

# Slovenia



DAMIEN SIMONIS

# Slovenia

Imagine alpine meadows crisscrossed with quiet country lanes. Imagine baroque steeples rising over stone villages. Picture soaring snow-tipped peaks presiding over virgin forests and turquoise lakes. Switzerland? No, Slovenia, the tiny republic of immense natural beauty squeezed between Croatia, Italy, Austria and Hungary.

With more than half its interior blanketed with forests, Slovenia is one of the world's greenest countries and the sporty Slovenes take full advantage of their bounty. For adrenaline junkies, the rugged interior offers canyoning, white-water rafting, rock climbing, skiing and anything else you can think of doing on mountains. Swing down to the coast and scuba dive to WWII wrecks. Or burrow into one of Slovenia's majestic caves at Postojna or Škocjan.

The urban landscape is equally varied. Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, is young and dynamic with museums, galleries, a graceful baroque Old Town and the countercultural Metelkova centre. The country's architectural heritage includes Venetian fishing ports, Romanesque churches and a wealth of turreted castles that evoke the days of princes and peasants.

As you relax in a thermal spa or sample one of Slovenia's wines in a local café, strike up a conversation with a Slovene. Genial, multilingual and hardworking, Slovenes are sometimes called the Swiss of the Balkans but they have never considered themselves part of that volatile region. Even as war was engulfing its neighbours to the east, Slovenes worked to build their economy and solidify their links to Europe. With Slovenia's thoroughly European heart and soul, it was only natural for the political arrangements to follow. In 2004 Slovenia became the first country of the former Yugoslavia to attain membership in the EU.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 20,256 sq km
- **Capital** Ljubljana
- **Currency** tolar (SIT); €1 = 239SIT; US\$1 = 200SIT; UK£1 = 349SIT; A\$1 = 150SIT; ¥100 = 176SIT; NZ\$1 = 131SIT
- **Famous for** mountain sports, Lipizzaner horses, plonky Ljutomer riesling
- **Key phrases** *dober dan* (good day); *pozdravljen* (hi); *nasvidenje* (goodbye); *hvala* (thanks); *oprostite* (sorry)
- **Official language** Slovene; English, Italian and German are widely understood
- **Population** 2 million
- **Telephone codes** country code ☎ 386; international access code ☎ 00; ☎ toll free 080
- **Visas** not required for most; see p381 for details



## HIGHLIGHTS

- The glory days of Venice echoing in the old streets of **Piran** (p366)
- The Julian Alps' glimmering lakes of **Bled** (p351) and **Bohinj** (p356)
- Gliding down the icy blue **Soča River** (p359) in a kayak or raft
- Ljubljana's stately Old Town and its wild side, **Metelkova** (p343).
- The **Škocjan Caves** (p363), recalling both *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Ring Cycle*

## ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Enjoy the zesty street life and nightlife of Ljubljana then zip up to Bled to relax by the lake.
- **One week** From Ljubljana and Bled, fan out to the Soča Valley making stops in the Bohinj Valley. Descend to the coast for a look at Piran and the majestic Škocjan Caves.
- **Two weeks** As above, adding some extreme sports in Bovec or plenty of hiking around Bohinj.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The ski season lasts from December to March, though avalanche risks may keep the Vršič Pass closed until May. Lake Bled freezes over in winter, but the short coastline has a contrastingly mild, typically Mediterranean climate. April is often wet, but this means accommodation is cheaper and the vivid blossom-dappled forests are at their scenic best. May and June are warmer, but during these months hotel prices start to rise, peaking in August, when rooms can be hard to find at any price. Nonetheless, mid-summer is the only time of year that cheap student hostels are open. Moving into autumn, warm September days are calm and ideal for hiking and climbing, while October can be damp.

See Climate Charts p388.

## HISTORY

### The Romans

In 181 BC the Romans established the colony of Aquileia (Oglej in Slovene) on the Gulf of Trieste and then went on to annex the rest of Slovenia and Istria. After subdividing the area into provinces and establishing military bases in each one, they built an extensive road system connecting their new settlements. From these bases

## HOW MUCH?

- **Plain ajdovi žganci (buckwheat groats)** 450SIT
- **Bottle of cheap Teran wine** 900SIT to 1200SIT
- **Litre of wine from the winemaker's barrel** 330SIT to 380SIT
- **One day's bicycle hire** 3000SIT
- **One day ski pass** 4900SIT

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** 193SIT to 196SIT
- **1.5-litre bottle of water** 95SIT to 130SIT
- **Half-litre of Laško beer** 165SIT (shop), 330SIT to 450SIT (bar)
- **Souvenir T-shirt** 2700SIT to 3200SIT
- **Street snack (burek)** 350SIT to 450SIT

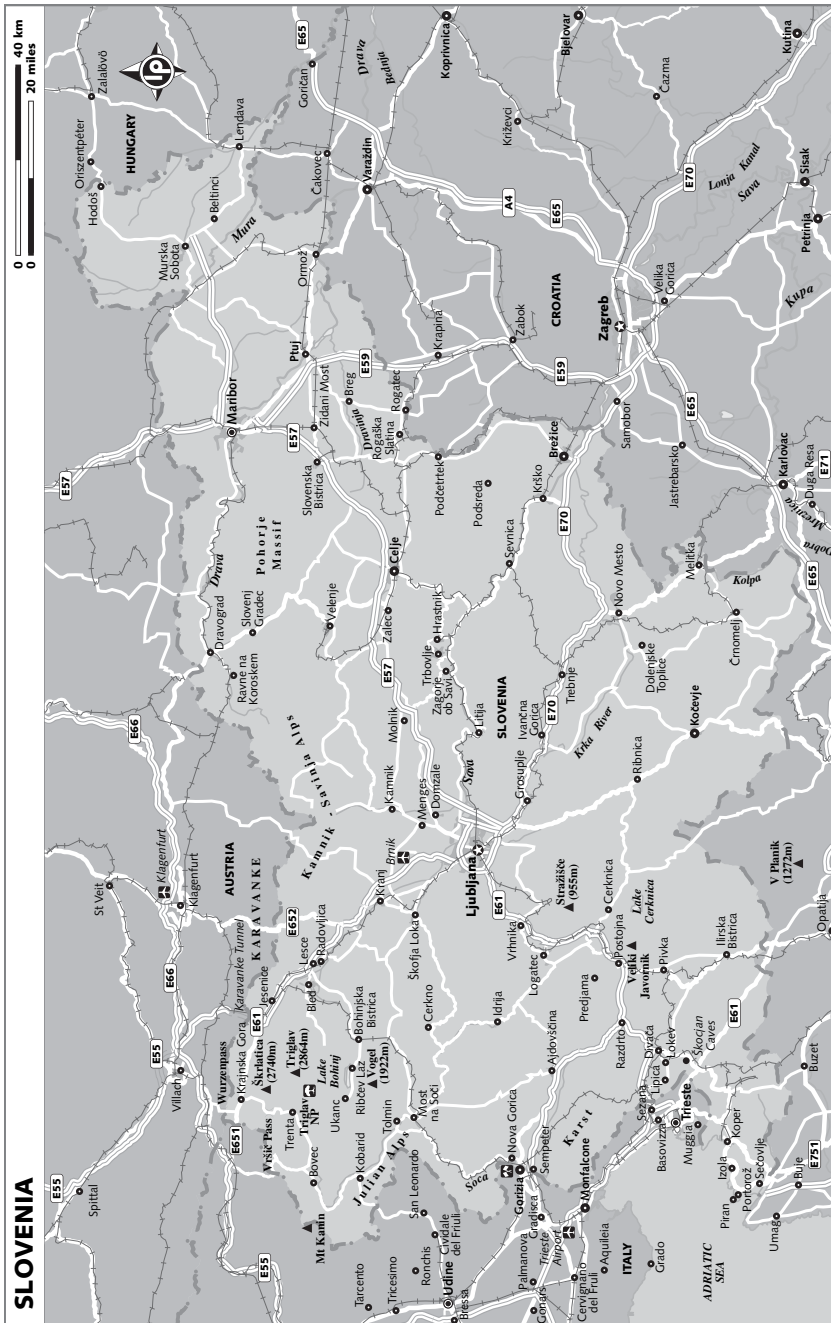
developed the important towns of Emona (Ljubljana), Celeia (Celje) and Poetovio (Ptuj), where reminders of the Roman presence can still be seen.

