposite is the excellent **City Museum** (☎ 241 25 00; www.mm-lj.si; Gosposka ul 15; adult/child €2.10/1.25; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), which focuses on Ljubljana's history and culture. The reconstructed Roman street in the basement is worth a visit in itself.

Of several major galleries and museums west of Slovenska c, the best are the impressive **National Gallery** (☎ 241 54 34; www.ng-slo.si; Prešernova c 24; adult/student & senior €2.90/4.20, free admission 2-6pm Sat & 1st Sun of month; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), which contains the nation's historical art collection; the vibrant and inspiring (but outwardly drab) 1940s **Modern Art Museum** (☎ 241 68 00; www.mg-lj.si; Cankarjeva cesta 15; adult/student & senior €4.20/2.10; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun); and the fascinating **Museum of Contemporary History** (☎ 300 96 10; www.muzej-nz.si; Celovška c 23; adult/student €2.10/1.25; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat) in **Park Tivoli**, with its imaginative look at 20th-century Slovenia, via the milk carton. The latter museum also plunges you unexpectedly into a WWI trench.

The **National Museum** (☎ 241 44 04; www.narmuz-lj.si; Muzejska ul 1; adult/student & senior €4.60/3.35, admission 1st Sun of month free; ☎ 10am-6pm Fri-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu) occupies an elegant 1888 building. It has rich archaeological and coin collections, but at the time of writing only temporary exhibitions

and the natural history section were accessible, while the main galleries were closed for a protracted renovation.

The **Slovenian Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 300 87 45; www.etno-muzej.si; Metelkova ul 2; adult/student & senior €3.35/2.10; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), housed in the 1886 Belgian Barracks on the southern edge of Metelkova (see Metelkova Mesto, p674), has a permanent collection on the 3rd floor with traditional Slovenian trades and crafts – everything from beekeeping and blacksmithing to glass-painting and pottery making – and some excellent exhibits directed at children. Temporary exhibits are on the 1st and 2nd floors.

TOURS

A two-hour guided **walking tour** (adult/student & senior €6.25/2.90; ☎ 10am daily Apr-Sep, 11am Fri-Sun Oct-Mar) in English and organised by the TIC departs from the **Town Hall** (Mestni trg 1) year-round. Ask the TIC about its cycle, boat and balloon tours.

SLEEPING

Ljubljana is not overly endowed with accommodation choices, especially at the midrange level, but things are changing. In fact, the following selection includes the lion's share of central budget and midrange options available at the time of research. The tourist offices have comprehensive details of other hotels further out in the suburbs, of similarly inconvenient private rooms and of the half-dozen other central top-end hotels.

Budget

Ljubljana Resort (☎ 568 39 13; www.ljubljanaresort.si; Dunajska c 270; camp sites per adult €7.10-12.10, per child €5.30-9.10; ☎ year-round; ☎ ☎ ☎) It's got a pretty grandiose name, but wait till you see the facilities at this attractive seven-hectare camping ground-cum-resort 5km north of the city centre. Along with a 62-room hotel (singles/doubles from €54.25 to €75.10) and five chalets (rooms €75.10), there's

the Laguna water park (open from June to September), with outdoor swimming pools, fitness studio with sauna, and badminton and volleyball courts. Take bus 8 to its terminus or the more frequent bus 6 (stop Ježica).

Dijaški Dom Tabor (☎ 234 8840; www.2.ames.si/-=ssljddta4; dm/s/d €10/26/38; ☎ late Jun-late Aug; ☎) From sometime in June until to August five colleges open their dormitories (*dijaški dom*) to foreigner travellers, but only this 300-bed one, a 10-minute walk southeast of the bus and train stations, is really central. Enter from Kotnikova ul.

Ljubljana Youth Hostel (☎ 548 00 55; www.yh-ljubljana.com; Litijska c 57; dm HI member/nonmember €16.50/17.50; ☎) This HI-affiliated hostel has six rooms with shared facilities at the BIT Center Hotel (below). While not in the most central location, 3km east of the city centre, the hostel is easily reached on bus 5, 9 or 13 (stop Emona). A boon is the attached sports centre (open 7am to 11pm), where guests get a 50% discount.

Alibi Hostel (☎ 251 12 44; www.alibi.si; Cankarjevo nabrežje 27; dm/d €20/60; ☎ ☎ ☎) This unbelievably well-situated 110-bed hostel is changing the face of budget accommodation in Ljubljana. It's right on the Ljubljana in the former headquarters of the British Council, and has brightly painted, airy dorms with six to 12 wooden bunks and five doubles on four floors.

Midrange

Vila Veselova (☎ 059-926 721, 041-678 000; www.v.v.si; Veselova ul 14; dm €20-25, d/tr €70/90; ☎ ☎ ☎) This very attractive freestanding villa, with its own garden and 40 beds in the centre of the museum district, offers mostly hostel accommodation in three rooms with four to eight beds, but a double and an apartment with en suite facilities make it an attractive midrange option. Some rooms face Park Tivoli across busy Tivolska c.

BIT Center Hotel (☎ 548 00 55; www.bit-center.net; Litijska c 57; s/d/tr €34/50/54; ☎) The Bit Center

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Celica Hostel (☎ 230 97 00; www.hostelcelica.com; Metelkova ul 8; dm €17, s/d/tr cell €44/46/57, 4- to 5-bed room per person €24, 6- to 7-bed room per person €19; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This stylishly revamped former prison (1882) in Metelkova has 20 designer 'cells', complete with original bars, both rooms and apartments with three to seven beds, and a packed-full, popular 12-bed dorm. The ground floor is home to three cafés (set lunch €3 to €5.25; open 7.30am to midnight): a traditional Slovenian *gostilna*, a Western-style café (with two internet stations) and the Oriental Café, with cushions, water pipes and shoes strictly outside. Celica has become such a landmark that there are guided tours daily at 2pm.

offers one of the best-value deals in Ljubljana, although at 3km east of the city centre (bus 5, 9 or 13 to Emona stop), it's a bit far from the action. Its 33 rooms are spartan but bright and comfortable.

Park Hotel (☎ 300 25 00; www.hotelpark.si; Tabor 9; s €39-55, d €48-71; ☒ ☑) A partial face-lift inside and out has made this 145-room tower-block hotel an even better-value midrange choice in central Ljubljana. Pleasant, well-renovated standard rooms are bright and unpretentiously well equipped. Cheaper rooms have en suite toilet but share showers. Students with ISIC cards get a 10% discount.

Hotel Emonec (☎ 200 15 20; www.hotel-emonec.com; Wolfova ul 12; s €53, d €60-70, tr €83; ☒ ☑) The décor is simple and coldly modern at this 26-room hotel, but everything is spotless and you can't beat the central location – only steps away from Prešernov trg at the back of a courtyard.

Pri Mraku (☎ 421 96 00; www.daj-dam.si; Rimska c 4; s €60-74.50, d €95-112, tr €116-125; ☒ ☑ ☑) Although it calls itself a *gostilna*, the 'At Twilight' is really just a smallish hotel (36 rooms) in an old building with no lift. Almost opposite the Križanke on Trg Francoske Revolucije, it's ideally located for culture vultures. Only some rooms have air-con.

M Hotel (☎ 513 70 00; www.m-hotel.si; Derčeva ul 4; s €62-83, d €95-115; ☒ ☑ ☑) This hotel 2km northwest of the city center and set back from noisy Celovška c (bus 1, 5, 8 or 15 to Kino Šiška stop) is not much to look at from the outside, but the 154 rooms are comfortable and airy, with all the basic mod-cons.

Top End

Grand Hotel Union Executive (☎ 308 1270; www.gh-union.si; Miklošičeva c 1; s €149-179, d €159-212, ste €350-420; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑) This 187-room hotel, the Art Nouveau southern wing of a two-part hotel, was built in 1905 and remains the most desirable address for visitors to Ljubljana. It has glorious public areas, including a cellar restaurant, Unionska Klet, which moves to the Unionski Vrt (Union Garden) restaurant in summer. Guests can use the indoor swimming pool, sauna and fitness centre on the 8th floor of adjacent Grand Hotel Union Business.

EATING

The Old Town has plenty of appealing restaurants, though the choice of bona fide restaurants isn't quite as overwhelming as that of cafés. For cheaper options, try the dull but

functional snack bars around the bus and train stations and both on and in the shopping mall below Trg Ajdovščina.

Restaurants

Kitajska Zvezda (☎ 425 88 24; Hrenova ul 19; entrées €1.50-2.45, mains €5-6.45; ☒ ☑ 11am-11pm) If you're looking for a fix of rice or noodles, try the 'Chinese Star' on the river just south of the Old Town. Szechuan dishes, including the *ma po doufu* (tofu with garlic and chilli), are quite good.

Vegedrom (☎ 513 26 42; Vodnikova c 35; soups & salads €2.10-3.35, dishes €4.20-9.80; ☒ ☑ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat) This appealing, if somewhat pricey, vegan restaurant is at the northeastern edge of Park Tivoli. The platters for two are good value at €17.50 to €20.90, and there's a salad bar.

Cantina Mexicana (☎ 426 93 25; Knafljev prehod 3; entrées €2.70-3.75, mains €7.10-13.80; ☒ ☑ 11am-midnight Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) The capital's most stylish Mexican restaurant has an eye-catching red and blue exterior, and hacienda-like décor, sofas and lanterns inside. The fajitas (€7.50 to €11.70) are great.

Harambaša (☎ 041-843 106; Vrtna ul 8; dishes €2.70-4; ☒ ☑ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) Here you'll find authentic Bosnian – Sarajevo in to be precise – cuisine served at low tables in a charming modern cottage atmosphere, with quiet Balkan music and a lively crowd.

Yildiz Han (☎ 426 57 17; Karlovska c 19; entrées €2.70-5, mains €6.90-10.20; ☒ ☑ noon-midnight Tue-Sun) If Turkish is your thing, head for this mum and dad-run restaurant, which features belly dancing and/or live Turkish music on Friday night.

Gostilna Pri Pavli (☎ 425 92 75; Stari trg 1; entrées €4.10-5.40, mains €5.80-10.85; ☒ ☑ 8am-11pm) A wonderful holdover from the socialist era, 'Paula's Place' is an attractive, country-style inn in an enviable location that has managed to retain its old-school style and prices. The Farmer's Feast (€22.10) is a two-person feast.

Pri Škofju (☎ 426 45 08; Rečna ul 8; entrées €4.20-6.25, mains €4.60-13.35; ☒ ☑ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) This wonderful little place in tranquil Krakovo south of the city centre serves some of the best prepared local dishes and salads in Ljubljana, with an ever-changing menu. Set lunches are a snip at €5 to €6.70.

Julija (☎ 425 64 63; Stari trg 9; entrées €5-7.50, mains €7.50-15.85; ☒ ☑ 8am-midnight Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-1am Fri, 10am-11pm Sun) Julija serves decent risotto and pasta dishes either outside on the pavement

terrace or in a Delft-tiled backroom behind a café decorated with 1920s prints.

Taverna Tatjana (☎ 421 00 87; Gornji trg 38; entrées €5-8.35, mains €8.35-20.90; ☒ ☑ 5pm-midnight) Looking like an old-world wooden-beamed cottage pub with a nautical theme, this is actually a rather exclusive fish restaurant with a lovely (and protected) back courtyard for the warmer months.

Sokol (☎ 439 68 55; Ciril Metodov trg 18; entrées €4.10-9.50, mains €5.80-11.20; ☒ ☑ 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) In this old vaulted house, traditional Slovenian food is served on heavy tables by costumed waiters. Pizza is available if traditional dishes like *obara* (veal stew; €5.40) and *Krvavica* sausage with cabbage (€5.80) don't appeal.

Pri Vitezu (☎ 426 60 58; Breg 18-20; entrées €6.70-14.20, mains €11.70-20; ☒ ☑ noon-11pm Mon-Sat) Located directly on the left bank of the Ljubljanica, 'At the Knight' is the place for a special meal (Mediterranean-style grills and Adriatic fish dishes), whether in the vaulted cellar dining rooms or adjoining wine bar.

Ali Baba (☎ 230 17 87, 051-234 066; Poljanska c 11; mains €7.10-7.75; ☒ ☑ 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat) Carpets and low brass tables decorate this cosy little restaurant, whose Iranian and Indian dishes are popular with journalists and students.

Aska in Volk (☎ 251 10 69; Gornji trg 4; mains €7.10-13.80; ☒ ☑ noon-10pm Sun-Thu, noon-11pm Fri & Sat) The 'Lamb and Wolf', which takes its name from a Bosnian novel, is a very stylish choice for South Slav specialities, including roast lamb.

Like most European capitals today, Ljubljana is awash in pizzerias, where pizza routinely costs €4 to €6.50. The pick of the crop includes **Foculus Pizzeria** (☎ 251 56 43; Gregorčičeva ul 3; ☒ ☑ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun), which boasts a vaulted ceiling painted with spring and autumn leaves; **Trta** (☎ 426 50 66; Grudnov nabrežje 21; ☒ ☑ 11am-10.30pm Mon-Fri, noon-10.30pm Sat), on the right bank of the Ljubljanica; and **Mirje** (☎ 426 60 15; Tržaška c 5; ☒ ☑ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat), southwest of the city centre, which does some excellent pasta dishes, too.

Quick Eats

Delikatesa Ljubljanski Dvor (☎ 426 93 27; Kongresni trg 11; pizza slices €1.20-1.70; ☒ ☑ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat) Locals queue for huge, bargain slices of pizza, salads and grilled vegetables sold by weight, and braised veggies to take away or eat on the spot.

Nobel Burek (Miklošičeva c 30; burek €1.90, pizza slice €1.50; ☒ ☑ 24hr) This round-the-clock hole-in-the-wall serves Slovenian-style fast food.

Paninoteka (☎ 059-018 445, 041-529 824; Jurčičev trg 3; soups & toasted sandwiches €2.10-3.35; ☒ ☑ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, 9am-11pm Sun) Healthy sandwich creations on a lovely little square by the river.

Hot Horse Trubarjeva c 31 (snacks & burgers €2.50-3.35; ☒ ☑ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, noon-1am Sun) Park Tivoli branch (Park Tivoli; ☒ ☑ 24hr) These two places exist to supply Ljubljančani with a favourite treat: horse burgers. The branch in Park Tivoli is just down the hill from the Museum of Contemporary History (p670).