The Roman Empire and its territories fell to a wave of invasions in the 5th century AD and a period of instability followed. The ancestors of today's Slovenes arrived from the Carpathian Basin in the 6th century and spread outward, settling the Sava, Drava and Mura River valleys, the eastern Alps, the Friulian plain and east as far as Lake Balaton in Hungary. At that time these people were called Sclavi or Sclaveni, as were most Slavs. As a social group they made no class distinctions, but chose a leader – a *župan* (now the word for 'mayor') or *vojvoda* (duke) – in times of great danger.

## The Duchy of Carantania

When the Avars failed to take Byzantium in 626, the Alpine Slavs united under their leader Valuk and founded the Duchy of Carantania (Karantanija), the first Slavic state, with its seat at Krn Castle (now Karnburg in Austria).

By the early 8th century, a new class of ennobled commoners (*kosezi*) had emerged, and it was they who publicly elected and crowned the new *knez* (grand duke) on the 'duke's rock' (*knežni kamen*) in the courtyard



of Krn Castle. Such a democratic process was unique in the feudal Europe of the early Middle Ages.

### The Carinthian Kingdom

In 748 the Frankish empire of the Carolingians incorporated Carantania as a vassal state called Carinthia and began converting the population to Christianity. When the Frankish state collapsed, a Carinthian prince named Kocelj established a short-lived independent Slovenian 'kingdom' (869–74) in Lower Pannonia. It was here that calls for a Slavic archdiocese were first heard.

In about 900, the Magyars subjugated the Slovenian regions of Lower Pannonia and along the Sava, cutting them off from Carinthia. It wasn't until 955 that they were stopped by forces under King Otto I at Augsburg who introduced German control of the region.

The Germans decided to reestablish Carinthia, dividing the area into half a dozen border counties (or marches). Control of the land was shared between the nobility and various church dioceses and German gentry were settled on it. The population remained essentially Slovenian, however, and it was largely due to intensive educational and pastoral work by the clergy that the Slovenian identity was preserved.

### Early Habsburg Rule

In the early Middle Ages, the Habsburgs were just one of many German aristocratic families struggling for hegemony on Slovenian soil, but as dynasties intermarried or died out the Habsburgs consolidated their power. Between the late 13th and early 16th centuries, almost all of the lands inhabited by the Slovenes passed into Habsburg hands except for Istria and the Littoral, which were controlled by Venice, and parts of Prekmurje, which belonged to the Hungarian crown.

Attacks by the Ottomans on southeastern Europe began in 1408 and continued for more than two and a half centuries; by the start of the 16th century, thousands of Slovenes had been killed or taken prisoner. The assaults helped to radicalise landless peasants and labourers who were required to raise their own defences and continue to pay tribute and work for their feudal

lords. More than a hundred peasant uprisings and revolts occurred between the 14th and 19th centuries, but they reached their peak between 1478 and 1573. None of the revolts succeeded, however.

In the early 18th century, Habsburg economic decline brought on by a series of wars was reversed, and Empress Maria Theresa (1740–80) introduced a series of reforms that awarded limited self-government, greater religious freedom and the introduction of obligatory schooling. As a result, agricultural output improved, manufacturing intensified and shipping from Austria's main port at Trieste increased substantially. The reforms also produced a flowering of the arts and letters in Slovenia. The playwright and historian Anton Tomaž Linhart and the poet and journalist Valentin Vodnik produced their finest and most influential works at this time.

### Napoleon & the Illyrian Provinces

The French Revolution of 1789 convinced the Austrian rulers that the reform movement should be nipped in the bud, and a period of reaction began that continued until the Revolution of 1848. Napoleon, after being defeated by the Austrians at Wagram in 1809, decided to cut the Habsburg empire off from the Adriatic. To do so he created six 'Illyrian Provinces' from Slovenian and Croatian regions and made Ljubljana the capital.

Although the Illyrian Provinces lasted only from 1809 to 1813, France instituted a number of reforms, including equality before the law and the use of Slovene in primary and lower secondary schools and in public offices. Most importantly, the progressive influence of the French Revolution brought the issue of national awakening to the Slovenian political arena for the first time.

### Return to Austria

Austrian rule, restored in 1814, was now guided by the iron fist of Prince Clemens von Metternich. He immediately reinstated the Austrian feudal system and attempted to suppress every national movement from the time of the Congress of Vienna (1815) to the Revolution of 1848. But the process of change had already started in Slovenia.

In 1848 Slovenian intellectuals drew up their first national political program under the banner of Zedinjena Slovenija (United Slovenia). In essence it called for the unification of all historic Slovenian regions within an autonomous unit of the Austrian monarchy, the use of Slovene in education and the establishment of a local university. The demands were rejected as they would have required the reorganisation of the empire along ethnic lines.

The only tangible results for Slovenes in the 1848 Austrian constitution were that laws would henceforth be published in Slovene and that the Carniolan (and thus Slovenian) flag should be three horizontal stripes of white, blue and red. Towards the end of the 19th century a new idea emerged. The distinguished Croatian bishop Josip Strossmayer argued that the southern Slavs should unite and demand greater autonomy within the Austro-Hungarian empire.

### WWI & the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats & Slovenes

Although Slovenian political parties generally tended to remain faithful to Austria-Hungary, the heavy loss of life and the destruction of property during WWI lent support to demands for greater autonomy. Finally, in 1918, Slovenes, Croats and Serbs banded together and declared the independent Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, under Serbian King Peter I.

The kingdom was dominated by the notion of Yugoslav ('south Slav') unity, Serbian control and imperialistic pressure from Italy. Slovenia was reduced to little more than a province in this centralist kingdom, although it did enjoy cultural and linguistic autonomy.

In 1929 Peter I's son King Alexander seized absolute power, abolished the constitution and proclaimed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. But the king was assassinated five years later during an official visit to France, and his cousin, Prince Paul, was named regent.

### WWII & the Partisan Struggle

Prince Paul, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, signed a treaty with the Axis powers in March 1941. He was overthrown in a coup and the new king (the son of Alexander I) attempted neutrality, but German

armies invaded and occupied Yugoslavia in April. Slovenia was split up among Germany, Italy and Hungary.

Slovenian communists and other left-wing groups quickly formed a Liberation Front (Osvobodilne Fronte; OF), and the people took up arms for the first time since the peasant uprisings. The OF, dedicated to the principles of a united Slovenia in a Yugoslav republic, joined the all-Yugoslav Partisan army of the KPJ (Communist Party of Slovenia) and its secretary-general Josip Broz 'Tito'. The Partisans received assistance from the Allies and were the most organised and successful of any resistance movement during WWII.

After Italy capitulated in 1943, the anti-OF Slovenian Domobranci (Home Guards) were active in Primorska and, in a bid to prevent the communists from gaining political control in liberated areas, began supporting the Germans. Despite this and other support the Germans were forced to evacuate Belgrade in 1944, losing control of the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs & Slovenes (later Yugoslavia).

Slovenia was liberated in May 1945, and as many as 12,000 Domobranci and anti-communist civilians were sent back to Slovenia from refugee camps in Austria. Most of them were executed by the communists over the next two months.

### Postwar Division

Of immediate concern to Slovenia after the war was the status of liberated areas along the Adriatic, especially Trieste. A peace treaty signed in Paris in 1947 put Trieste and its surrounds under Anglo-American administration (Zone A) and the Koper and Buje (Istria) areas under Yugoslav control in Zone B.

In 1954 Zone A (with both its Italian and ethnic Slovenian populations) became the Italian province of Trieste. Koper and a 47km stretch of coast later went to Slovenia, and Istria to Croatia.

### Tito & Socialist Yugoslavia

Tito moved quickly after the war to consolidate his power under the communist banner. It soon became obvious that Slovenia's rights to self-determination and autonomy would be very limited and that Serbian domination from Belgrade would

continue as it did under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Tito had distanced himself from the Soviet Union as early as 1948, but initially remained committed to creating a communist state. It didn't work. By the 1960s Tito was forced to introduce elements of a market economy. He also allowed greater freedom of movement over the objection of Communist Party officials.

A new constitution in 1974 gave the Yugoslav republics more independence (and autonomy to the ethnic Albanian province of Kosovo in Serbia); by the end of the decade Slovenia was the most advanced republic in the federation.

### Crisis, Renewal & Change

The death of Tito and the economic decline in Yugoslavia in the early 1980s led to interethnic tensions, particularly when Serbia proposed scrapping elements of the 1974 constitution in favour of more uniformity of the state. This was anathema to Slovenes, who saw themselves under threat. Murmurings of independence appeared in influential magazines.

In June 1988 three Slovenian journalists working for the *Mladina* (Youth) weekly and a junior army officer who had given away 'military secrets' were tried by a military court and sentenced to prison. Mass demonstrations were held throughout the country in protest.

In the spring of 1989 the new opposition parties published the May Declaration demanding a sovereign state for Slovenes based on democracy and respect for human rights. In September the Slovenian parliament amended the constitution to legalise management of its own resources and peacetime command of the armed forces. In April 1990 Slovenia became the first Yugoslav republic to hold free elections. A coalition of seven opposition parties won 55% of the vote, and Kučan was elected 'president of the presidency'.

On 23 December 1990, 88.5% of the Slovenian electorate voted for an independent republic – effective within six months. The presidency of the Yugoslav Federation in Belgrade labelled the move secessionist and anticonstitutional. Serbia then proceeded to raid the Yugoslav monetary system and misappropriated almost the entire monetary

issue planned for Yugoslavia in 1991 – US\$2 billion. The Slovenian government began stockpiling weapons, and on 25 June 1991 Slovenia pulled out of the Yugoslav Federation altogether. 'This evening dreams are allowed,' President Kučan told the jubilant crowd in Ljubljana's Kongresni trg the following evening. 'Tomorrow is a new day.'

And so it was. On 27 June the Yugoslav army began marching on Slovenia but met great resistance from the Territorial Defence Forces, the police and the general population. Within several days, units of the federal army began disintegrating; Belgrade threatened aerial bombardment and total war. Belgrade apparently never expected Slovenia to resist, believing that a show of force would be sufficient. Since no territorial claims or minority issues were involved (unlike other republics in former Yugoslavia), the Yugoslav government agreed on 7 July to a truce brokered by leaders of the European Community (EC). The war had lasted just 10 days and taken the lives of 66 people.

### The Road to Europe

To everyone's surprise, Belgrade announced that it would withdraw the federal army from Slovenian soil within three months, and did so on 25 October 1991, less than a month after Slovenia introduced its new currency, the tolar. In late December, Slovenia got a new constitution that provided for a parliamentary system of government. The head of state, the president, is elected directly for a maximum of two five-year terms. Milan Kučan, the nation's most popular politician, held that role from independence until October 2000, when Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek was elected. Executive power is vested in the prime minister – Janez Janša at the time of writing – and his 17-member cabinet.

The EC formally recognised Slovenia on 15 January 1992, and it was admitted to the UN four months later as the 176th member-state.

Slovenia began negotiations for entry into the EU in 1998 and, along with nine other countries, was invited to join the union four years later. In a referendum held in March 2003, an overwhelming 89.6% of the electorate voted in favour of Slovenia's joining the EU, and 66% approved its membership



in NATO. Slovenia became a full member of the EU in May 2004.

## PEOPLE

Slovenes are ethnically Slavic, typically multilingual, friendly without being pushy, and miraculously manage to combine a Germanic work ethic with an easy-going, Mediterranean *joie de vivre*.

Almost 90% of the population is ethnic Slovene, with the remainder being Croat, Serbian and Bosnian minorities and small, long-term enclaves of Italians and Hungarians. Although always a relatively homogeneous population, the new government of Slovenia took no chances after its independence, allegedly 'erasing' up to 130,000 nonethnic Slovenes from public records. The newly nonexistent found it impossible to get passports, health insurance and state benefits. Bowing to EU pressure, the government passed a law in 1999 allowing the victims of 'administrative cleansing'

to apply for citizenship. Only 14,000 applied. Some were unaware of the law; some couldn't get their documents together to meet the tough deadline; others had simply given up and left the country.

## RELIGION

Constitutionally, Slovenes are left free to choose (and not obliged to publicly declare) their religion. A 2003 survey estimated that 67.9% consider themselves at least nominally Catholic, 26% atheist or agnostic, 2.3% Orthodox Christian and 1.2% Muslim. Although Sundays remain 'holy' (ie shops close), many locals prefer to use their uncluttered weekends to find spirituality through mountain sports rather than by church-bound worship.

## ARTS Architecture

Fine examples of Romanesque architecture can be found in many parts of Slovenia,

including the churches at Stična Abbey and at Podsreda Castle.

Much Gothic architecture in Slovenia is of the late period; the earthquake of 1511 took care of many buildings erected before then (although Koper's Venetian Gothic Loggia and Praetorian Palace date back a century earlier). Renaissance architecture is mostly limited to civil buildings (eg the town houses in Škofja Loka and Kranj).

Italian-influenced baroque of the 17th and 18th centuries abounds in Slovenia, particularly in Ljubljana (eg the Cathedral of St Nicholas). Classicism prevailed in architecture here in the first half of the 19th century; the Tempel pavilion in Rogaška Slatina is a good example.

The turn of the 20th century was when the secessionist (or Art Nouveau) architects Maks Fabiani and Ivan Vurnik began changing the face of Ljubljana after the devastating earthquake of 1895. But no architect has had a greater impact on his city or nation than Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), who cut his professional teeth working on Prague's Hradčany Castle. Many of Ljubljana's most characteristic features, including the Park Tivoli and Ljubljana's idiosyncratic recurring pyramid motifs, were his inspired design.

## Literature

Far and away Slovenia's best-loved writer is romantic poet France Prešeren (1800–49), whose statue commands old Ljubljana's central square, Prešernov trg. Prešeren's patriotic yet humanistic verse was a driving force in raising Slovene national consciousness. Fittingly a stanza of his poem *Zdravljica* (The Toast) is now the national anthem. It calls for neighbourliness and an end to war, a very marked contrast to the enemy-confounding sentiment of Britain's anthem. Visit [www.preseren.net/ang](http://www.preseren.net/ang) for English translations of this and other works by Prešeren.

In the latter half of the 19th century, Fran Levstik (1831–87) brought the writing and interpretation of oral folk tales to new heights with his *Martin Krpan*, legends about the eponymous larger-than-life hero of the Bloke Plateau in Notranjska. But it was Josip Jurčič (1844–81) who published the first full-length novel in Slovene, *Deseti Brat* (The 10th Brother, 1866).

The period from the turn of the 20th century up to WWII is dominated by two men

who single-handedly introduced modernism into Slovenian literature: the poet Oton Župančič (1878–1949) and the novelist and playwright Ivan Cankar (1876–1918). The latter has been called 'the outstanding master of Slovenian prose'. His works, notably *Hiša Marije Pomočnice* (The Ward of Our Lady of Mercy) and *Hlapec Jernej in Njegova Pravica* (The Bailiff Jerney and His Rights), influenced a generation of young writers.