Ribca (☎ 425 15 44; Adamič-Lundrovo nabrežje 1; dishes €2.70-6.70; ☒ ☑ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat) This basement seafood bar below the Plečnik Colonnade in Pogačarjev trg serves tasty fried squid, sardines and herrings to hungry market-goers.

Self-Catering

Handy supermarkets and convenience stores include **Mercator** (Slovenska c 55; ☒ ☑ 7am-9pm) and, opposite the train and bus stations, **Noč in Dan** (☎ 234 79 62; Trg OF 13; ☒ ☑ 24hr), a variety store open 'Day and Night'. The **Maximarket supermarket** (☎ 476 68 00; basement, Trg Republike 1; ☒ ☑ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) below the department store of that name has the largest selection of food and wine in the city centre, as well as a bakery.

The open-air **market** (Pogačarjev trg & Vodnikov trg; ☒ ☑ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 6am-5pm Sat Jun-Sep, 6am-4pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) opposite the cathedral sells mostly fresh fruit and vegetables.

DRINKING

Few cities have central Ljubljana's concentration of fabulously inviting cafés and bars, the vast majority with outdoor seating.

Cafés & Tea houses

Kavarna Zvezda (☎ 421 90 90; Kongresni trg 4 & Wolfova ul 14; ☒ ☑ 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) The Star Café is celebrated for its shop-made cakes, especially *skutina pečena* (€2), an eggy cheesecake.

Café Antico (☎ 425 13 39; Stari trg 17; ☒ ☑ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 11am-10am Sun) With Frescoed ceilings and retro-style furniture, this is *the* place for a quiet tête-à-tête over a glass of wine.

Čajna Hiša (☎ 421 24 44; Stari trg 3; ☒ ☑ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm & 6-10pm Sat) If you take your cuppa seriously, come here; the appropriately named 'Teahouse' offers a wide range of green and black teas and fruit tisanes for €1.60 to €3.15 a pot, and sells the leaves, too.

Le Petit Café (☎ 426 14 88; Trg Francoske Revolucije 4; ☒ ☑ 7.30am-11pm Sun-Thu, 9am-midnight Fri & Sat) Just opposite the Križanke, this pleasant, studenty

place offers great coffee and a wide range of breakfast goodies (€2.90 to €4.20).

Kafeterija Lan (Gallusovo nabrežje 27; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, 9am-1am Fri & Sat, 10am-1am Sun) This little greener-than-green café-bar on the river below Cobbler Bridge is something of a hipster-gay magnet.

Slašičarna Pri Vodnjaku (☎ 425 07 12; Stari trg 30; ☎ 8am-midnight) For all kinds of chocolate of the ice cream and drinking kind, the 'Confectionery by the Fountain' will surely satisfy – there are 32 different flavours (€0.85 per scoop), as well as teas (€1.50) and fresh juices (€1.05 to €3.35)

Pubs & Bars

Pločnik (Prešernov trg 1; ☎ 7am-1am Apr-Oct) This roped-off café-bar on the southern side of Prešernov trg, with the distinctive name of 'Pavement', is one of the most popular places for a drink if you just want to sit outside and watch the passing parade. There's often live music.

Maček (☎ 425 37 91; Krojaška ul 5; ☎ 9am-1am) The place to be seen on a sunny summer afternoon, the 'Cat' is Pločnik's rival on the right bank of the Ljubljanica. Happy hour is between 4pm and 7pm daily.

Cutty Sark (☎ 425 1477; Knafjjev prehod 1; ☎ 9am-1am Mon-Sat, noon-1am Sun) A pleasant and well-stocked nautically themed pub in the courtyard behind Wolfova ul 6, the Cutty Sark is a congenial place for a *pivo* or glass of *vino*.

Dvorni Bar (☎ 251 12 57; Dvorni trg 1; ☎ 8am-1am) This wine bar is an excellent place to taste Slovenian vintages; it stocks 100 varieties, and frequently schedules promotions and wine tastings.

Pr'skelet (☎ 252 77 99; Ključavničarska ul 5; ☎ 10am-3am) OK, it might be something of a one-joke wonder, but you'll shake, rattle and roll at this skeleton-themed basement bar, where cocktails are two for one throughout the day.

Salon (☎ 439 87 64; Trubarjeva c 23; ☎ 9am-1am Mon & Tue, 9am-3am Wed-Sat, 10am-1am Sun) Salon is a dazzling designer-kitsch cocktail bar featuring gold ceilings, faux leopard armchairs, heavy burgundy and gold drapes, and excellent cocktails (€4.20 to €6.25) and shooters (€3.75 to €4.20).

Žmavc (☎ 251 03 24; Rimska c 21; ☎ 7.30am-1am Mon-Sat, 8am-1am Sun) A super-popular student hang-out west of Slovenska c, with comic-strip scenes and figures running halfway up the walls. It's owned by the same people who run the Vila Veselova (p671).

ENTERTAINMENT

The free quarterly magazine **Ljubljana Life** (www.ljubjanalife.com) has practical information and listings. It's distributed free at the airport and in hotels and the tourist offices.

Where to? in *Ljubljana*, available from the tourist offices, lists cultural and sporting events.

Nightclubs

D'Place (☎ 040-626 901; www.club-dplace.com, in Slovene; Šmartinska c 152; ☎ 10pm-6am Thu-Sat) This new club, with different themed evenings (eg hip-hop and R 'n' B on Saturday), has been making quite a splash since it's recent opening. It's in the Kolosej multiplex cinema at BTC City Shopping Centre.

Funfactory (☎ 428 96 90; Jurčkova c 224; ☎ 9pm-dawn Thu-Sat) Ljubljana's biggest club is hidden in a shopping centre opposite the Leclerc Hypermarket (take bus 3 to the end) in the far southeastern suburbs

Global (☎ 426 90 20; www.global.si, in Slovene; Tomšičeva ul 2; ☎ 9am-5am 5pm Mon-Sat) This retro cocktail bar on the 6th floor of the Nama department store becomes a popular dance venue nightly and attracts a chi-chi crowd. Take the bouncer-guarded lift in the passageway linking Kanjarjeva ul and Tomšičeva ul.

Klub K4 (☎ 438 03 04; www.klubk4.org; Kersnikova ul 4; ☎ 10pm-4am) This evergreen club in the basement of the Student Organisation of Ljubljana University (Študentska Organizacija Univerze Ljubljani; ŠOU) features rave-electronic music Friday and Saturday, with other styles of music on weeknights, and a popular gay and lesbian night on Sunday. It closes when the university breaks up.

Bacchus Center Club (☎ 241 82 44; Kongresni trg 3; ☎ 10pm-5am Mon-Sat) This place has something for everyone (it also has a restaurant and bar-lounge) and attracts a mixed crowd.

As Pub (☎ 425 88 22; Knafjjev prehod 5a; ☎ 7am-3am Wed-Sat) DJs transform this candlelit basement bar, hidden beneath an incongruously upmarket fish restaurant, into a pumping, crowd-pulling nightclub four nights a week.

Metelkova Mesto (Metelkova ul; www.metelkova.org) 'Metelkova Town', an ex-army garrison taken over by squatters after independence, is now a free-living commune – a miniature version of Copenhagen's Christiania. In this two-courtyard block, half a dozen idiosyncratic venues hide behind gaily tagged doorways, coming to life generally after

midnight Thursday to Saturday. Entering the main 'city gate' from Masarykova c, the building to the right houses Gala Hala, with live bands and club nights, Channel Zero (punk, hardcore) and 100% Mizart. Easy to miss in the first building to the left are Klub Tiffany for gay men and Klub Monokel for lesbians. Beyond the first courtyard to the southwest, well-hidden Klub Gromka (folk, live concerts) is beneath the body-less heads. Next door is Menza pri Koritu (performance) and the idiosyncratic Čajnica pri Mariči (psycho-blues). Cover charges and midweek openings are rare but erratic for all Metelkova venues.

Live Music

ROCK, POP & JAZZ

Orto Bar (☎ 232 1674; www.orto-bar.com; Graboličeva ul 1; ☎ 6pm-4am Mon-Thu, 6pm-5am Fri & Sat, 6pm-2am Sun) A popular bar for late-night drinking and dancing with occasional live music, Orto is just five minutes' walk from Metelkova.

Jazz Club Gajo (☎ 425 32 06; www.jazzclubgajo.com; Beethovnova ul 8; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 7pm-midnight Sat & Sun) Gajo is the city's premier venue for live jazz, and attracts both local and international talent, usually midweek or on Friday at 8.30pm (jam sessions at 8.30pm Monday).

CLASSICAL

Cankarjev Dom (☎ 241 71 00; www.cd-cc.si, in Slovene; Prešernova c 10) Ljubljana's premier cultural and conference centre has two large auditoriums (the Gallus Hall has perfect acoustics) and a dozen smaller performance spaces offering a remarkable smorgasbord of performance arts. The ticket office (☎ 241 72 99; open 11am to 1pm and 3pm to 8pm Monday to Friday, 11am to 1pm Saturday and one hour before performance) is in the subway below Maximarket supermarket on the opposite side of Trg Republike.

Philharmonic Hall (Filharmonija; ☎ 241 08 00; www.filharmonija.si; Kongresni trg 10) Head on down to the attractive Philharmonic Hall for classical concerts.

Opera House (☎ 241 17 40; www.opera.si; Župančičeva ul 1) Opera and ballet are performed at the neo-Renaissance 1882 Opera House.

Križanke (☎ 241 60 00, 241 60 26; Trg Francoše Revolučije 1-2) Hosts events of the Ljubljana Summer Festival (p692) in what was a sprawling monastic complex dating back to the 13th century.

Cinema

Kinoteka (☎ 434 25 20; www.kinoteka.si, in Slovene; Miklošičeva c 28) The 'Slovenian Cinematheque' screens archival art and classic films.

Kino Dvor (Court Cinema; ☎ 434 25 44; www.kinodvor.si, in Slovene; Kolodvorska ul 13; ☎ 6pm, 8pm & 10pm) Kinoteka's sister-cinema shows more contemporary films.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The shedlike **bus station** (☎ 234 46 01, information 090 42 30; www.ap-ljubljana.si; Trg OF 4; ☎ 5.30am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) opposite the train station has bilingual info-phones, and its timetable is useful once you get the hang of it. Frequent buses serve Bohinj (€8, two hours, 86km, hourly) via Bled (€6.15, 1¼ hours, 57km). Most buses to Piran (€11.70, three hours, 140km, up to seven daily) go via Koper (€10.75, 2½ hours, 122km, up to 11 daily) and Postojna (€5.75, one hour, 53km, up to 24 daily). All bus services are much less frequent on weekends.

Ljubljana's **train station** (☎ 291 33 32; www.slo-zeleznice.si; Trg OF 6; ☎ 5am-10pm) has daily services to Koper (€7.30 to €8.70, 2½ hours, 153km, four times daily). Alternatively take the Sežana-bound train (5.55am) and change (rapidly – you've got seven minutes!) at Divača (1¼ hours). For international services, see p695.

GETTING AROUND

The cheapest way to **Ljubljana Aerodrom** (LJU; www.lju-airport.si) at Brnik is by city bus from stop 28 (€3.70, 50 minutes, 27km) at the bus station. These run hourly from 6.10am to 8.10pm Monday to Friday; on the weekend there's a bus at 6.10am and then one every two hours from 9.10am to 7.10pm. A **private airport van** (☎ 04-252 63 19, 041-792 865) also links Trg OF near the bus station with the airport up to 10 times daily between 5.20am and 10.30pm (€8, 30 minutes).

You can park on the street (€0.40 to €0.50 per hour) in Ljubljana, though not always easily in the museum area and near Metelkova. Once you've found a space it's generally most efficient to walk.

Ljubljana has an excellent network (21 lines) of city buses; the main lines operate every five to 15 minutes from 3.15am to midnight. However, the central area is perfectly walkable, so buses are really only necessary if you're staying out of town. Buy little metal tokens (*žetoni*; €0.80) in advance from newsstands, or pay €1.25 on board.

Ljubljana Bike (☎ 051-441 900; per 2hr/day €0.85/4.20; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Oct) has bikes available from some 10 locations around the city, including the train station, the STIC office (p669), the Celica Hostel (p671) and at the start of Miklošičeva c.

JULIAN ALPS

The Julian Alps – named in honour of Caesar himself – form Slovenia's dramatic northwest frontier with Italy. Triglav National Park, established in 1924, includes almost all of the alps lying within Slovenia. The centrepiece of the park is, of course, Mt Triglav (2864m), Slovenia's highest mountain, but there are many other peaks here reaching above 2000m, as well as ravines, canyons, caves, rivers, streams, forests and alpine meadows. Along with an embarrassment of fauna and flora, the area offers a wide range of adventure sports at very affordable prices.

KRANJ

☎ 04 / pop 34,850

Situated at the foot of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, with the snow-capped peak of Storžič (2132m) and others looming to the north, Kranj is Slovenia's fourth-largest city. The attractive Old Town, perched on an escarpment above the confluence of the Sava and Kokra Rivers, barely measures 1km by 250m.

The frequent weekday buses between Kranj and Ljubljana Aerodrom at nearby Brnik make it possible to head straight from the plane to the Julian Alps without diverting to the capital. While waiting for your onward bus to Bled or Kranjska Gora, have a look at the Old Town, starting with the Art Nouveau **former post office** (Maistrov trg), a 600m walk south

from the bus station past the eyesore 87-room **Hotel Creina** (☎ 281 75 00; www.hotel-creina.si; Koroška c 5; s/d €60/80; ☎ ☎), the only game in town and where most airline crews stay while overnighing in Slovenia. Most places of interest are along just three south-bound pedestrianised streets – Prešernova ul, Tavčarjeva ul and Tomišičeva ul – two of which lead to the **Church of St Cantianus**, with impressive frescoes and stained glass. Another 300m further south, the Old Town dead-ends behind the Serbian Orthodox **Plague Church**, built during a time of pestilence in 1470, and a 16th-century **defence tower**. **Mitnica** (☎ 040-678 778; Tavčarjeva ul 35; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Wed, 7am-1am Thu, 7am-3am Fri & Sat), a lovely café-bar in the basement of a 16th-century toll house with a huge terrace backing on to the river, is just the place to relax in Kranj on a warm afternoon.