Slovenian literature immediately before and after WWII was influenced by socialist realism and the Partisan struggle, as exemplified by the novels of Prežihov Voranc (1893–1950). Since then, Slovenia has tended to follow Western European trends: late expressionism, symbolism (poetry by Edvard Kocbek, 1904–81) and existentialism (novels by Vitomil Zupan, 1914–87, and the drama of Gregor Strniša, 1930–87). Contemporary writers and poets making use of avant-garde techniques include Drago Jančar (1948–), Tomaž Šalamun (1941–) and Kajetan Kovič (1931–).

## Music

The conversion of the Slavs to Christianity from the 8th century brought the development of choral singing – the oldest Slovenian spiritual song dates from 1440 – in churches and monasteries. Baroque music had gone out of fashion by the time the Filharmonija was founded in Ljubljana in 1701, and classicist forms had become all the rage. *Belin*, the first Slovenian opera, was written by Jakob Francisek Zupan in 1780, and Janez Novak composed classicist music for a comedy written by Slovenia's first playwright, Anton Tomaž Linhart. The 19th-century romantics like Benjamin Ipavec, Fran Gerbič and Anton Foerster incorporated traditional Slovenian elements into their music as a way of expressing their nationalism. Perhaps Slovenia's best-known composer was Hugo Wolf (1860–1903), born in Slovenj Gradec.

Slovenian music between the wars is best represented by the expressionist Marij Kogoj and the modernist Slavko Osterc. Contemporary composers whose reputations go well beyond the borders of Slovenia include Primož Ramovš, Marjan Kozina, Lojze Lebič and the ultramodernist Vinko Globokar, who lives in Paris. Opera buffs won't want to miss out on the chance to

## SLAVENAKIA

Let's get one thing straight. We are talking about Slovenia (formerly attached to ex-Yugoslavia) not Slovakia (formerly attached to the Czech Republic) and certainly not Slavonia (now attached to Croatia). First Slovenia declared independence, then Slavonia descended into war, then Slovakia separated from Czechoslovakia. Confusion has reigned ever since. We won't name names but a certain US presidential candidate in 2000 mixed up Slovenia and Slovakia, a certain Dutch diplomat visited Slavonia and lamented war-torn Slovenia, a certain major German weekly extolled Czech spas in Slovenia and a certain major US daily moved Slovakia into Slovenia's map position on the Adriatic. Reports are that no less than 600 tons of mail addressed to Slovakia ends up in Slovenia. Or maybe Slavonia. Since Slovenes are understandably sensitive about this issue, we would like to highlight the major differences.

|                          | Slovenia                    | Slovakia              | Slavonia  |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Capital</b>           | Ljubljana                   | Bratislava            | Zagreb, Croatia   |
| <b>Official language</b> | Slovene (Slavic roots)      | Slovak (Slavic roots) | Croatian (Slavic roots)   |
| <b>Call them</b>         | Slovenes                    | Slovaks               | Croatians   |
| <b>Borders</b>           | Austria & Italy             | Austria & Hungary     | on Croatia's eastern border with Hungary, Serbia & Bosnia & Hercegovina |
| <b>Mountaineering</b>    | in the Julian Alps          | in the High Tatra     | no mountaineering, no mountains   |
| <b>Menus include</b>     | trout                       | trout & carp          | carp  |
| <b>Independence</b>      | after tense 10-day standoff | after genteel divorce | part of independent Croatia after violent convulsion & ethnic cleansing |
| <b>Part of EU</b>        | as of 2004                  | as of 2004            | if & when Croatia is accepted   |

hear Marjana Lipovšek, the country's foremost mezzo-soprano.

Popular music runs the gamut from Slovenian *chanson* (song) and folk to jazz and mainstream polka. However, it was punk music in the late 1970s and early 1980s that put Slovenia on the world stage. The most celebrated groups were Pankrti, Borghesia and Laibach, and they were imitated throughout Eastern Europe. (Laibach's leader, Tomaž Hostnik, died tragically in 1983 when he hanged himself from a *kozolec*, the traditional Slovenian hayrack.) The most popular rock band in Slovenia at present is Siddharta, which managed to fill Ljubljana's 30,000-seat Central Stadium – 1.5% of the national population! – in September 2003.

Folk music (*ljudska glasba*) in Slovenia has developed independently from other forms of music over the centuries. Traditional folk instruments include the *frajtonarica* (button accordion), *cymbalom* (a curious stringed instrument played with sticks), zither, *zveгла* (wooden cross flute), *okarina* (a clay flute), *šurle* (Istrian double flute), *trstenke* (reed pipes), Jew's harp, *lončeni bajs* (earthenware bass) and *brač* (eight-string guitar).

One of the best commercial folk groups in Slovenia is Katice. Another group definitely worth checking out is Katalena, who play traditional Slovene music with a modern twist. Brina & String.si combine the folk vocalist Brina Vogelnik-Saje with the world-music five-man String.si band. Šukar plays traditional Balkan Roma (Gypsy) music. Terra Folk is the quintessential world-music band.

### Visual Arts

Examples of Romanesque fine art are rare in Slovenia, surviving only in illuminated manuscripts. Gothic painting and sculpture is another matter, however, with excellent works at Bohinj. Important painters of this time were Johannes de Laibaco (John of Ljubljana); Jernej of Loka, who worked mostly around Škofja Loka near Kranj; and Johannes Aquila of Radgona.

For baroque sculpture, look at the work of Francesco Robba in Ljubljana (Robba fountain in Mestni trg). Fortunat Bergant, who painted the Stations of the Cross in the church at Stična Abbey, was a master of baroque painting.

Classicism prevailed in Slovenian art in the first half of the 19th century in the

works of the painter Franc Kavčič and the romantic portraits and landscapes of Josip Tominc and Matevž Langus. Realism arrived in the second half of the century in the work of artists like Ivana Kobilca, Jurij Šubic and Anton Ažbe. The most important painters of that time, however, were impressionists Rihard Jakopič, Matija Jama, Ivan Grohar and Matej Sternen, who exhibited together in Ljubljana in 1900.

In the 20th century, the expressionist school of Božidar Jakac and the brothers France and Tone Kralj gave way to the so-called Club of Independents (the painters Zoran Mušič, Maksim Sedej and France Mihelič) and later the sculptors Alojzij Gangl, Franc Berneker, Jakob Savinšek and Lojze Dolinar. The last two would later create 'masterpieces' of socialist realism under Tito without losing their credibility or (sometimes) their artistic sensibilities. Favourite artists of recent years include Janez Bernik, Rudi Španzel (who designed the tolar notes now in circulation) and Jože Tisnikar from Slovenj Gradec.

### ENVIRONMENT

#### The Land

Slovenia has a surface area of only 20,273 sq km. It borders Austria to the north and Croatia to the south and southeast. Much shorter frontiers are shared with Italy to the west and Hungary to the northeast.

There are basically four topographical regions. The Alps, including the Julian Alps, the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, the Karavanke chain and the Pohorje Massif, are to the north and northeast. Spreading across their entire southern side are the pre-Alpine hills of Idrija, Cerklno, Škofja Loka and Posavje. The Dinaric karst lies below the hills and encompasses the 'true' or 'original' Karst plateau between Ljubljana and the Italian border. The Slovenian littoral follows 47km of coastline along the Adriatic Sea, and the essentially flat Pannonian plain spreads to the east and northeast.

Much of the interior of Slovenia is drained by the Sava (221km) and Drava (144km) Rivers, both of which flow southeastward and empty into the Danube. Other important rivers are the Soča to the west, which flows into the Adriatic; the Mura in the northeast; the Krka to the southeast; and the Kolpa, which forms part of the southeast-

ern border with Croatia. There are several 'intermittent' rivers (eg the Unica, Pivka and Reka), which disappear into karst caves and potholes, only to resurface elsewhere under different names. Slovenia's largest natural lakes are Cerknica, which is dry for part of the year, and Bohinj.

### MAIN REGIONS

Slovenia has eight traditional *krajine* (regions): Gorenjska, Primorska, Notranjska, Dolenjska, Bela Krajina, Štajerska, Koroška and Prekmurje.

Greater Ljubljana, by far the nation's largest city and its capital, is pinched between two groups of hills to the west and east and the non-arable Ljubljana Marsh to the south. Gorenjska, to the north and northwest of the capital, is Slovenia's most mountainous province and contains the country's highest peaks, including Triglav (2864m) and Škrlatica (2740m). Primorska, a very diverse region of hills, valleys, karst and a short coastline on the northern end of the Istrian peninsula, forms the country's western border, and the countryside feels Mediterranean. Notranjska, to the south and southeast of Ljubljana, is an underdeveloped area of forests and karst – Slovenia's 'last frontier'. Dolenjska lies south of the Sava River and has several distinct areas, including the Krka Valley, the hilly Kočevje and also the remote Posavje regions. Bela Krajina, a gentle land of rolling hills, birch groves and folk culture south of Dolenjska, is washed by the Kolpa River. Štajerska – Slovenia's largest region – stretches to the east and northeast and is a land of mountains, rivers, valleys, vineyards and ancient towns. Maribor and Celje are the centres and Slovenia's second- and third-largest cities respectively. Sitting north of Štajerska, little Koroška, with its centre at Slovenj Gradec, is all that is left of the once great historical province of Carinthia. Prekmurje, 'beyond the Mura River' in Slovenia's extreme northeast, is basically a flat plain, although there are hills to the north.

### HABITATION

Slovenia is predominantly hilly or mountainous; about 90% of the surface is more than 300m above sea level. Forest, some of it virgin, and woodland cover more than half of the country, making Slovenia the greenest country in Europe outside

Finland and Sweden. Land under agricultural use (pastures, fields, orchards, vineyards) is rapidly diminishing as farms are abandoned' now accounts for less than 25%.

What has mushroomed in recent years is the number of organic farms – from just 41 in 1998 to 1150 in 2002 – raising and processing everything from cereals, dairy products and meat to fruits and vegetables, oils, nuts and wine. Only products inspected and certified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food may bear the government's *ekološki* label or the organic farmers' union logo 'Biodar'.

The population density of Slovenia is just over 98 people per square kilometre, with the urban-rural ratio being almost half and half. The five largest settlements in Slovenia are Ljubljana (269,800), Maribor (116,000), Celje (40,000), Kranj (37,000) and Velenje (26,750).

### Wildlife

#### ANIMALS

Common European animals such as deer, boar, chamois, brown bear, wolves and lynx live in Slovenia in abundance, especially in the Alpine regions and the Kočevje region of Dolenjska. There are also some rare species such as the moor tortoise, cave hedgehog, scarab beetle and various types of dormice. Two species unique to Slovenia are the marbled Soča trout (*Salmo trutta marmoratus*) and *Proteus anguinus*, a blind salamander that lives in karst cave pools. Slovenia also abounds in important habitats for our feathered friends.

### PLANTS

Slovenia is home to 3200 plant species, and about 70 of them – many in the Alps – are unique to Slovenia or were first classified here. Triglav National Park is especially rich in endemic flowering plants, including the Triglav 'rose' (actually a pink cinquefoil), the blue Clusi's gentian, yellow hawk's-beard, Julian poppy, Carniola lily and the purple Zois bellflower.

### National Parks

About 8% of the countryside is protected under law. Further statutes have already been approved by parliament, and gradually almost a third of the territory will be conservation area of some kind.

At present, there is only one national park – the 83,807-hectare Triglav National Park, which encompasses almost all of the Julian Alps – although proposals have been made to set aside four more: in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, the Pohorje Massif, the Karst and the Kočevje-Kolpa regions. There are two regional parks (in the Kozjansko region of southeast Stajerska and the area around the Škocjan Caves in Primorska) and 40 designated as country (or ‘landscape’) parks. These range in size from the 310-hectare park and nature reserve on the Strunjan Peninsula south of Izola in Primorska to the pristine Logarska Dolina (2438 hectares) in Stajerska. There are also about 50 protected nature reserves, including 200 hectares of primeval forest in the Kočevski Rog region of Dolenjska, and more than 600 natural heritage sites, such as tiny Wild Lake (Divlje Jezero) near Idrija in Primorska.

### Environmental Issues

Although Slovenia is a very ‘green’ country in both senses of the word, pollution is a problem here, and it is now being tackled by the National Environment Protection Program approved by parliament in 1999 and the Environmental Agency (Agencija za Okolje) set up two years later.

Over the past two decades the biggest concern has been air pollution. Nitrogen oxide emitted by cars, between Gorenjska and the coast in particular, were hurting the pine forests of Notranjska and damaging buildings and outdoor sculptures and other artwork in many historical cities. Sulphur dioxide levels were high in cities and towns like Šoštanj, Trbovlje and Ljubljana where coal was the main fuel. The nation’s sole nuclear power plant (at Krško in Dolenjska) provides about 40% of electric power, but half of it is owned by Croatia, and Slovenia plans to stop using it by 2023.

Steps taken to clean up the mess – which include the construction of water-purifying plants, monitoring of those companies discharging waste, installation of filters on power plants and the introduction of gas heating – from 1985 to 2000 saw sulphur dioxide emissions fall by almost 40% and nitrogen oxide levels reduced by 20%.

The government has now shifted its priorities to halt the overuse and pollution of surface waters and the increasing problem

of refuse disposal. The Sava, Mura and lower Savinja Rivers are especially vulnerable, rain has washed all sorts of filth dumped in the Karst region underground, and waste carried by the ‘disappearing’ Unica and Ljubljana Rivers could threaten the Ljubljana Marsh. Slovenia produces 1.2 million tonnes of waste a year, almost half of it domestic, much of which still ends up in illegal tips.

### FOOD & DRINK

It’s relatively hard to find archetypal Slovene foods like *žlikrofi* (potato-filled ravioli) in *bakalca* (lamb sauce), *mlinci* (corn-pasta sheets in gravy) and *ajdovi žganci* (buck-wheat groats). Inns (*gostilna* or *gostišče*) or restaurants (*restavracija*) more frequently serve pizzas, *rižota* (risotto), *klobasa* (sausage), *zrezek* (cutlet/steak), *golaž* (goulash) and *paprikaš* (stew). Fish (*riba*) meals are sometimes priced by the *dag* (0.1kg). Trout (*postrv*) generally costs half the price of other fish, though grilled squid (*lignji na žaru*) doused in garlic butter is a ubiquitous bargain at 1200SIT to 1500SIT per plate. For favourites popular throughout the region see p36.

Certain better restaurants ask 100SIT to 300SIT for bread/cover charge, and at some of the cheapest it is customary to share tables with other customers when things get busy. Some restaurants have bargain-value four-course *dnevno kosilo* (daily lunch) menus, including *juha* (soup) and *solata* (salad), for 1000SIT to 1600SIT. 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. Distinctively Slovenian wines (*vino*) include hearty red Teran made from Refošk grapes and the light-red Cviček with a plummy sourness. Slovenes are justly proud of their top vintages. However, cheaper bar-standard ‘open-wines’ (90SIT to 200SIT per glass) are often pure gut-rot. Some fascinating *suho* (dry) whites are made from sweet grapes like Tokaj and Muskat but *sladko* and *polsladko* (sweet/semisweet) wines can be very sugary indeed.

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

There are dozens of hard-hitting *žganje* fruit liquors, including *češnovec* (from cherries), *sadjavec* (apples), *brinjevec* (juniper), *hruška* (pears) and *slivovka* (plums). *Na zdravje!* (Cheers!).