From Kranj it's an easy excursion to **Škofja Loka**, whose main square, **Mestni Trg**, is one of Slovenia's most beautiful and whose fine **Loka Castle** (Grajška pot 13) contains a decent **ethnographical museum** (☎ 517 04 00; adult/child €2.90/2.10; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Buses depart hourly from Kranj (€2.10, 25 minutes, 13km).

BLED

☎ 04 / pop 5250

With its emerald-green lake, picture-postcard church on an islet, medieval castle clinging to a rocky cliff, and some of the highest peaks of the Julian Alps and the Karavanke as backdrops, Bled seems too good to be true, designed, it would seem, by some god of tourism. As it is Slovenia's most popular destination it can get pretty crowded in summer, but it's small, convenient and a delightful base from which to explore the mountains.

HIKING MT TRIGLAV

The Julian Alps offer some of Europe's finest hiking. In summer some 167 mountain huts (*planinska koč* or *planinski dom*) operate, none more than five hours' walk from the next. These huts get very crowded, especially on weekends, so booking ahead is wise. If the weather turns bad, however, you won't be refused refuge.

At €20 per person in a private room or half that amount in a dormitory in a Category I hut (Category II huts charge €13.35 and €7.50 respectively), the huts aren't cheap, but as they serve meals you can travel light. Sturdy boots and warm clothes are indispensable, even in midsummer. Trails are generally well marked with a white-centred red circle, but you can still get lost and it's very unwise to trek alone. It's best to engage the services of a qualified (and licensed) guide.

The tourist offices in Bled, Bohinj, Kranjska Gora and Bovec all have lots of hiking information, sell maps in a variety of useful scales and can help book huts in their regions.

Information

3glav adventures (☎ 041-683 184, 041-819 636; www.3glav-adventures.com; Ljubljanska c 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct)

Ā Propos Bar (☎ 574 40 44; Bled Shopping Centre, Ljubljanska c 4; per 15/30/60min €1.25/2.10/4.20;

☎ 8am-midnight) Offers internet access.

Gorenjska Banka (C Svobode 15; ☎ 9-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) In the Park Hotel shopping complex.

Kompas (☎ 572 75 00; www.kompas-bleed.si; Bled Shopping Centre, Ljubljanska c 4; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon & 4-8pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon & 4-7pm Sun Sep-Jun) Rents private rooms and bicycles.

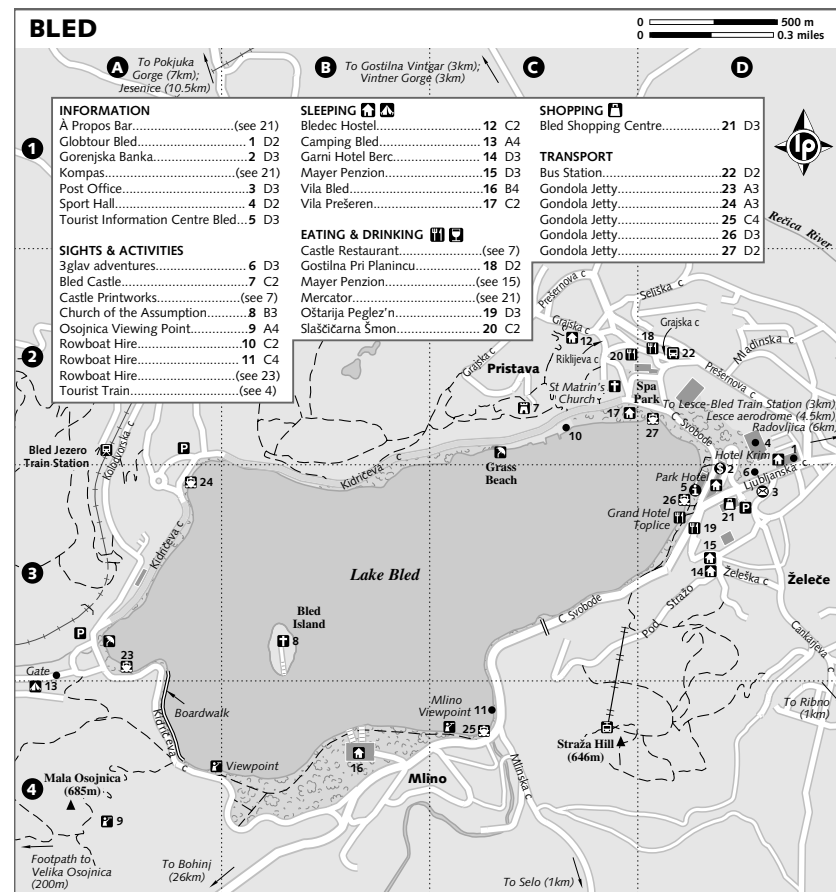
Tourist Information Centre Bled (☎ 574 11 22; www.bleed.si; C Svobode 10; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jun & Sep,

8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun Oct & Mar-May, 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun Nov-Feb)

Sights

On its own tiny island, the baroque **Church of the Assumption** (☎ 8am-dusk) is Bled's icon. Getting there by a piloted **gondola** (pletna; ☎ 041 293 424) is the archetypal tourist experience. Gondola prices (return per person €10) are standard from any jetty, and you'll stay on the island long enough to ring the 'lucky' bell; all in all, it's a 1½-hour trip. Ordinary row-yourself boats for three to four people cost €10.50 per hour.

Perched atop a 100m-cliff, **Bled Castle** (☎ 578 05 25; Grajska c 25; adult/student/child €5/4.60/3.10; ☎ 8am-8pm May-Oct, 8am-5pm Nov-Apr) is the perfect backdrop to a lake view. One of many access



footpaths leads up from behind the Bledec Hostel (right). Admission includes entry to the **museum collection** as well as **Castle Printworks**. The fabulous views are 'free' if you have a meal or sunset beer on the superbly situated terrace of the Castle Restaurant (opposite).

A short distance southeast of Bled and well served by bus (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7.5km, half-hourly), the town of **Radovljica** appears at first glance to be an amorphous, modern sprawl. However, it has a particularly delightful square called **Linhartov trg** in its Old Town, where there's a restored, painted **manor house**, an interesting **gallery** and the fascinating **Beekeeping Museum** (☎ 532 05 20; Linhartov trg 1; adult/student €2.10/1.90; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10am-noon & 3-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun Mar, Apr, Nov & Dec). The square starts 400m southeast of Radovljica bus station via Gorenjska c or just 100m north up narrow Kolodvorska ul from the train station.

Activities

The best way to see Lake Bled is on foot; the 6km stroll shouldn't take more than a couple of hours, including the short (but steep) climb to the brilliant **Sojnicna viewing point**. If you prefer, jump aboard the **tourist train** (adult/child €2.50/1.70; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm May-mid-Oct) for the 45-minute twirl around the lake, which departs from in front of the **Sport Hall** (Ljubljanska c 5) up to 20 times daily in summer.

A popular and easy walk is to **Vintgar Gorge** (adult/student/child €2.90/2.50/2.10; ☎ 8am-7pm late Apr-Oct) some 4km from the town centre to the northwest. The highlight is the 1600m-long wooden walkway, erected in 1893 and continually rebuilt, that criss-crosses the swirling Radovna River for the first 700m or so. Thereafter the scenery becomes tamer, passing a tall railway bridge and a spray-spouting weir, and ending at the anticlimactic 13m-high **Sum Waterfall**. The easiest way to get to the gorge is via the appealing Gostilna Vintgar, an inn just three well-signed kilometres away on quiet, attractive roads from the Bledec Hostel.

For something tougher, join one of the **rafting** or **kayaking** (€23 to €38) or **paragliding** (€70) trips on offer from **3glav adventures** (☎ 041-683 184, 041-819 636; www.3glav-adventures.com; Ljubljanska c 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct), the number one adventure- and extreme-sport specialist in Bled. Ask the tourist office about **hiking** and **mountain-bike routes** between road-less hamlets in the mountains.

Sleeping BUDGET

Private rooms are offered by dozens of homes in the area. Both **Kompas** (p677) and **Globtour Bled** (☎ 575 13 00; www.globtour-bled.com; Ljubljanska c 7; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon & 4-8pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Sep-Jun) in the Hotel Krim have extensive lists, with prices for singles/doubles starting at €20/30.

Bledec Hostel (☎ 574 52 50; Grajska c 17; HI members/nonmembers high season dorm €17.5/20, low season €15.50/18, d high season €23.50/26, low season €21.50/24; ☎ ☎) This well-organised hostel has four-bed dorms with private bathrooms, a bar and an inexpensive restaurant. Laundry (€8.35 per load €8.35) and internet access (€2.10 per half-hour €2.10) are available.

Camping Bled (☎ 575 20 00; www.camping.bled.si; Kidričeva c 10; adult €8.50-11, child €6-7.00; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct) This popular 6.5-hectare site fills a rural valley behind a waterside restaurant at the western end of the lake.

MIDRANGE

Mayer Penzion (☎ 574 10 58; www.mayer-sp.si; Želeška c 7; d/q €70/90, apt €65-75; ☎ ☎) This delightful 13-room inn in a renovated 19th-century house is in a quiet location above the lake. Even if you're not staying here, have a meal at its excellent restaurant (opposite).

Garni Hotel Berc (☎ 576 56 58; www.berc-sp.si; Pod Stražo 13; s €40, d €65-70; ☎ ☎) Just opposite the Mayer, this new purpose-built *penzion*, reminiscent of a Swiss chalet, has 15 rooms on two floors and gets good reviews from readers.

Vila Prešeren (☎ 578 08 00; www.vila.preseren.s5.net; Kidričeva c 1; s lake view €58-64, park view €50-55, d lake view €78-88, park view €67-72, ste €112-154) Facing the lake just west of Spa Park, this positively charming mini-hotel has just six rooms and two suites in a lovely old villa dating from 1865.

TOP END

Vila Bled (579 15 00; www.vila-bled.com; C Svobode 26; s €130-150, d €170-190, ste lake view €210-240, park view €190-210; ☎ ☎) Now a Relais & Chateaux property, this place started life as Tito's summer retreat. The 10 rooms and 20 suites are furnished in retro 1950s décor, and it is surrounded by a large park and has its own beach.

Eating

Slaščičarna Šmon (☎ 574 16 16; Grajska c 3; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Bled's culinary speciality is *kremna snežna rezina* (cream cake; €1.70), a layer of

vanilla custard topped with whipped cream and sandwiched neatly between two layers of flaky pastry, and this is the place to try it.

Gostilna Pri Planincu (☎ 574 16 13; Grajska c 8; entrées €4.20-8, mains €5.85-15; ☎ noon-10pm) 'At the Mountaineers' is a homey pub-restaurant just down the hill from the Bledec Hostel, with simple Slovenia mains and grilled Balkan specialities, like *čevapčiči* (spicy meatballs of beef or pork; €5.65) and tasty *pljeskavica z kajmakom* (Serbian-style meat patties with mascarpone-like cream cheese; €6.25).

Ostarija Peglez'n (☎ 574 42 18; C Svobode 19a; entrées €4.60-7.50, mains €6.25-16.25; ☎ 11am-midnight) Our new favourite restaurant in Bled, the 'Iron Inn' is just opposite the landmark Grand Hotel Toplice, with fascinating retro décor and serving some of the best fish dishes in town.

Mayer Penzion (☎ 574 10 58; www.mayer-sp.si; Želeška c 7; entrées €7-8, mains €9.20-18.80; ☎ 5pm-midnight Tue-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) The restaurant at this delightful inn (above) serves such tasty Slovenian fare such as sausage, trout, roast pork and *skutini štruklji* (cheese curd pastries). The list of Slovenian wines is a cut above.

Castle Restaurant (☎ 579 44 24; entrées €5-10.85, mains €10.85-18.80; ☎ 10am-10pm) You can't beat the views from this place and the wine list – all Slovenian – is exceptional.

You'll find a **Mercator** (Ljubljanska c 4; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) at the eastern end of Bled Shopping Centre.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses to Bohinj (€3.50, one hour, 26km, hourly), Ljubljana (€6.10, 1¼ hours, 57km, hourly) and Radovljica (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7.5km, half-hourly) use the central bus station.

Bled has no central train station. Trains to Bohinjska Bistrica (€1.45, 20 minutes, 18km, seven daily) and Nova Gorica (€5.05, 2¼ hours, 79km, seven daily) use little Bled Jezero train station, which is 2km west of central Bled – handy for the camping ground but little else. Trains for Ljubljana (€3.90 to €5.30, 55 minutes, 51km, up to 17 daily) use Lesce-Bled train station, 4km to the east of town.

BOHINJ

☎ 04 / pop 5260

Bohinj, a larger and much less-developed glacial lake 26km to the southwest, is a world apart from Bled. Triglav itself is visible from the lake and there are activities galore – from kayaking and mountain biking to trekking up Triglav via one of the southern approaches.

Bohinjska Bistrica, the area's largest village, is 6km east of the lake and useful mainly for its train station. The main tourist hub on the lake is **Ribčev Laz**, at the lake's eastern end. Its minuscule commercial centre contains a supermarket, post office with ATM and the obliging **Tourist Information Centre Bohinj** (☎ 574 60 10; www.bohinj.si; Ribčev Laz 48; ☎ 8am-8pm Jul & Aug, 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun Sep-Jun), which changes money, sells **fishing licences** (€25 to €50.50 per day) and can help with accommodation. Central **Alpinsport** (☎ 572 34 86; www.alpinsport.si; Ribčev Laz 53; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Sep-May) organises a range of activities, and hires kayaks, canoes, bicycles and other equipment from a kiosk near the stone bridge. Next door is the **Church of St John the Baptist**, which contains splendid 15th- and 16th-century frescoes, but is undergoing a protracted renovation.

A nearby village called **Stara Fužina** has an appealing little **Alpine Dairy Museum** (☎ 572 30 95;

A NATIONAL ICON

Nothing is as Slovenian as the *kozolec*, the hayrack seen almost everywhere in the country, except on the far northeastern plain and in the Karst region. Because the ground in Alpine and hilly areas can be damp, wheat and hay are hung from racks, allowing the wind to do the drying faster and more thoroughly.

Until the late 19th century the *kozolec* was looked upon as just another tool to make a farmer's work easier and the land more productive. Then the artist Ivan Grohar made it the centrepiece of many of his impressionist paintings, and the *kozolec* became as much a part of the cultural landscape as the physical one. Today it has become virtually a national icon.

There are many different types of Slovenian hayracks: single ones standing alone or 'goat hayracks' with sloped 'lean-to' roofs, parallel and stretched ones and double hayracks (*toplarji*), often with roofs and storage areas on top. Simple hayracks are not unknown in other parts of Alpine central Europe, but *toplarji*, decorated or plain, are unique to Slovenia.

Stara Fužina 181; adult/child €1.70/1.25; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jan-Jun, Sep & Oct). Just opposite is a cheesemonger called **Plansar** (☎ 572 30 95; Stara Fužina 179; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Oct, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun Dec-May), which specialises in home-made dairy products: hard Bohinj cheese, a soft, strong-tasting cheese called *mo-hant*, cottage cheese, curd pie, sour milk and so on. Just 2km east is **Studor**, a village famed for its *toplarji*, the double-linked hayrack with barns or storage areas at the top, some of which date from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Depending on the season, **Tourist boats** (☎ 041-434 986; adult/child one-way €6.25/4.60, return €7.45/5.45; ☎ 10am-6pm) depart from the pier just opposite the Alpinsport kiosk every half-hour to an hour, terminating 15 minutes later at the Ukanc jetty at the lake's far western west end. Just 300m up from the Ukanc jetty and 5km west of Ribčev Laz, a **cable car** (adult/child return €10/7; ☎ every 30min 7am-7pm Jul & Aug, 8am-6pm Sep-Jun) will whisk you up a vertical kilometre to 1540m; from here, paths continue up **Mt Vogel**.

Sleeping

Private rooms (per person €9.20-15.10) are available through the tourist office.

Penzion Rožič (☎ 572 33 93; rozic@siol.net; Ribčev Laz 42; per person €20-25; ☎) This unpretentious chalet-style guesthouse with 20 rooms and a popular restaurant is just 200m east of the tourist office.

Hotel Bellevue (☎ 572 33 31; www.alpinum.net; Ribčev Laz 65; s €39-52, d €55-89; ☎) The shabby, 59-room Bellevue has a beautiful (if somewhat isolated) location on a hill about 800m south of the Hotel Jezero. Whodunit fans take note: Agatha Christie stayed here for three weeks in 1967. Thirty-eight of the rooms are in the unattractive Savica Annexe.

Hotel Jezero (☎ 572 91 00; www.bohinj.si/alpinum/jezero; Ribčev Laz 51; s €52-86, d €69-141; ☎) This recently renovated 63-room place is the closest hotel to the lake, just opposite the stone bridge in Ribčev Laz. It has a lovely indoor swimming pool, two saunas and a fitness centre.

Autokamp Zlatorog (☎ 572 34 82; www.alpinum.net; Ukanc 2; per person €5.85-10; ☎ May-Sep) This pine-shaded 2.5-hectare camping ground accommodating 500 guests is on the lake at its western end.

Getting There & Around

Buses run regularly from Ukanc to Ljubljana (€8.50, two hours, 91km, hourly) via Ribčev

Laz, Bohinjska Bistrica and Bled (€4, one hour, 34km), with six extra buses daily between Ukanc and Bohinjska Bistrica (€2.20, 20 minutes, 12km). Buses headed as far as Ukanc are marked to 'Bohinj Zlatorog'. From Bohinjska Bistrica, passenger trains to Novo Gorica (€4.50, 1½ hours, 61km, up to seven daily) make use of a century-old tunnel under the mountains that provides the only direct option for reaching the Soča Valley. In addition there are six daily auto trains (*avtovlaki*) to Podbrdo (€7.10, eight minutes, 7km) and Most na Soči (€10.85, 25 minutes, 28km).

KRANJSKA GORA

☎ 04 / pop 1420

Kranjska Gora, lying in the Sava Dolinka Valley that separates the Karavanke range of mountains from the Julian Alps, is the largest and best-equipped ski resort in the country. It's at its most perfect under a blanket of snow, but its surroundings are wonderful to explore in warmer months as well. There are endless possibilities for hiking and mountaineering in Triglav National Park on the town's southern outskirts, and few travellers will not be impressed by a trip over the Vrščič Pass (1611m), the gateway to the Soča Valley.

As ski resorts go, compact Kranjska Gora is relatively cute and sits right beside the ski lifts. There are world record-setting ski jumps 4km west at Planica. Needless to say, there are a lot of places offering ski tuition and equipment hire, including **ASK Kranjska Gora Ski School** (☎ 588 53 00; www.ask-kg.com; Borovška c 99a) in the same building as SKB Banka.

Borovška c, 400m south of where buses arrive and depart, is the heart of the village, with the endearing **Liznjek House** (☎ 588 19 99; Borovška 63; adult/child €2.30/1.70; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun May-Oct & Dec-Mar), an 18th-century museum house with a good collection of household objects and furnishings peculiar to this area of Gorenjska province. At its western end is the **Tourist Information Centre Kranjska Gora** (☎ 588 17 68; www.kranjska-gora.si; Tičarjeva c 2; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun Jun-Sep & mid-Dec-Mar, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr, May, Oct-mid-Dec).

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation costs peak from December to March and in midsummer. April is the cheapest time to visit, though some hotels close for renovations and redecorating at this time. **Private rooms** (s €15.50-20.50, d €21-35) can

be arranged through the tourist office and **Globtour** (☎ 582 02 00; www.globtour-kranjskagora.com; Borovška c 92; ☎ 9am-7pm daily Jul, Aug, Dec-Mar, 9am-7pm Mon-Sat Sep-Nov & Apr-Jun).

Hostel Nika (☎ 588 10 00; zvone.oreskovic@s5.net; Čičare 2; dm €11, s/d €16/28; ☎) This somewhat institutional hostel, with 66 beds in a large village, is about 800m northeast of the town centre and just across the main road from the TGC Shopping Centre.

Hotel Miklič (☎ 588 16 35; www.hotelmiklic.com; Vitranska ul 13; s €45-66, d €70-112; ☎) This pristine *penzion* south of the town centre is surrounded by luxurious lawns and flowerbeds, and boasts an excellent restaurant. It's definitely a cut above most other accommodation options in Kranjska Gora.

Hotel Kotnik (☎ 588 15 64; hotel@hotel-kotnik.si; Borovška c 75; s €48-62, d €56-84; ☎) If you're not into big high-rise hotels with hundreds of rooms, choose this charming, bright yellow property. It has 15 cosy rooms, a great restaurant and pizzeria, and it couldn't be more central.

Gostilna Pri Martinu (☎ 582 03 00; Borovška c 61; entrées €4.20-5.85, mains €5.85-10; ☎ 10am-11pm) This atmospheric tavern-restaurant in an old house opposite the fire station is one of the best places in town to try local specialities, such as venison, trout and *telečja obara* (veal stew.; €3.75).

Getting There & Away

Buses run hourly to Ljubljana (€8.50, two hours, 91km) via Jesenice (€3, 30 minutes, 23km), where you should change for Bled (€2.60, 20 minutes, 16km). There are just two direct departures to Bled (€4.90, one hour, 40km) on weekdays at 9.15am and 1.10pm. A service to Bovec (€5.50, two hours, 46km) via the spectacular Vrščič Pass departs daily in July and August, and on Saturday and Sunday in June and September.

SOČA VALLEY

The region of the Soča Valley stretches from Triglav National Park to Nova Gorica. It is dominated by the 96km-long Soča River coloured a deep – almost artificial – turquoise. The valley has more than its share of historical sights, but most people come here for rafting, hiking and skiing.

Bovec

☎ 05 / pop 1650

The effective capital of the Soča Valley, Bovec has a great deal to offer adventure-sports en-

thusiasts. With the Julian Alps above, the Soča River below and Triglav National Park at the back door, you could spend a week hiking, kayaking, mountain biking and, in winter, skiing at Mt Kanin, Slovenia's highest ski station, without ever doing the same thing twice.

The compact village square, **Trg Golobarskih Žrtev**, has everything you need. There are cafés, a hotel, the extremely helpful **Tourist Information Centre Bovec** (☎ 384 19 19; www.bovec.si; Trg Golobarskih Žrtev 8; ☎ 9am-8pm daily Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 4-6pm Sat, 9am-noon Sun Sep-Jun) and a handful of adrenaline-raising adventure-sports companies, including: **Avantura** (☎ 041-718 317; bovecavantura@hotmail.com); **Soča Rafting** (☎ 389 62 00; www.socarafting.si); **Outdoor Freaks** (☎ 389 64 90, 041-553 675; www.freakoutdoor.com); **Sport Mix** (☎ 389 61 60, 031-871 991; traft@siol.net); and **Top Extreme** (☎ 330 00 90, 041-620 636; www.top.si). Following are just some of the activities on offer:

Canyoning Two hours at Sušec costs €33.70 to €39.

Hydrospeed Like riding down a river on a boogie board; you'll pay €30 to €35 for an 8km ride.

White-water rafting Available only from April to October, it costs around €27 to €37 for a 10km trip, €34.60 to €40 for 21km.

Kayaking A guided 10km paddle costs from €30 per person, or two-day training courses from €77.

Caving A trip costs from €25.50 per person with guide.

In winter you can take a tandem paraglider flight (ie as a passenger accompanied by a qualified pilot) from the top of the Kanin cable car, 2000m above the valley floor. AThe cost of a flight costs from €100; ask the Avantura agency for details.

Private rooms (per person €12-25) are easy to come by in Bovec, and the tourist office and other agencies have hundreds on their lists.

Camping facilities are generally better in Kobarid, but **Kamp Polovnik** (☎ 388 60 69; www.camp-polovnik.com; adult/child €6.70/4.80; ☎ Apr-Oct) about 500m southeast of the town centre is in an attractive setting and much more convenient.

The 103-room **Alp Hotel** (☎ 388 60 40; www.bovec.net/hotelalp; Trg Golobarskih Žrtev 48; s €37-48, d €57.50-78; ☎) is fairly good value and as central as you are going to find in Bovec.

Dobra Vila (☎ 389 64 00; www.dobra-vila-bovec.com; Mala Vas 112; s/d €55/72; ☎) is a positive stunner of a 12-room boutique hotel housed in the former telephone exchange building. It has its own small cinema, library and vine cellar, as well as a fabulous restaurant.

Kobarid

☎ 05 / pop 1250

Some 21km south of Bovec, quaint Kobarid (Caporetto in Italian) lies in a broad valley on the west bank of the Soča River. Although it's surrounded by mountain peaks higher than 2200m, Kobarid feels more Mediterranean than alpine, and the Italian border at Robič is only 9km to the west.

On the town's main square is the extreme-sports agency, **XPoint** (☎ 388 53 08, 041-692 290; www.xpoint.si; Trg Svobode 6; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct), which can organise rafting, canyoning, canoeing and paragliding in Kobarid and Tolmin, 16km to the southeast. The **Tourist Information Centre Kobarid** (☎ 380 04 90; www.lto-sotocje.si; Gregorčičeva ul 8; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-8pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Sep-Jun) is next door to the award-winning **Kobarid Museum** (☎ 389 00 00; Gregorčičeva ul 10; adult/student/child €4/2.90/2.10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), devoted almost entirely to the Isonzo (Soča) Front of WWI (p664), which formed the backdrop to Ernest Hemingway novel's *A Farewell to Arms*. A free pamphlet titled *The Kobarid Historical Walk* outlines a 5km-long route that will take you past remnant WWI troop emplacements to the impressive Kozjak Stream Waterfalls.

The oldest camping ground in the Soča Valley, **Kamp Koren** (☎ 389 13 11; www.kamp-koren.si; Drežniške Ravne 33; per person €6.50-8.50; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct) is a small, one-hectare site, with wheelchair access, about 500m north of Kobarid on the left bank of the Soča River and just before the turnoff to Drežniške Ravne, a lovely village with traditional farmhouses.

The welcoming little **Apartma-Ra** (☎ 389 10 07; apartma-ra@siol.net; Gregorčičeva ul 6c; per person €15-25; ☎ 24) between the museum and Trg Svobode is entirely nonsmoking. Some rooms have terraces, and bicycles are available for hire to guests for €6/9 per half-/full day.

In the centre of Kobarid you'll find two of Slovenia's best provincial restaurants, both of which specialise in fish and seafood: the incomparable **Topli Val** (☎ 389 93 00; Trg Svobode 1; entrées €7.50-10.85, mains €6.75-25; ☎ noon-10pm) and **Kotlar** (☎ 389 11 10; Trg Svobode 11; entrées €5.40-10.40, mains €6.25-16.70; ☎ noon-11pm Thu-Mon).

Getting There & Away

Weekday buses from Bovec via Kobarid go to Novo Gorica (€5.75, 1½ hours, 55km, five

daily) and to Ljubljana (€6.95, three hours, 130km, up to four daily) passing Most na Soči train station for Bled and Bohinj. A bus crosses over the spectacular Vrščič Pass to Kranjska Gora (€6.65, three hours, 68km) daily in July and August.

Novo Gorica

☎ 05 / pop 12,600

Novo Gorica is a green university town straddling the Italian border. When the town of Gorica, capital of the former Slovenian province of Gorizia, was awarded to the Italians after WWII, the new socialist government in Yugoslavia set itself to building a model town on the eastern side of the border. They called it 'New Gorica' and erected a chain-link barrier between the two towns. This mini-'Berlin Wall' was pulled down to great fanfare in 2004, leaving the anomalous Piazza Transalpina (Trg z Mozaikom) straddling the border right behind Novo Gorica train station, where you'll now find the rather esoteric **Museum of the Border** (☎ 333 44 00; admission free; ☎ 1-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun).

With no barrier remaining, there's really nothing to stop you wandering across to the Italian side, where the Italian bus 1 will whisk you to Gorizia train station. However, this is still not a *legal* border crossing and won't become one until Slovenia joins the Schengen Convention. Meanwhile EU citizens may use a less direct shuttle bus (€1, 25 minutes, hourly) between the two train stations, or cross on foot at the **Gabrielle border crossing** (☎ 8am-8pm), some 500m south at the end of Erjavčeva ul, which becomes Via San Gabriele in Italy.