## LJUBLJANA

☎ 01 / pop 269,800

Inspiring Ljubljana (pronounced ‘Loob-lyana’) has a small but charming old core, a vibrant street-café culture, a buzzing student community, and an alternative-lifestyle centre at Metelkova. Viewed from Ljubljana Castle, the less exciting skirt of concrete suburbs is overshadowed by a magnificent alpine horizon, which seems to be almost leaping distance from the ram-parts. Although the city may lack big-name attractions, the great galleries, atmospheric bars and varied, accessible nightlife make it tempting to while away weeks here.

### HISTORY

If the city really was founded by the Golden Fleece-stealing Argonauts, they left no proof of their sojourn. All that survives of the later Roman city of Emona is a ragged wall on Mirje ul, which was wrecked by the Huns and rebuilt by Slavs. The city took its present form (as ‘Laibach’) under the Austrian Habsburgs, 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 an 1895 earthquake, and fortunately most later 20th-century development was relegated to the suburbs. The brutal, concrete Trg Republike is a marked exception.

### LJUBLJANA IN TWO DAYS

Starting at **Ljubljana Castle** (p342), explore the Old Town surrounding **Prešernov trg** (p343). Museum-hop from the **National Gallery** (p343) to the **Modern Art Museum** (p343). Have a traditional Slovene dinner at **Sokol** (p346) and finish the day at lively **Metelkova** (p343).

Next day stroll through **Park Tivoli** (p344) to the **Museum of Contemporary History** (p344), check out some of the area’s art galleries, including the **International Centre of Graphic Arts** (p344), and then return to dine in the Old Town. Alternatively, do the 2pm **Celica Hostel tour** (p345), then hop on the 4.15pm train for a four-hour sunset excursion to **Kamnik** (p370).

### ORIENTATION

Prešernov trg is the heart of Ljubljana’s delightful, if relatively small, old-town area, which follows the northern and western flanks of castle hill on both sides of the Ljubljanica River. Walk 10 minutes north up Miklošičeva c to the bus and train stations.

Despite being called ‘Ljubljana Aerodrome’, the airport is actually at Brnik near Kranj, some 23km north of Ljubljana.

### Maps

Excellent free maps, some of which show the complete bus network, are available from the various tourist information offices. Even better are Kod-&-Kam maps, sold at bookshops and Tourist Information Centres (TICs).

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Geonavtik** (www.geonavtik.com in Slovene; Kongresni trg 1; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) Stocks Lonely Planet guides.

**Kod-&-Kam** (Trg francoske revolucije 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Map specialist.

### Internet Access

Web connection is available at many hotels and hotels, plus the following:

**Kotiček** (Bus station; per 10min 100SIT; ☎ 7am-8.30pm)

**Napotnica.com** (Trg Ajdovščina 1; per 15min 200SIT; ☎ 8am-11pm) Small café in the city centre mini-mall above the Pelican Pub.

**Xplorer** (Petkovškovo nab 23; per 5min 110SIT, per hr 800SIT; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat & Sun) Good connection, plus discounts of 20% before noon, and 10% for students.

### Laundry

Washing machines are available, even to nonguests, at the Celica Hostel (see the boxed text, p345) for 1200SIT per load, including powder.

### Left Luggage

**Bus station** (320SIT; ☎ 5am-8.30pm)

**Train station** (400SIT or €2; ☎ 24hr) Coin lockers on platform No 1.

### Medical Services

**Klinični Center** (☎ 232 30 60; Bohoričeva 9; ☎ 24hr) Emergency clinic.

**Zdravstveni Dom Center** (☎ 472 37 00; Metelkova 9; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) Non-emergency doctors.







|  |           |                                   |          |                                       |          |
|--|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>INFORMATION</b>                         |           | Roman Walls.....                  | 35 A6    | Café Antico.....                      | 72 D6    |
| American Embassy.....                      | 1 B4      | Statue of France Prešeren.....    | 36 D4    | Cajna Hiša.....                       | 73 D5    |
| Australian Consulate.....                  | 2 B4      | Tivoli Recreation Centre.....     | 37 A2    | CN7 Patisserie.....                   | 74 D5    |
| Belgian Embassy.....                       | (see 2)   | Trump Hall.....                   | 38 D5    | Cutty Sark.....                       | 75 C4    |
| British Embassy.....                       | (see 2)   | Triple Bridge (Tromostovje).....  | 39 D4    | Fraga Gallery-Bar.....                | 76 D5    |
| Canadian Consulate.....                    | 3 D2      | Zmajski Most (Dragon Bridge)..... | 40 E4    | Makalonca.....                        | 77 D4    |
| Currency Exchange Booth.....               | (see 105) |                                   |          | Maček.....                            | 78 D5    |
| Currency Exchange Booth.....               | (see 105) |                                   |          | Minimal.....                          | 79 D5    |
| Dutch Embassy.....                         | 4 E4      | <b>SLEEPING</b> ☑                 |          | Movia Vinoteka.....                   | 80 D5    |
| French Embassy.....                        | 5 B6      | Celica Hostel.....                | 41 G2    | Patrick's.....                        | 81 E3    |
| Geonavitk.....                             | 6 C4      | Cityhotel Turist.....             | 42 D3    | Petit Café.....                       | 82 C6    |
| German Embassy.....                        | 7 B4      | Dijaška Dom Ivana Cankarja.....   | 43 G5    | Pr'skelet.....                        | 83 D5    |
| Gorenška Banka.....                        | 8 D3      | Dijaški Dom Tabor.....            | 44 F3    | Roza.....                             | 84 C5    |
| Irish Embassy.....                         | (see 4)   | Grand Hotel Union Executive.....  | 45 D4    | Salon.....                            | 85 E4    |
| Klinični Center.....                       | 9 H3      | Hotel Emonec.....                 | 46 D4    | Sir William's.....                    | 86 D3    |
| Kod&Kam.....                               | 10 C6     | Park Hotel.....                   | 47 F3    | Slaščičarna Pri Vodnjaku.....         | 87 D6    |
| Kotček.....                                | (see 105) | Pri Mraku.....                    | 48 C6    | Zlata Ladjica.....                    | 88 D5    |
| Ljubljanska Banka.....                     | 11 D5     |                                   |          | Zvezda.....                           | 89 D4    |
| Napötince.com.....                         | 12 C3     | <b>EATING</b> ☑                   |          |                                       |          |
| Post Office.....                           | 13 C4     | Ajdovo Zmo.....                   | 49 D4    | <b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> ☑                |          |
| Roza Klub.....                             | (see 99)  | Alamut Orient House.....          | 50 F4    | As.....                               | 90 C4    |
| South African Consulate.....               | 14 D2     | Cantina Mexicana.....             | 51 C4    | Bacchus.....                          | 91 C4    |
| STA Ljubljana.....                         | 15 D3     | Cerín.....                        | 52 F4    | Cankarjev Dom.....                    | 92 B5    |
| STIC.....                                  | 16 E4     | Delikatessen Ljubljana Dvor.....  | 53 C5    | Cankarjev Dom Ticket Office.....      | 93 B5    |
| TIC.....                                   | 17 D4     | Focus.....                        | 54 C5    | Club Tiffany.....                     | 94 G2    |
| TIC Branch Office.....                     | 18 E1     | Gostilna Pri Pavli.....           | 55 D6    | Gala Hala.....                        | 95 G2    |
| Xplorer.....                               | 19 E4     | Gostilna Vodnikov Hram.....       | 56 E4    | Global.....                           | 96 C4    |
| Zdravstveni Dom Center.....                | 20 G2     | Harambaša.....                    | 57 C6    | Gromka.....                           | 97 G2    |
|  |           | Hot Horse.....                    | 58 E4    | Jazz Club Gajo.....                   | 98 C4    |
|  |           | Joe Pen'a's.....                  | 59 C3    | K4.....                               | 99 C2    |
| <b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>             |           | Julija.....                       | 60 D5    | Kinoteka & Marilyn Caffé.....         | 100 D2   |
| Cathedral of St Nicholas.....              | 21 E4     | Ljubljanski Dvor.....             | 61 D5    | Križanke.....                         | 101 C6   |
| Colonnade.....                             | 22 E4     | Market Tabor.....                 | 62 F2    | Monokel Club.....                     | (see 94) |
| Ethnographic Museum.....                   | 23 G3     | Napoli.....                       | 63 D3    | Opera House.....                      | 102 B3   |
| Filharmonija.....                          | 24 D5     | Nobel Burek.....                  | 64 D2    | Orto Bar.....                         | 103 H1   |
| Franciscan Church of the Annunciation..... | 25 D4     | Oriental Café.....                | (see 41) |                                       |          |
| Ljubljana Castle.....                      | 26 E5     | Paninoteka.....                   | 65 D5    |                                       |          |
| Ljubljana University.....                  | 27 C5     | Pink.....                         | 66 G5    | <b>TRANSPORT</b>                      |          |
| Market.....                                | 28 E4     | Pri Sv Florjanu.....              | 67 D6    | Bicycle Hire Kiosk.....               | (see 78) |
| Modern Art Museum.....                     | 29 B3     | Sokol.....                        | 68 D4    | Bus 09 to Ljubljana Youth Hostel..... | 104 E2   |
| Museum of Contemporary History.....        | 30 A1     | Taverna Tatjana.....              | 69 E6    | Bus Station.....                      | 105 E2   |
| National Gallery.....                      | 31 B3     | Zivila.....                       | 70 D5    | Buses towards Dijaški Dom Šiška.....  | 106 C2   |
| National Museum.....                       | 32 B4     |                                   |          | Hertz.....                            | 107 E1   |
| Pyramid Gateway.....                       | 33 B6     |                                   |          | Hotel Lev (Bicycle Hire).....         | 108 C2   |
| Robba Fountain.....                        | 34 D5     | <b>DRINKING</b> ☑ ☑               |          | Tourist Tram.....                     | (see 36) |
|  |           | BIKofe.....                       | 71 C5    |                                       |          |