Other passport-holders are expected to use the 24-hour **Rožna Dolina-Cassa Rosa border crossing**. That's reached by half-hourly buses (any number) from Novo Gorica bus station, or by walking 20 minutes south from the train station: follow the railway line through the cycle tunnel, from where you immediately cross the tracks on a footbridge and continue along Ul Pinka Tomažiča and Pot na Pristavo. From Cassa Rosa take Italian bus 8 northbound along its convoluted route, which loops back to Gorizia bus/train stations.

The helpful **Tourist Information Centre Novo Gorica** (☎ 333 46 00; www.novogorica-turizem.com; Bev-kov trg 4; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun) is in the lobby of the Kulturni Dom (Cultural House).

Novo Gorica's only inexpensive accommodation option, **Prenocišče Pertout** (☎ 330 75 50, 041-624 452; www.prenociscepertout.com; Ul 25 Maja 23; s/d/tr €22.50/36/48), is a five-room B&B in Rožna Dolina, south of the town centre and scarcely 100m northeast of the Italian border.

The Italian restaurant **Marco Polo** (☎ 302 97 29; Kidričeva ul 13; entrées €5.85-12.50, mains €7.50-15.00; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun), 250m east of the tourist office, is one of the town's best places to eat, serving both pizza (€3.75 to €6.25) and more ambitious dishes, and with a delightful back terrace.

Buses travel hourly between Novo Gorica and Ljubljana (€10.35, 2½ hours, 116km) via Postojna (€5.75, one hour, 53km), and up to six times daily to Bovec (€7.30, two hours, 77km) via Kobarid (€5.75, 1½ hours, 55km).

Trains link Novo Gorica with Bohinjska Bistrica (€4.50, 1½ hours, 61km, up to seven daily) and Bled or via Sežana and Divača to Postojna and Ljubljana (€7.30, 3½ hours, 153km, up to six daily).

KARST & COAST

Slovenia's short coast (47km) on the Adriatic is not renowned for its fine beaches, though the southernmost resort of Portorož has some decent ones. Three important towns full of Venetian Gothic architecture – Koper, Piran and Izola – are the drawing card here and will keep even the most indefatigable of sightseers busy. En route from Ljubljana you'll cross the

Karst, a huge limestone plateau and a land of olives, ruby-red Teran wine, *pršut* (air-dried ham), old stone churches and deep subterranean caves. In fact, Slovenia's two most famous caverns – theme park-like Postojna and awesome Škocjan – are here.

POSTOJNA

☎ 05 / pop 8670

Slovenia's most popular natural tourist attraction, **Postojna Cave** (☎ 700 01 00; www.postojnska-jama.si; adult/student/child €16.65/12.50/13.80; ☎ tours hourly 9am-6pm May-Sep, 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm Apr & Oct, 10am, noon & 2pm Mon-Fri, 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is about 2km northwest of the town of Postojna. The 5.7km-long cavern is visited on a 1½-hour tour, but about 4km of it is covered by an electric train. The remaining 1700m is on foot. Inside, impressive stalagmites and stalactites stretch almost endlessly in all directions, as do the chattering crowds who pass them. The tour culminates with a quick encounter (in a tank) with the endemic *Proteus anguinus* (below). Dress warmly or rent a woollen cape (€2); even on summer days it's only 10°C (50°F) inside the cave.

Close to the cave's entrance is the **Proteus Vivarium** (adult/student/child €5/3.50/2.90; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm May-Sep, 9.30am-4.30pm Apr & Oct, 9.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), a speliobiological research station with a video introduction to underground zoology. A 45-minute tour then leads you into a small, darkened cave to peep at some of the shy creatures you've just learned about. Don't expect monsters

THE HUMAN FISH

Proteus anguinus is one of the most mysterious creatures in the world. A kind of salamander, but related to no other amphibian, it is the largest known permanent cave-dwelling vertebrate. The blind little fellow lives hidden in the pitch black for up to a century and can go for years without food. It was discovered by the 17th-century Slovenian polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor, who named it after the protector of Poseidon's sea creatures in Greek mythology and the Latin word for 'snake'.

Proteus anguinus is 25cm to 30cm long and is a bundle of contradictions. It has a long tail fin that it uses for swimming, but can also propel itself with its four legs (the front pair have three small 'fingers' and the back have two 'toes'). Though blind, *Proteus anguinus* has an excellent sense of smell and is sensitive to weak electric fields in the water. It uses these to move around in the dark, locate prey and communicate. It breathes through frilly, bright-red gills at the base of its head when submerged, but also has rudimentary lungs for breathing when outside the water. The human-like skin has no pigmentation whatsoever, but looks pink in the light due to blood circulation.

The question that scientists have asked themselves for three centuries is: how do they reproduce? The salamander's reproduction has never been witnessed in a natural state, and they haven't been very cooperative in captivity. It is almost certain that they hatch their young from eggs and don't reach sexual maturity until the (almost human) age of 16 or 18 years.

of the deep; most are so minuscule you can hardly see them.

Predjama, a village 9km northwest of Postojna, consists of half a dozen houses, an inn, a mock-medieval jousting course and the remarkable **Predjama Castle** (☎ 751 60 15; adult/student/child €5/3.50/2.90; 🕒 9am-7pm May-Sep, 10am-6pm Apr & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar), which actually appears to grow out of a yawning cave. The partly furnished interior boasts costumed wax mannequins, one of which dangles from the dripping rock-roofed torture chamber. Beneath are stalactite-adorned **caves** (adult/student/child €5/3.50/2.90, cave & castle combination ticket €9/6.30/5.20), which lack Postojna's crowds but also much of its grandeur.

Sleeping & Eating

Lots of houses in Postojna rent out **private rooms** (per person €13.90-15.80). Your best contact is **Kompas Postojna** (☎ 721 14 80; info@kompas-postojna.si; Titov trg 2a; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat May, Sep & Oct, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Nov-Apr).

Hotel & Hostel Sport (☎ 720 622 44; www.sport-hotel.si; Kolodvorska c 1; dm €13-15, s €34-38, d €43-56; 🕒) This recent arrival, with 37 spic-and-span and very comfortable rooms, including 40 hostel beds, is just 300m north of the centre of Postojna. True to its name, it can arrange all sorts of activities, including mountain-biking trips in nearby Notranjska Regional Park.

Pizzeria Minutka (☎ 720 36 25; Ljubljanska c 14; pizza €4.20-5.85; 🕒 10am-11pm) A pizzeria with a terrace, Minutka is a favourite with locals and is just south of the Hotel & Hostel Sport.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Ljubljana to Koper, Piran or Novo Gorica all stop in Postojna (€5.75, one hour, 54km, half-hourly). The train is less useful, as the train station is 1km east of town near the bypass (ie 3km from the caves).

As close as you'll get by local bus from Postojna to Predjama (€1.70, 15 minutes, 9km, five daily Monday to Friday) and during the school year only is Bukovje, a village about 2km northeast of Predjama. A taxi from Postojna, including an hour's wait at Predjama Castle, will cost €25, which staff at Kompas Postojna can arrange.

ŠKOCJAN CAVES

☎ 05

The immense **Škocjan Caves** (☎ 763 28 40, 708 21 10; www.park-skocjanske-je-me.si; Škocjan 2; adult/student/child

€10.85/7.50), a Unesco World Heritage site since 1986, are far more captivating than the larger one at Postojna, and for many travellers a visit here will be one of the highlights of their trip to Slovenia – a page right out of Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. With relatively few stalactites, the attraction is the sheer depth of the awesome underground chasm, which you cross by a dizzying little footbridge. To see this you must join a shepherded two-hour walking tour, involving hundreds of steps and ending with a rickety funicular ride. Tours depart hourly from 10am to 5pm from May to September, and 10am, 1pm and 3.30pm in April, May and October, and 10am and 1pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am, 1pm and 3pm Sunday from November to March.

The nearest town with accommodation is **Divača** (population 1300), 5km to the northwest. Here **Gostilna Malovec** (☎ 763 02 00; Kraška 30a; s/d €20/40) has a half-dozen basic but comfortable renovated rooms in a building beside its popular restaurant (entrées €3.35 to €5.85, mains €5 to €9.10; open 7am to 10pm). For something a bit more, well, 21st century, cross the road to **Orient Express** (☎ 763 30 10; Kraška c 67; pizza €5-10.85; 🕒 11am-11pm Sun-Fri, 11am-2am Sat), a lively pizzeria and pub.

Buses from Ljubljana to Koper and the coast stop at Divača (€7.60, 1½ hours, 82km, half-hourly), as do trains (€5.90, 1½ hours, 104km, hourly). Staff at both the train station and at helpful **Kraški Turist** (☎ 041-573 768; kraskiturst@gmail.com; 🕒 8am-5pm Apr-Oct) next to the small café at the station can provide you with a photocopied route map for walking to the caves. Alternatively, Kraški Turist has bicycles for hire (€1.25/8.35 per hour/day) and can arrange transport for around €5 per person.

LIPICA

☎ 05 / pop 130

Lipica is where Austrian Archduke Charles, son of Ferdinand I, established a stud farm to breed horses for the Spanish Riding School in Vienna in 1580.

The snow-white beasts are still bred here at the **Lipica Stud Farm** (☎ 739 15 80; www.lipica.org; Lipica 5; adult/student from €7/3.50), which offers equestrian fans a variety of tours, as well as rides and lessons. Tour times are too complex and varied to list here, please contact the farm for details.

The 68-room **Hotel Maestoso** (☎ 739 15 80; www.lipica.org; s €53-68, d €82-106; 🕒) has excellently

appointed modern rooms looking over the golf links-like landscape.

KOPER

☎ 05 / pop 23,270

By far the largest town on the Slovenian coast, Koper (Capodistria in Italian) is a workaday port city that at first glance scarcely seems to give tourism a second thought. Yet its central core is delightfully quiet, quaint and much less touristy than its ritzy cousin Piran, 17km down the coast.

Koper grew rich as a key port trading salt, and was the capital of Istria under the 15th- and 16th-century Venetian Republic. At that time it was an island commanding a U-shaped bay of saline ponds, something hard

to imagine now, given the centuries of land reclamation that have joined it very firmly to the mainland.

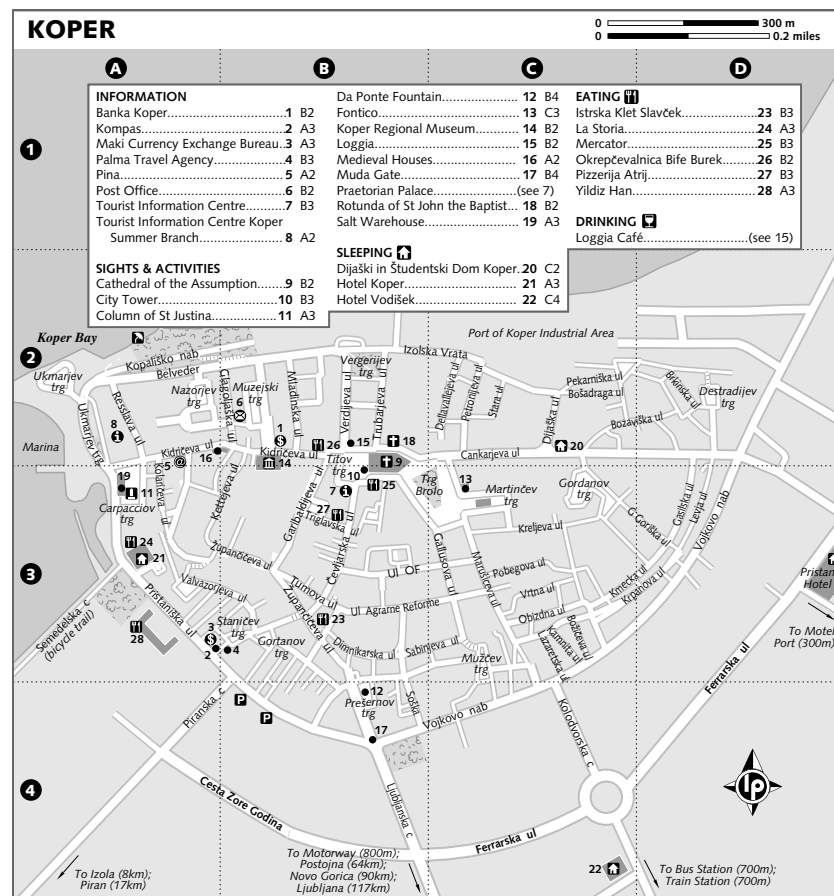
Orientation

The joint bus and train station is 1.4km south-east of central Titov trg. To walk into town, just head north along Kolodvorska c in the direction of the cathedral's distinctive campanile (bell tower). Alternatively, take bus 1, 2 or 3 to Muda Gate.

Information

Banka Koper (Kidričeva ul 14; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Kompas (☎ 663 05 82; Pristaniška ul 17; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Has private rooms.



Maki Currency Exchange Bureau (Pristaniška ul 13; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm Sat)

Palma Travel Agency (☎ 663 36 60; Pristaniška ul 21; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Can arrange private rooms.

Pina (☎ 627 80 72; Kidričeva ul 43; adult/student per hr €3.75/1.25; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri) Central internet café with 10 terminals.

Tourist Information Centre main branch (☎ 664 64 03; tic@koper.si; Praetorian Palace, Titov trg 3; ☎ 8am-9pm Jul & Aug, 9am-5pm Sun Sep-Jun); summer branch (☎ 663 20 10; Ukmarjev trg 7; ☎ 8am-9pm Jul & Aug)

Sights

The greatest attraction of Koper is aimless wandering. You change centuries abruptly passing through the **Muda Gate** (1516). Continue north past the **Da Ponte Fountain** (Prešernov trg), erected in 1666, and up Župančičeva ul and Čevljarska ul, the narrow commercial artery, to reach Titov trg. This fine central square is dominated by the 1480 **City Tower** attached to the part-Gothic, part-Renaissance **Cathedral of the Assumption**. The renovated 15th-century **Praetorian Palace** (Titov trg 3; admission free) contains the town hall, with exhibits on the 1st floor and an old pharmacy and the tourist office on the ground floor. Opposite, the splendid 1463 **Loggia** is now an elegant yet affordable café (opposite). To the east of it is the circular Romanesque **Rotunda of St John the Baptist**, a baptistery dating from the second half of the 12th century.

Several more fine façades face **Trg Brolo**, a wide, peacefully Mediterranean square to the southeast. One is the shield-dotted **Fontico** that started life as a grain warehouse in the late 14th century.

The **Koper Regional Museum** (☎ 663 35 70; Kidričeva ul 19; adult/child €1.70/1.25; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun) is inside the Belgramoni-Tacco Palace and contains an Italianate sculpture garden. Kidričeva ul also has a few appealing **medieval houses** with beamed overhangs. It leads west into Carpacciov trg, the former fish market with a 15th-century **salt warehouse** and a stone **Column of St Justina**, topped with a statue of St Justina and dating from 1571.

Sleeping

Kompas (p685) and the Palma Travel Agency (above) can arrange **private rooms** (s €12.50-14.60, d €20.85-25) and **apartments** (apt for 2 €29.20-35.40, apt for 4 €43.80-54.20). Most rooms and apartments are in the new town beyond the train station, however.

Motel Port (☎ 639 32 60; motel.port@siol.net; Ankarska c 7; dm €14, rm for up to 3/4 €46/65; ☎ ☎) Hidden on the top floor of a Mondrianesque shopping centre south of the Old Town, this place has excellent en suite rooms, but its location beside a truck terminal results in a deep traffic rumble and the mainly male, lorry-driver clientele may discourage single women.

Dijaški in Študentski Dom Koper (☎ 662 62 50; www.d-dom.kp.edus.si, in Slovene; Cankarjeva ul 5; dm €15; ☎ late Jun-late Aug; ☎) In summer this relatively central student dormitory becomes a hostel. Try to arrive early, as it gets booked up fast.

Hotel Vodisek (☎ 639 24 68; www.hotel-vodisek.com; Kolodvorska c 2; s/d/tr €40/60/75; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This tiny hotel, with 32 reasonably priced rooms is in a shopping centre halfway between the Old Town and the train and bus stations. TheIt has wheelchair access, and use of bicycles is free for guests.

Hotel Koper (☎ 61005000; www.termo-gatez.si; Pristaniška ul 3; s €60, d €100-110; ☎ ☎ ☎) This pleasant, 65-room property on the very edge of the historic Old Town is the only central hotel in Koper. RatesIt has wheelchair access, and rates include entry to Aquapark at the Hotel Žusterna.

Eating & Drinking

Okrepčevalnica Bife Burek (☎ 271 347; Kidričeva ul 8; snacks €1.50-2.10; ☎ 7am-10pm) Buy good-value *burek* and pizza slices here and enjoy them at Titov trg for a take-away snack.

Yildiz Han (☎ 626 14 60; Pristaniška ul 2; entrées €2.70-5, mains €6.90-10.20; ☎ noon-midnight) 'Star House', a branch of a similarly named establishment in Ljubljana, has all our Turkish favourites, including *sigara böreği* (filo parcels filled with cheese) and *yaprak dolmasi* (stuffed vine leaves), as well as kebabs.

Istrska Klet Slavček (☎ 627 67 29; Župančičeva ul 39; dishes €3.35-10.85; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri) This 'Istrian Cellar', situated in the 18th-century Carli Palace, is one of the most colourful places for a meal in the Old Town. Filling set lunches go for less than €10, and there's Malvazija and Teran wine drawn straight from the barrel.

Pizzerija Atrij (☎ 626 28 03; Triglavska ul 2; pizza €4.20-6.05; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat) This popular pizzeria down an alleyway no wider than your average quarterback's shoulder spread has a small back garden.

La Storia (☎ 031-769 079; Pristaniška ul 3; entrées €4.80-6.70, mains €5-10; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun) This Italian-style trattoria in the same building as the Hotel Koper focuses on pasta

dishes and salads, and has outside seating in the warmer months. The salad bar (small/large €2.30/3.35) is good value.

Mercator (Titov trg 2; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) This small supermarket branch in the Old Town also opens on weekends.

Loggia Café (☎ 621 32 13; Titov trg 1; ☎ 7.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) This lovely café in the exquisite 15th-century Loggia is the best vantage point for watching the crowds on Titov trg.

Getting There & Away

Bus routes to Piran (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) half-hourly on weekdays and every 40 minutes on weekends. Up to 15 buses daily run to Ljubljana (€10.35, 1¼ to 2½ hours, 120km), though the train is more comfortable, with IC services (€8.70, 2¼ hours) at 5.55am and 2.45pm, and local services (€7.30, 2½ hours) at 10.03am and 7.12pm.

Bus routes to Trieste (€3, one hour, 23km, up to 13 daily) run along the coast via Ankaran and Muggia on weekdays only. Destinations in Croatia include Rijeka (€7.60, two hours, 84km, 10.10am Monday to Friday), Rovinj (€11.10, 129km, three hours, 3.55pm daily July and August) via Poreč (€8, two hours, 88km), plus two or three to Poreč only, notably at 8.30am Monday to Friday.

IZOLA

☎ 05 / pop 10,425

Overshadowed by much-more genteel Piran, Izola (Isola in Italian) is bypassed by most foreign visitors and, frankly, the locals don't seem to give a damn. This also-ran place does have a certain Venetian charm, a few narrow old streets, and some nice waterfront bars and restaurants. Ask the helpful **Tourist Information Centre Izola** (☎ 640 10 50; tic.izola@izola.si; Sončno nabrežje 4; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat Oct-May) about private rooms, or in summer check out the 174-bed **Dijaški Dom Izola** (☎ 662 1740; branko.miklobusec@guest.arnes.si; Prekomorskih Brigad ul 7; dm from €20; ☎ Jul & Aug; ☎), which overlooks the marina and offers about the cheapest beds you'll find within striking distance of Piran. Because of the lack of tourists Izola is a good place to enjoy a seafood meal, especially at **Ribič** (☎ 641 83 13; Veliki trg 3; entrées €4.20-8.75, mains €8-17.50; ☎ 8am-1am), a venue much loved by locals. Out in Izola's industrial suburbs, **Ambasada Gavioli** (☎ 641 8212; www.ambasada-gavioli.com; Industrijska c; ☎ midnight-6am Sat) remains Slovenia's

top nightrave club, featuring a procession of international star DJs.

Frequent buses between Koper (€1.70, 15 minutes, 6km) and Piran (€1.70, 20 minutes, 9.5km) go via Izola, and there's a catamaran service to Venice (p695).

PIRAN

☎ 05 / pop 4050

Everyone's favourite town on the Slovenian coast, picturesque little Piran (Pirano in Italian) sits on the tip of a narrow peninsula, the westernmost point of Slovenian Istria. Strunjan Bay is to the north; Piran Bay and Portorož, Slovenia's largest beach resort, lie to the south. Piran's Old Town is a gem of Venetian Gothic architecture and is full of narrow streets. In summer the town gets pretty overrun by tourists, but in April or October it's hard not to fall in love with the winding Venetian-Gothic alleyways and tempting seafood restaurants. It's thought that the town's name comes from the Greek word for fire (*pyr*). In ancient times fires were lit at Punta, the very tip of the peninsula, to guide ships to the port at Aegida (now Koper).

Orientation

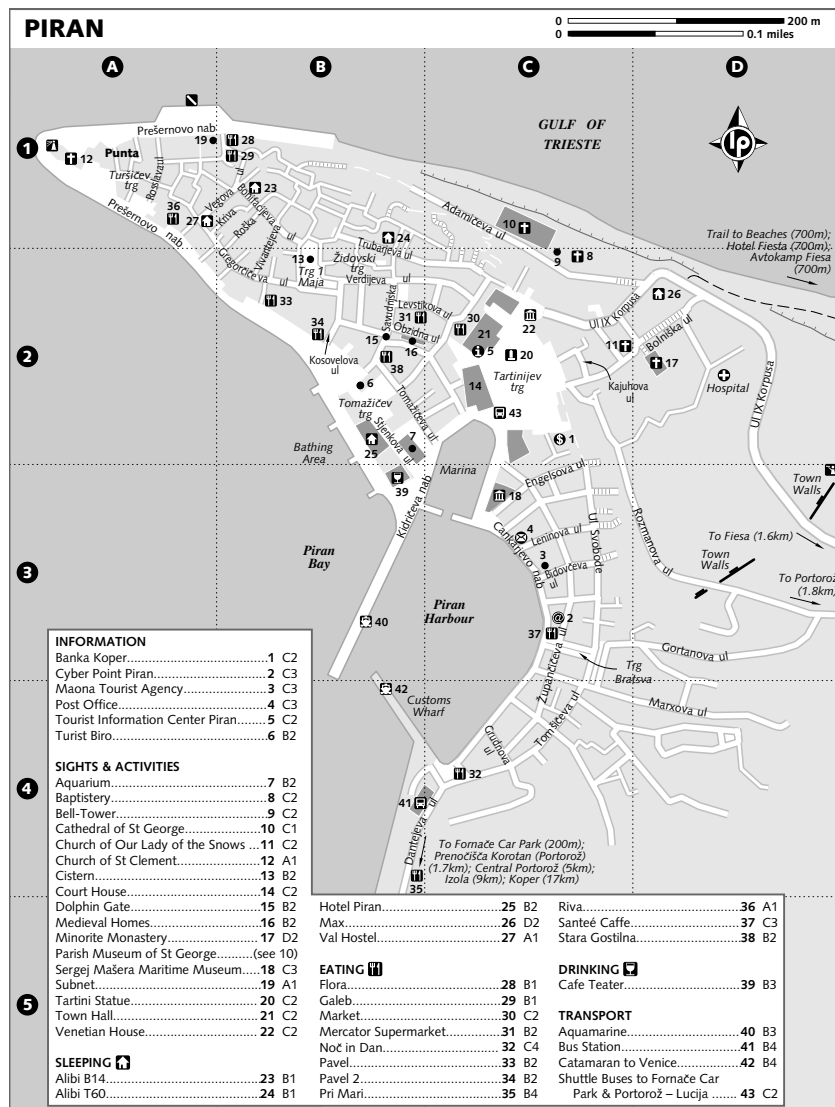
Bus routes from everywhere except Portorož arrive at the bus station, just a 300m stroll along the portside Cankarjevo nabrežje from central Tartinijev trg. Be warned that a car is an encumbrance, not a help in Piran. Vehicles are stopped at a tollgate 200m south of the bus station, where the sensible choice is to use the huge Fornače car park (€0.80/7.70 per hour/day €0.80/7.70). You could take a ticket and drive on into the town centre (first hour free, then €2.70 per hour) but old Piran is so small, parking is so limited and its alleyways so narrow (mostly footpaths) that you're likely to regret it.

Information

Banka Koper (Tartinijev trg 12; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Cyber Point Piran (☎ 671 00 22; http://cyberpoint.ksoop-cscp.si, in Slovene; 4th fl, Študentek Bldg, Župančičeva ul 14; per hr €4.20; ☎ 1-9pm Mon-Fri) Internet access on five terminals.

Maona Tourist Agency (☎ 673 45 20; www.maona.si; Cankarjevo nabrežje 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) Unstintingly helpful travel agency can organise anything from private rooms to activities and cruises.



Tourist Information Center Piran (☎ 673 02 20; www.piran.si; Tartinijev trg; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun) Located in the impressive Town Hall.

Sights & Activities

Piran is continuously watched over by the **Cathedral of St George** (Adamičeva ul 2). If time weighs

on your hands, visit the attached **Parish Museum of St George** (☎ 673 34 40; admission €1; ☎ 11am-5pm), which contains church plate, paintings and a lapidary. The cathedral's freestanding **bell tower** (1608) was clearly modelled on the campanile at San Marco's Basilica in Venice, and its octagonal **baptistry** dating from the mid-17th century has imaginatively recycled

a 2nd-century Roman sarcophagus for use as a baptismal font. The **Minorite Monastery** (☎ 673 44 17; Bolniška ul 20) on the way down to Tartinijev trg has a delightful cloister, and in the **Church of Our Lady of the Snows** almost opposite is a superb 15th-century arch painting of the Crucifixion. The **Sergej Mašera Maritime Museum** (☎ 671 00 40; Cankarjevo nabrežje 3; adult/student €2.50/2.10; ☎ 9am-noon & 6-9pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun) has 2000-year-old Roman amphorae beneath the glass ground floor, and lots of impressive antique ships' models and ex-voto offerings upstairs.

One of Piran's most eye-catching structures is the red 15th-century **Venetian House** (Tartinijev trg 4), with its tracery windows and stone lion relief. When built this would have overlooked Piran's inner port, which was filled to form Tartinijev trg in 1894. The square is named in honour of the violinist and composer Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770), who was born in what is now the house at Tartinijev trg 7 and whose **statue** stands in the middle of the square. The square is dominated to the north by the porticoed 19th-century **Town Hall**, which houses the tourist office, and to the west by the **Court House**. The **Aquarium** (☎ 673 25 72; Kidričevo nabrežje 4; adult/child €2.50/1.70; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-7pm late Mar-mid-Jun, Sep-mid-Oct, 9am-10pm mid-Jun-Aug), south of the square along the harbour, has a tremendous variety of sea life packed into its two-dozen tanks.

Behind the market north of Tartinijev trg, **medieval homes** have been built into an ancient defensive wall along Obzidna ul, which passes under the 15th-century **Dolphin Gate**. **Trg 1 Maja** (1st May Sq) may sound like a socialist parade ground, but in fact it's one of Piran's most attractive squares, with a **cistern** dating from the late 18th century. Rainwater from the surrounding roofs flowed into it through the fish borne by the two stone putti in the back.

Punta, the historical 'snout' of Piran, still has a **lighthouse**, but today's is small and modern. Just behind it, however, the round, serrated tower of 18th-century **Church of St Clement** evokes the ancient beacon from which Piran likely got its name.

Most water-related activities take place in Portorož, but if you want to give diving a go, **Subnet** (☎ 673 22 18; www.sub-net.si; Prešernovo nabrežje 24; shore/boat dive €25/40; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Sun-Fri, 9am-noon & 2-7pm Sat) organises shore and boat-guided dives, gives PADI open-water courses (around €150) and hires equipment. Don't expect Red Sea-style corals in these parts,

though. The most unusual underwater sight hereabouts is the wreck of a WWII seaplane in Portorož Bay.

Sleeping

Private rooms (s €15.85-25, d €23-35) and **apartments** (apt for 2 people €36.30-44.20, for 4 €56-72) are available through Maona Tourist Agency (p687) and the **Tourist Biro** (☎ 673 25 09; www.turistbiro-ag.si; Tomažičeva ul 3; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat & sun), opposite the Hotel Piran.