## Money

There are ATMs at every turn, including in both the train and bus stations, where you'll also find **currency exchange booths** (☎ 6am-10pm). Dozens of banks have ATMs and change money:

**Gorenška Banka** (Dalmatinova 4; ☎ 9am-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11am Sat) Pseudo Art Nouveau furnishings make amends for the travesty of this bank's façade, which mars the architectural splendour of Miklošičev Park. Exchanges travellers cheques.

**Ljubljanska Banka** (Mestni trg 16; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm) Handily central ATM.

## Post

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

## Tourist Information

All three TICs have great free maps, themed brochures, tips and events listings.

**Ljubljana Tourist Information Centre** (TIC; www.ljubljana-tourism.si) Stritarjeva 2 (☎ 306 12 15; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, to 7pm Oct-May); train station (☎ 433 94 75; ☎ 8am-10pm Jun-Sep, to 7pm Oct-May) This

centre's three-day Ljubljana Card (3000SIT) gives free city transport and various discounts, but only big museum fans will recoup the cost. A new service handles ticketing for all the city's cultural events, including festivals, concerts, sporting events and fairs. The branch office is located at the train station.

**Slovenian Tourist Information Centre** (STIC; ☎ 306 45 75; www.slovenia-tourism.si; Krekov trg 10; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, to 7pm Oct-May) Internet and bicycle hire available. Also, a free basic course in Slovenian is offered each Wednesday from 5pm to 6.30pm.

## Travel Agencies

**STA Ljubljana** (☎ 439 16 90; Trg Ajdovščina Mall; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Offers discount airfares for students.

## SIGHTS Old Town

**Ljubljana Castle** (Ljubljanski Grad) crowns an abrupt, wooded hill that forms the city's focal point. It's an architectural mishmash, including early-16th-century walls, a 1489 chapel and a 1970s concrete café. Admission to the central courtyard and some

north-facing ramparts is free. However, there are even better 360-degree views from the 19th-century **tower** (adult/student 790/490SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), and visits include an excellent 'virtual museum'. Don your 3-D spectacles and 'fly' around the Ljubljana of various historical epochs. Reaching the castle takes about 15 minutes, either on foot or by taking the hourly **tourist tram** (adult/child 550/350SIT; ☎ 9am-9pm) from Prešernov trg.

**Prešernov trg** is Ljubljana's central square, with the pink **Franciscan Church of the Annunciation** (1660) and a **statue** (1905) of national poet France Prešeren. Furtively observing Prešeren from a fake window on Wolfova is a bust of his unrequited love (and poetic inspiration), Julija Primic (Primicova).

Wander north of the square to admire the fine **Art Nouveau buildings** of Miklošičeva c, including the still-grand Grand Hotel Union Executive (p345). Built in 1905, the hotel was commandeered during WWI for use as the command centre for the Soča/Isonzo-front campaign. Today it retains many elements of Jugendstil style, including the 'Blue' meeting room, the Unionska Klet cellar-restaurant, and a sweeping interior stone stairway with splendid original brass lantern stands.

South of Prešernov trg you cross the small but much celebrated **Triple Bridge** (Tromostovje). The original 1842 span had two side bridges added in 1931 by Ljubljana's superstar architect Jože Plečnik (who also plonked the curious **Pyramid Gateway** on top of the city's minimal **Roman Walls** at Mirje ul, southwest of the centre). A baroque **Robba Fountain** stands before the Gothic **Town Hall** (1718) in Mestni trg, which leads south into **Stari trg** and **Gornji trg**. These squares wind picturesquely around the castle bluff – delightfully sprinkled with cafés, they are arguably Ljubljana's greatest overall attraction.

East of the Triple Bridge, the 1708 **Cathedral of St Nicholas** (Stolnica; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm) is filled with a riot of splendid frescoes (partly hidden during ongoing renovation at the time of research). To get inside, heave open what appear to be superheavy bronze sculptures, but which, on closer inspection, turn out to be the doors. Behind the cathedral is a lively **market** (☎ closed Sun) selling all kinds of stuff, a Plečnik **colonnade** and the 1901 **Dragon Bridge** (Zmajski Most), a bridge guarded by

cute verdigris dragons which have become city mascots.

The grand if rather pompous main building of **Ljubljana University** (Kongresni trg 12) was formerly the regional parliament (1902). The more restrained **Filharmonija** (☎ 241 0800; Kongresni trg 10) dates from an 1898 reconstruction, despite the prominent 1701 plaque. It's home to the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra.

## City Centre

Of the 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 800/600SIT, Sat afternoon free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), and the vibrant but outwardly drab 1940s **Modern Art Museum** (☎ 251 41 06; www.mg-lj.si; Cankarjeva c 15; adult/student 1000/700SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, to 1pm Sun).

The **National Museum** (☎ 241 44 04; www.nar.muz-lj.si; Muzejska 1; adult/student 1100/800SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Fri-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu) occupies an elegant 1888 building that was recently renovated. The archaeological collection ranges from prehistoric objects to Slavic jewellery, the 19th-century throne of Archduke Charles and mementos from WWI. Other galleries include a coin collection and an extensive collection of graphics.

## Metelkova

An ex-army garrison taken over by squatters after independence, Metelkova is now a somewhat daunting, free-living commune – a miniature version of Copenhagen's Christiania. To really 'feel' Metelkova (which is around 500m east of the train station), visit the nightclubs after midnight (see p348). Even if you're staying there, a free 2pm tour of Metelkova's ultrahip Celica Hostel (p345) is intriguing, especially on Tuesday and Wednesday when you usually get to meet one of the architects. Sadly, as of the time of research, the authorities have announced plans to close some Metelkova structures. Naturally, there are petitions against it. See www.metelkova.org/indexe.htm for the latest developments and to register your protest, if you like.