Autokamp Fiesa (☎ 674 62 30, 031-487 255; autocamp.fiesa@siol.net; adult €8.35-10, child €2.50; ☎ May-Sep) The closest camping ground to Piran is at Fiesa, 4km by road but less than 1km if you follow the coastal trail east of the Cathedral of St George. It's tiny and becomes very crowded in summer.

Val Hostel (☎ 673 25 55; www.hostel-val.com; Gregorčičeva ul 38a; with/without HI card €20/24 Jun-Aug, €18/23 Sep-May; ☎ ☎) This central partially renovated hostel has 22 rooms, with shared shower, free internet access, kitchen and washing machine. It's a great favourite with backpackers.

Alibi B14 (☎ 031-363 666; www.alibi.si; Bonifacijeva ul 14; per person €20-25; ☎ ☎) The most welcome arrival on the budget/midrange accommodation scene in Piran in years is this upbeat and colourful four-floor party hostel, with six rooms, each with four to six beds, kitchenette and bath. It's in ancient townhouse on a narrow street, and there's a washing machine and free internet access.

Alibi T60 (Trubarjeva ul 60; per person €30; ☎ ☎ ☎) Even better is Alibi B14's sister-hostel, the more subdued Alibi T60, to the east, with a fully equipped double on each of its five floors. The top room's view terrace view is priceless. Reception is at Alibi B14.

Hotel Fiesa (☎ 671 22 00; www.hotel-fiesa.com; Fiesa 57; s €57-70, d €75-98) Although not in Piran itself, this 22-room hotel overlooking the sea near the Autokamp Fiesa camping ground is one of the most atmospheric places to stay in the area.

Max (☎ 673 34 36, 041-692 928; www.maxpiran.com; Ul IX Korpusa 26; s/d €50/60; ☎ ☎) Piran's most romantic accommodation option has rooms, each named rather than numbered, in a delightful, very pink townhouse just down from the cathedral.

Hotel Piran (☎ 676 21 00; www.hoteli-piran.si; Stjenkova ul 1; s €57-84, d €70-123, ste €131-181; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Hotel Piran has 80 rooms and 10 apartments, and is right on the water.

Eating & Drinking

One of Piran's attractions is its plethora of fish restaurants, especially along Prešernovo nabrežje, though don't expect any bargains. Virtually all charge around €6.25 for a plate of grilled squid and from €33.40 per kg for fish.

Pavel (☎ 674 71 01; Gregorčičeva ul 3; ☎ 11am-11pm) This fish restaurant – the granddaddy of them all – and its sister-eatery nearby, **Pavel2** (☎ 674 71 02; Kosovelova ul 1; ☎ 11am-midnight), cater to the tourist trade and are somewhat overpriced; expect to pay about €25 per person with house wine.

Flora (☎ 673 12 58; Prešernovo nabrežje 26; pizza €3.35-5.85; ☎ 8am-1am Jul & Aug, 10am-10pm Sep-Jun) The terrace of this simple pizzeria east of the Punta lighthouse has uninterrupted views of the Adriatic.

Pri Mari (☎ 673 47 35, 041-616 488; Dantejeva ul 17; entrées €3.75-8.30, mains €6.25-14.60; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) This very stylish restaurant south of the bus station makes an ambitious (and successful) attempt at combining Mediterranean and Slovenian food. Service is slow, so go with time on your hands.

Stara Gostilna (☎ 673 31 65; Savudrijska ul 2; entrées €4.20-7, mains €5.85-14.60; ☎ 9am-11pm) This delightful bistro in the Old Town serves both meat and fish dishes, and offers some of the best and most welcoming service in town.

Riva (☎ 673 22 25; Gregorčičeva ul 43; entrées €5-8.30, mains €5-16.60; ☎ 9am-midnight) Our new favourite (and very classy) seafood restaurant on Prešernovo nabrežje has the best sea views, décor and a pizzeria (pizza €4.20 to €5.40) next door for ichthyophobes.

Galeb (☎ 673 32 25; Pusterla ul 5; meals from €14.60; ☎ 11am-4pm & 6pm-midnight Wed-Mon) This excellent family-run restaurant is east of the Punta lighthouse. It's totally nonsmoking.

Santée Caffè (☎ 051-309 980; Cankarjevo nabrežje 11; sandwiches from €1.25, salads €4.20; ☎ 7am-midnight) The hyperfriendly Santée Caffè has sandwiches (€1.25 to €3.10) and salads (€4.20), and walls painted in colours as vivid as its excellent ice creams.

Café Teater (☎ 041-638 933; Stjenkova ul 1; ☎ 7am-3am Mon-Fri, 9am-3am Sat & Sun) Anyone who's anyone in Piran can be found at this café, with a waterfront terrace and antique furnishings.

There's an outdoor **market** (Zelenjavi trg; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) in the small square behind the Town Hall. There's a small **Mercator** (Levitikova ul 3; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8-11am Sun) supermarket in the Old Town, and a **Noč**

in Dan (☎ 671 57 52; Tomšičeva ul 41; ☎ 7am-midnight) branch opposite the bus station.

Getting There & Away

From the bus station buses run every 30 to 40 minutes to Koper (€2.60, half-hour, 18km) via Izola, while five daily (Monday to Friday only) head for Trieste (€4.60, 1¼ hours, 36km) and up to eight daily to Ljubljana (€11.70, 2½ to three hours, 140km) via Divača and Postojna.

From Tartinijev trg, shuttle buses (€1) travel to Portorož-Lucija (bus 1) and Portorož via Strunjan (bus 3).

Piran and Izola despatch catamarans to Venice (p695) at least once a week.

PORTOROŽ

☎ 05 / pop 2800

Portorož (Portorose in Italian), Slovenia's biggest resort, can be a bit honky-tonk, especially along Obala, the main drag, but it isn't all bad. Its sandy beaches are the largest on the coast and are relatively clean, there are pleasant spas and wellness centres where you can take the waters or cover yourself in curative mud, and the list of other activities is endless. At the same time the vast array of accommodation options makes Portorož a useful fall back if everything's full in nearby Piran. Full listings are available at the **Tourist Information Centre Portorož** (☎ 674 02 31; www.portoroz.si; Obala 16; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm mid-Sep-mid-Jun). Just off the main road between Piran and the centre of Portorož, the unusually upmarket, summer-only hostel **Prenočišča Korotan** (☎ 674 5400; www.sd.upr.si/sdp/prenocisca; Obala 11; s/d/tr €29/41/55; ☎ Jul & Aug; ☎) in Korotan has en suite rooms and its internet computers are open to nonguests year-round. Most of Portorož is high-rise city. For something on a more human scale, check out the lovely 48-room **Hotel Marco** (☎ 617 40 00; www.hotel-marco.com; Obala 28; s €54-83, d €67-104), with lovely gardens and just opposite the beach.

The pleasant cantina **Papa Chico** (☎ 677 93 10; Obala 26; entrées €3.75-5.45, mains €4.60-8.75; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Sat, 10am-2am Sun) serves 'Mexican fun food' (go figure), including fajitas (€7.50 to €9.20).

The über-designer café **Kavarna Cacao** (☎ 674 10 35; Obala 14; ☎ 8am-3am) wins the award as the most stylish on the coast, with a fabulous terrace.

There are dozens of decent pizzerias all along Obala, but the place of choice is **Pizzeria Figarola** (☎ 674 22 00; Obala 14a; pizza €5.65-7.50; ☎ 10am-10pm), with a huge terrace just up from the main pier, serving pizza and pasta dishes.

Every 20 minutes, shuttle bus 1 (€1) from Piran trundles right along Obala to Lucija, passing by Prenočišča Korotan.

SLOVENIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation listings throughout this guide have been ordered by price – from the cheapest to the most expensive. Very, very roughly, budget accommodation means a double room under €50, midrange is €51 to €100 and top end is anything over €101.

Camping grounds generally charge per person, whether you're in a tent or caravan. Rates always include hot showers. Almost all sites close from mid-October to mid-April. Camping 'rough' is illegal in Slovenia, and this is enforced, especially around Bled. Seek out the Slovenian Tourist Board's *Camping in Slovenia*.

Slovenia's growing stable of hostels includes Ljubljana's trendy Celica and the Alibi hostels found both in the capital and at Piran. Throughout the country there are student dorms moonlighting as hostels in July and August. Unless stated otherwise hostel rooms share bathrooms. They typically cost €13 to €21; prices are at their highest in midsummer, when it can sometimes be difficult to find accommodation at any price.

Tourist information offices can help you access extensive networks of private rooms, apartments and tourist farms, or they can recommend private agencies that will. Such accommodation can appear misleadingly cheap if you carelessly overlook the 30% to 50% surcharge levied on stays of less than three nights. Also beware that many such properties are in outlying villages with minimal public transport, and that the cheapest one-star category rooms with shared bathroom are actually very rare, so you'll often pay well above the quoted minimum. Depending on the season you might save a little money by going directly to any house with a sign reading *sobe* (rooms).

Guesthouses, known as a *penzion*, *gostišče*, or *prenočišča*, are often cosy and better value than full-blown hotels, some of which are unattractive if well-renovated socialist-era holdovers. Nonetheless it can be difficult to find a double room in a hotel for under €50. Beware that locally listed rates are usually quoted per person assuming double occupancy. A tourist tax – routinely €0.65 to €1 per person and a

hefty single-occupancy supplement – often lurk in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, room rates include en suite toilet, shower with towels and soap, and breakfast.

ACTIVITIES

Slovenia is a very well-organised place for all outdoor activities.

Extreme Sports

Several areas specialise in adrenaline-rush activities, the greatest range being available at Bovec, famous for white-water rafting, hydro-speed, kayaking and canyoning – ie sliding down and through waterfalls and gullies in a neoprene wetsuit with the assistance of a well-trained (and licensed) guide. Bovec is also a great place for paragliding; in winter you ascend Mt Kanin (below) via ski lift and then jump off. Gliding costs are very reasonable from Lesce near Bled. Scuba diving from Piran is also good value.

Hiking

Hiking is extremely popular, with the **Alpine Association of Slovenia** (www.pzs.si) counting some 55,000 members and Ljubljančani flocking in droves to Triglav National Park on weekends. There are around 7000km of waymarked paths, and in summer 167 mountain huts offer comfortable trailside refuge. Several shorter treks are outlined in the *Sunflower Guide Slovenia* (www.sunflowerbooks.co.uk), now in its 2nd edition.

Skiing

Skiing is a Slovenian passion, with slopes particularly crowded over the Christmas holidays and early in February; see **Slovenia – Official Travel Guide** (www.slovenia-tourism.si/skiing) for much more information.

Just west of Maribor in eastern Slovenia (the country's second-largest city) is a popular choice and the biggest downhill skiing area in the country. Although relatively low (336m to 1347m), it's easily accessible, with very varied downhill pistes and relatively short lift queues.

Kranjska Gora (up to 1291m) has some challenging runs, and the world record for ski-jumping was set at nearby Planica. Above Lake Bohinj, Vogel (up to 1800m) is particularly scenic, as is Kanin (up to 2300m) above Bovec, which can have snow as late as May. Being relatively close to Ljubljana, Krvavec (up to 1970m), northeast of Kranj, can have particularly long lift queues.

Other Activities

Mountain bikes are available for hire from travel agencies at Bovec, Bled and Bohinj. The hire season is usually limited to May to October, however.

The Soča River near Kobarid and the Sava Bohinjka near Bohinj are great for fly-fishing (season April to October). Licences (per day €5, catch and release €34) are sold at tourist offices and certain hotels.

Spas and wellness centres are very popular in Slovenia; see **Slovenia Spas** (www.terme-giz.si) for more information. Most towns have some sort of spa complex, and hotels often offer free or bargain-rate entry to their guests. One of the most celebrated spa towns in the country is Rogaska Slatina, close to the Croatian border about 40km east of Celje.

BUSINESS HOURS

All businesses post their opening times (*delovni čas*) on the door. Many shops close Saturday afternoons. Sundays are still 'holy'; although a handful of grocery stores open, including some branches of the ubiquitous Mercator chain. Most museums close on Monday. Banks often take lunch breaks from 12.30pm to 2pm and only a few open on Saturday morning.

Restaurants typically open for lunch and dinner until at least 10pm, and bars until midnight, though they may have longer hours on the weekend and shorter ones on Sunday.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Slovenian Embassies & Consulates

Slovenian representations abroad are fully listed on **Government of the Republic of Slovenia – Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mzz.gov.si) and include the following embassies: **Australia** (☎ 02-6243 4830; vca@gov.si; 6th fl, St George's Bldg, 60 Marcus Clarke St, Canberra ACT 2601)

Austria (☎ 01-586 13 09; vdu@gov.si; Nibelungengasse 13, A-1010 Vienna)

Canada (☎ 613-565 5781; vot@gov.si; Ste 2101, 150 Metcalfe St, Ottawa K2P 1P1)

Croatia (☎ 01-63 11 000; vzg@gov.si; Savska c 41, 10000 Zagreb)

Hungary (☎ 01-438 5600; vbp@gov.si; Cseppkö út 68, 1025 Budapest)

Ireland (☎ 01-670 5240; vdb@gov.si; 2nd fl, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau St, Dublin 2)

Italy (☎ 06-80 914 310; vri@gov.si; Via Leonardo Pisano 10, 00197 Rome)

Netherlands (☎ 070-310 86 90; vhg@gov.si; Anna Paulownastraat 11, 2518 BA Den Haag)

UK (☎ 020-7222 5400; vlo@gov.si; 10 Little College St, London SW1P 3SH)

USA (☎ 202-667 5363; vwa@gov.si; 1525 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20036)

Embassies & Consulates in Slovenia

Following are among the embassies and consulates in Ljubljana: **Australia** (☎ 01-425 42 52; 12th fl, Trg Republike 3; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Austria Embassy (☎ 01-479 07 00; Prešernova c 23;

☎ 8am-noon Mon-Thu, 8-11am Fri) Enter from Veselova ul.

Canada Consulate (☎ 01-430 35 70; Dunajska c 22; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

Croatia Embassy (☎ 01-425 62 20; Gruberjevo nabrežje 6; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri)

Hungary Embassy (☎ 01-512 18 82; ul Konrada Babnika 5; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri)

Ireland Embassy (☎ 01-300 89 70; Poljanski nasip 6; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Italy Embassy (☎ 01-426 21 94; Snežniška ul 8; ☎ 9-11am Mon-Fri)

Netherlands Embassy (☎ 01-420 14 61; Poljanski nasip 6; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

New Zealand Consulate (☎ 01-580 30 55; Verovškova ul 57; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

South Africa Consulate (☎ 01-200 63 00; Pražakova ul 4; ☎ 3-4pm Tue)

UK Embassy (☎ 01-200 39 10; 4th fl, Trg Republike 3; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

USA Embassy (☎ 01-200 55 00; Prešernova c 31; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Major cultural and sporting events are listed under 'Events' on the website of the **Slovenian Tourist Board** (www.slovenia-tourism.si) and in the STB's annual *Calendar of Major Events in Slovenia*. Among the most important and/or colourful are **Kurentovanje** (www.kurentovanje.net) in Ptuj, a 'rite of spring' celebrated for 10 days up to Shrove Tuesday (February or early March) and the most popular Mardi Gras celebration in Slovenia; the three-day **Ski Jumping World Cup Championships** (www.planica.info) at Planica near Kranjska Gora in March; **Druga Godba** (www.druga.godba.si), a festival of alternative and world music at the Križanke in Ljubljana in late May/early June; the **Festival Lent** (http://lent.slovenija.net), a two-week extravaganza of folklore and culture in Maribor's Old Town in late June/early July; the **Ljubljana Summer Festival** (www.festival-lj.si), the nation's premier cultural event (music, theatre and dance) held from early July to late August; **Rock Otočec** (www.rock-otocec.com), a three-day rock concert in early

July at Prečna airfield, 5km northwest of Novo Mesto and Slovenia's biggest open-air rock concert; the **Cows' Ball** at **Bohinj** (www.bohinj.si), a zany weekend of folk dance, music, eating and drinking in September to mark the return of the cows from their high pastures to the valleys; and the **Ljubljana Marathon** (http://maraton.slo-timing.com) in late October.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The typical Slovenian personality is quietly conservative but deeply self-confident, remarkably broad-minded and particularly tolerant. **Roza Klub** (☎ 01-430 47 40; Kersnikova ul 4) in Ljubljana is made up of the gay and lesbian branches of ŠKUC (Študentski Kulturni Center or Student Cultural Centre).

GALFon (☎ 01-432 40 89; ☎ 7-10pm) is a hotline and source of general information for gays and lesbians. The websites of **Slovenian Queer Resources Directory** (www.ljudmila.org/siqrd) and **Out in Slovenia** (www.outinslovenija.com) are both extensive and partially in English.

HOLIDAYS

Slovenia celebrates 14 holidays (*prazniki*) a year. If any of the following fall on a Sunday, then the Monday becomes the holiday.

New Year 1 & 2 January

Prešeren Day (Slovenian Culture Day) 8 February

Easter & Easter Monday March/April

Insurrection Day 27 April

Labour Days 1 & 2 May

National Day 25 June

Assumption Day 15 August

Reformation Day 31 October

All Saints/Saints' Day 1 November

Christmas Day 25 December

Independence Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There is internet access in towns and cities throughout the country but most cyber-cafés usually have only a handful of terminals. In some places you may have to resort to the local library, school or university. Be advised that Slovenian keyboards are neither qwerty nor azerty but qwertz, reversing the y and z keys, but otherwise following the Anglophone norm.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The website of the **STB** (www.slovenia-tourism.si) is tremendously useful, as is that of **Mat'Kurja** (www.matkurja.com), a directory of Slovenian web

resources. Most Slovenian towns and cities have a website accessed by typing www.townname.si or www.townname-tourism.si. Especially good are **Ljubljana** (www.ljubljana-tourism.si) and **Piran-Portorož** (www.portoroz.si).

LANGUAGE

Closely related to Croatian and Serbian, Slovene (*slovensčina*) is written in the Latin alphabet and consonants are generally pronounced as in English, with some notable exceptions: c=ts, č=ch, and j=y (though a 'j' is silent at the end of a word), š=sh and ž=zh (as the 's' in 'pleasure'). On toilets an 'M' (*Moški*) indicates 'men', and 'Ž' (*Zenske*) is 'women'. Virtually everyone in Slovenia speaks at least one other language; restaurant menus and ATMs are commonly in Italian, German and English, as well as Slovene. See the Language chapter (p895) for key phrases and words.

MONEY

Slovenia exchanged its 15-year-old currency, the tolar (SIT), for the euro in January 2007, the first of the 10 so-called accession countries that joined the EU in 2004 to do so. Exchanging cash is simple at banks, major post offices, travel agencies and *menjalnice* (bureaux de change), although some of the latter don't accept travellers cheques. Prices listed in this chapter are in euros, for the most part converted from prices quoted in tolar at the time of research, so expect some slight variations. Major credit and debit cards are accepted almost everywhere, and ATMs are ubiquitous.

POST

Local mail costs €0.20 for up to 20g, while an international airmail stamp costs €0.45. Poste restante is free; address it to and pick it up from the main post office at Slovenska c 32, 1101 Ljubljana.

TELEPHONE

Public telephones require a phonecard (*telefonska kartica* or *telekartica*), available at post offices and some newsstands. The cheapest card (€3, 25 unit) gives about 20 minutes' calling time to other European countries. Most locals have a mobile phone; SIM cards with around €4 credit are available for €12 from **SiMobil** (www.simobil.si) and €15.40 from **Mobitel** (www.mobitel.si). In fact, even certain businesses only quote mobile

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Police ☎ 113
- Ambulance ☎ 112
- Fire brigade ☎ 112
- Road emergency or towing ☎ 1987

numbers, identified by the prefix 031, 040, 041 and 051.

TOILETS

Toilets are free in restaurants, but usually incur a €0.20 charge at bus stations and other public sites.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Ljubljana-based **Slovenian Tourist Board** (☎ 01-589 18 40; www.slovenia-tourism.si; Dunajska c 156) has dozens of tourist information centres (TICs) in Slovenia and branches in a half-dozen cities abroad; see its 'Representations of STB Abroad' on its website for details. Request its free *Next Exit: Guide to Slovenia's Byways*, which contains coupons for 5% to 15% savings on various hotels, activities and sights, including the Škocjan Caves.

VISAS

Citizens of virtually all European countries, as well as Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand and the USA, do not require visas to visit Slovenia for stays of up to 90 days. Holders of EU and Swiss passports can enter using a national identity card.

Those who do require visas (including South Africans) can get them at any Slovenian embassy or consulate (see p692) for up to 90 days. They cost €35 regardless of the type or length of validity. You'll need confirmation of a hotel booking plus one photo, and may have to show a return or onward ticket.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Travelling as a single woman in Slovenia is no different from travelling in most Western European countries. If you can handle yourself in the very occasional less-than-comfortable situation, you'll be fine.

In the event of an emergency call the **police** (☎ 113) any time or the **SOS Helpline** (☎ 080-11 55; www.drustvo-sos.si; ☎ 04-206 19 81; ☎ 04-206 19 81; ☎ 04-206 19 81) noon-10pm Mon-Fri, 6-10pm Sat & Sun).

TRANSPORT IN SLOVENIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Slovenia's only international airport receiving regular scheduled flights is **Ljubljana Aerodrom** (LJU; www.lju-airport.si) at Brnik, 27km north of Ljubljana. From its base here, the Slovenian flag-carrier, Adria Airways, serves up to two-dozen European destinations depending on the season. Adria flights can be remarkably good value, but with the inauguration of easyJet and Wizzair flights between the Slovenian capital and London, most British visitors are now weekend visitors on budget airlines. Adria flights include useful connections to Pristina (Kosovo), Ohrid (Macedonia) and Tirana (Albania). Flight frequency drops in winter.

The following airlines travel to and from Slovenia:

Adria Airways (code JP; ☎ 01-231 33 12; www.adria-airways.com)

Air France (code AF; ☎ 01-244 34 47; www.airfrance.com) Daily flights to Paris (CDG).

Austrian Airlines (code OS; ☎ 01-202 01 22; www.austrian.com) Multiple daily flights to Vienna.

ČSA Czech Airlines (code OK; ☎ 04-206 17 50; www.csa.cz) Flights to Prague.

easyJet (code EZY; ☎ 04-206 16 77; www.easyjet.com) Low-cost flights to London Stansted.

JAT Airways (code JU; ☎ 01-231 43 40; www.jat.com) Daily flights to Belgrade.

LOT Polish Airlines (code LO; ☎ 04-202 01 22; www.lot.com) Flights to Warsaw.

Malév Hungarian Airlines (code MA; ☎ 04-206 16 76; www.malev.hu) Daily flights Budapest.

Turkish Airlines (code TK; ☎ 04-206 16 80; www.turkishairlines.com) Flights to Istanbul.

Wizz Air (code W6; ☎ 04-206 19 81; www.wizzair.com) Budget flights to London Luton and Brussels (Charleroi).

An alternative budget option to Slovenia, especially if you want to concentrate on the coast, is **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com), which links London Stansted with **Ronchi dei Legionari airport** (www.aeroporto.fvg.it) at Trieste. Trieste may (still) be in Italy but it's much closer to Koper, Piran and the Soča Valley than Ljubljana's airport at Brnik. From the Trieste airport terminal there is a daily bus (single/return €15/25) at 2.40pm to Koper (1½ hours, 56km), Izola (two hours, 61km), Portorož, and Piran (2½ hours, 69km). Check **Terravision**

Airport Bus Transfer (www.lowcostcoach.com) for this service.

Land

BUS

International bus destinations from Ljubljana include Frankfurt (€80, 12½ hours, 777km, 7.30pm Sunday to Friday, 9.30pm Saturday) via Munich (€35.40, 6¼ hours, 344km); Sarajevo (€35.65, 9½ hours, 570km, 7.15pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday); Split (€34.20, 10½ hours, 528km, 7.40pm daily) via Rijeka (€11.43, 2½ hours, 136km); and Zagreb (€13.20, 2¾ hours, 154km, 2.30am, 7.30am and 8pm).

There are regular buses on weekdays only between Trieste and Koper (see p687) plus a direct year-round Ljubljana–Trieste service (€11.50, 2½ hours, 105km, 6.25am Monday to Saturday), with an additional departure at 8.15am on Saturday between June and mid-October.

TRAIN

Ljubljana–Vienna trains (€57, 6¼ hours, 385km, twice daily) via Graz (€30, 200km, 3½ hours) are expensive, although SparSchiene fares as low as €29 apply on certain trains at certain times. Otherwise save money by going first to Maribor (€7.30 to €12.30, 2½ hours, 156km, up to two dozen daily), where you can buy a Maribor–Graz ticket (€11, 1¼ hours, three daily) and then continue on domestic tickets from Graz to Vienna (€13.50, 2¾ hours, 201km). Similar savings apply via Jesenice and Villach and/or Klagenfurt.

Three trains depart daily from Ljubljana for Munich (€66, 6½ hours, 405km). The 8.17pm departure has sleeping carriages available.

Ljubljana–Venice trains (€25, four hours, 244km) depart at 1.47am (via Trieste; €15, 99km), 10.28am and 4.16pm. It's cheaper to go first to Novo Gorica (€7.30, three hours, 153km, six daily), walk to Gorizia and then take an Italian train to Venice (€7.90, 2¼ hours).

For Zagreb there are eight trains daily from Ljubljana (€11.90, two hours, 154km) via Zidani Most. Several trains from the capital serve Rijeka (€11.40, two hours, 136km) via Postojna.

Ljubljana–Budapest trains (€58.60, 8¼ hours, 451km, three daily) go via Ptuj and Hodoš; there are Budapest Spezial fares available for as low as €39 on certain trains at cer-

tain times. The 9.05pm train to Thessaloniki (€83.80, 25 hours, 1159km, one daily) goes via Belgrade (€39.40, 10 hours, 535km).

Seat reservations, compulsory on trains to and from Italy and on InterCity (IC) trains, cost €3, but it is usually included in the ticket price.

Sea

From Piran **Venezia Lines** (☎ 05-674 70 29; www.toline.si) catamarans sail to Venice (one way/return €49/60.50, 2½ hours) from May to mid-September. The **Prince of Venice** (☎ 05-617 80 00; portoroz@kompas.si) catamaran from nearby Izola also serves Venice (€42 to €67, 2½ hours) from mid-April to September. Both operate between once and four times a week, generally returning the same evening.

GETTING AROUND

Trains are usually cheaper but less frequent than buses. Be advise that the frequency on both forms of transport drops off very significantly on weekends and during school holidays.

Bus

It's worth booking long-distance buses ahead of time, especially for travel on Friday afternoon. If your bag has to go in the luggage compartment below the bus, it will cost €1.25 extra. The online bus timetable, **Autobusna Postaja Ljubljana** (www.ap-ljubljana.si), is extensive, but generally only for buses that use Ljubljana as a hub.

Car & Bicycle

Hiring a car is recommended, and can even save you money as you can access cheaper out-of-centre hotels and farm or village homestays. Daily rates usually start at €45/245 per day/week, including unlimited mileage, collision-damage waiver and theft protection. Unleaded 95-octane petrol (*benzin*) costs €1.03 to €1.05 per litre, with diesel at €0.98. You must keep your headlights illuminated throughout the day.

Bicycles are available for hire at some train stations, tourist offices, travel agencies and hotels. You'll find mountain bikes easiest to hire in Bovec, Bled and Bohinj.

Hitching

Hitchhiking is fairly common and legal, except on motorways and a few major highways. Even young women hitch in Slovenia, but it's

never totally safe and Lonely Planet doesn't recommend it.

Train

The national railway, **Slovenske Železnice** (Slovenian Railways; ☎ 01-291 33 32; www.slo-zeleznice.si) has a useful online timetable that's easy to use. Buy tickets before boarding or you'll incur a €2.10 supplement. Be aware that InterCity

(IC) trains carry a surcharge of €1.40 to €1.70 on top of standard quoted fares.

A useful and very scenic rail line from Bled Jezero station via Bohinjska Bistrica near Lake Bohinj cuts under the mountains to Most na Soči (for Kobarid), then down the Soča Valley to Nova Gorica. Cars are carried through the tunnel section on a special auto train (*avtovlak*).