The **Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 432 54 03; www.etno-muzej.si; Metelkova 2) has a very extensive collection, but was still undergoing renovation at the time of research. Meanwhile, there's a temporary exhibit devoted to

ethnographic museums in Europe on the 1st floor and a look at contemporary and folk design on the 2nd floor.

### Park Tivoli

You can reach Tivoli, the city's leafy playground laid out in 1813 and measuring 5 sq km, via an underpass from Cankarjeva c. Straight ahead, at the end of **Jakopičev sprehajališče**, the monumental Jakopič Promenade designed by Plečnik in the 1920s and 30s, is the 17th-century **Tivoli Mansion** (Tivoljski Grad), which now contains the **International Centre of Graphic Arts** (Mednarodni Grafični Likovni Center, MGLC; ☎ 241 38 18; www.mglc-lj.si; Pod turnom 3; adult/student 800/400SIT; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun), with new exhibitions every three months. The centre hosts the International Biennial of Graphic Arts in odd-numbered years (see opposite).

The **Museum of Contemporary History** (Muzej Novejše Zgodovine; ☎ 300 96 10; www.muzej-nz.si; Celovška c 23; adult/child 2-14, student & senior 500/300SIT, free Sun; ☎ 10am-6pm), housed in the 18th-century Cekin Mansion (Cekinov Grad) just northeast of the Tivoli Recreation Centre, traces the history of Slovenia in the 20th century through multimedia. The gloriously baroque **Ceremonial Hall** (Room F) is how the whole mansion once looked. Note the contrast between the sober earnestness of the communist-era Room G and the exuberant, logo-mad commercialism of the neighbouring industrial exhibit in Room H. A portrait of Stalin lies 'discarded' behind the door between the two.

The 45-hectare **Ljubljana Zoo** (Živalski Vrt Ljubljana; ☎ 244 21 88; www.zoo-ljubljana.si in Slovene; Večna pot 70; adult/child 2-14 1100/700SIT; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Sep-May), on the southern slope of **Rožnik Hill** (394m), contains 500 animals representing 120 species. There's also a petting zoo for children.

## ACTIVITIES

### Hiking

The marked **Trail of Remembrance** (Pot Spominov), which runs for 34km around the city where German barbed wire once completely enclosed Ljubljana during WWII, is popular with walkers and joggers. The easiest places to reach the trail are from AMZS headquarters on Dunajska c 128 (catch bus 6, 8 or 21 to AMZS stop) or from Trg Komandanta Staneta just northwest of

the central office of the public transport authority LPP (Celovška c 160; bus 1 to Remiza stop). You can also join it from the northwestern side of Žale Cemetery (bus 19 to Nove Žale stop) – Ljubljana's own Père Lachaise or Highgate – or south of Trnovo (bus 19 to Veliki Štradol stop). These buses all leave from the bus station near the train station.

## Swimming & Sauna

**Tivoli Recreation Centre** (☎ 431 51 55; Celovška c 25) In Park Tivoli has an indoor swimming pool (open September to May), a fitness centre, clay tennis courts and a roller-skating rink (which becomes an ice rink from mid-August to February). It also has a popular sauna called **Zlati Klub** (Gold Club; morning 2100SIT, afternoon 2400SIT; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Sun men only, 10am-10pm Tue women only, 10am-midnight Fri & Sat mixed) with saunas, steam room, splash pools and outside swimming pool surrounded by high walls so you can sunbathe *au naturel*. Towels are an extra 500SIT.

## TOURS

Guided **city tours** (adult/student 1550/800SIT) start from in front of the Town Hall. At the time of writing, departures of English-language tours were 6pm (May to September) and 10am (October to April), but times vary year by year; check with the TIC.

A one-hour river-boat tour makes a pleasant summer outing. Boats leave at 6.30pm (weather permitting) from the Ribji trg pier, just southwest of the TIC.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The number-one event on Ljubljana's social calendar is the **Ljubljana Summer Festival** (www.festiva-lj.si), a summer celebration of music, opera, dance and street theatre held in venues throughout the city, but principally in the open-air theatre at the **Križanke** (☎ 252 65 44; Trg francoske revolucije) – originally a 13th-century monastic complex. The festival, now in its fifth decade, runs from early July to late August.

**Druga Godba** (Other Music; www.drugagodba.si)

A festival of alternative and world music; takes place in the Križanke in early June.

**Vino Ljubljana** An international wine fair held in early June at the **Ljubljana Fairgrounds** (Ljubljanski Sejem; www.ljubljanski-sejem.si; Dunajska c 10) north of the train station.

**International Biennial of Graphic Arts** (www.mglc-lj.si) At the International Centre of Graphic Arts in Park Tivoli, the Modern Art Museum and several other venues; held from mid-June to September in odd-numbered years.

**Ljubljana Jazz Festival** (www.cd-cc.si) At the Križanke in late June; has been taking place for 45 years.

**Summer in the Old Town** Ljubljana is at its most vibrant in July and August during the so-called Summer in the Old Town season when there are four or five free cultural events a week in the city's historic squares, courtyards and bridges. Contact the tourist office for more information.

**Trnfest** (www.kud-fp.si) An international festival of alternative arts and culture organised by KUD France Prešeren; takes place in Trnovo in late July and August.

**Young Lions** (Mladi Levi; bunker@siol.net) A 10-day festival of theatre and dance held in late August.

**City of Women** (www.cityofwomen-a.si) Held in October in venues throughout Ljubljana; showcases all forms of artistic expression by women.

**Ljubljana Marathon** (www.slo-timing.com) Starts and ends in Kongresni trg; held on the last Saturday in October.

## SLEEPING

Ljubljana is not overendowed with accommodation choices. The selection following includes all of the central budget and mid-range options. The TICs have comprehensive details of other hotels further out in the suburbs, of similarly inconvenient private rooms and of the four other central top-end hotels, all of which charge over €140 for a double.

### Old Town

**Hotel Emonec** (☎ 200 15 20; www.hotel-emonec.com; Wolfova 12; s/d €49/59; ☎) The décor is coldly modern but everything is gleamingly clean and you can't beat the central location. A

### THE HOSTEL'S CHOICE

**Celica Hostel** (☎ 230 97 00; www.souhostel.com; Metelkova 8; dm/s/d 3750/9500/10,500SIT; ☎) Even if you're not in the habit of staying in hostels, Celica is the place to make an exception. Who would think of turning a military prison into a hostel and getting different architects to design each 'cell'? The result is a highly original survey of design styles, including everything from Finnish modern to traditional Slovenian. It's not The Ritz but the comfort level is more than adequate for the price and you can experience prison without imprisonment.

TV and Internet access in every room are unusual niceties for the price, making this hotel excellent value for money.

### City Centre

**Pri Mraku** (☎ 433 40 49; www.daj-dam.si/ang/Mrak/mrakmain.htm; Rimska c 4; s/d from €58.80/71.80) Above a well-respected but misleadingly dowdy-looking restaurant of the same name, this hotel offers inviting rooms with all the creature comforts: great value for such an ideal location. Higher-priced rooms have air-con.

**Grand Hotel Union Executive** (☎ 308 12 70; www.gh-union.si; Miklošičeva c 1; s €136-165, d €145-177, ste €300; ☎) Although not the capital's most expensive hotel, the Union is nonetheless its star address, thanks to the great 1905 architecture and perfect position. For all the Art Nouveau flourishes, including brilliant brass lantern stands on sweeping stone stairways, be sure to choose the executive section. The slightly cheaper business section is a comfortable but entirely functional later addition.

**Park Hotel** (☎ 433 13 06; www.hotelpark.si; Tabor 9; s/d €53/70; ☎) In a handily central if rather uninviting area, this tower-block hotel is central Ljubljana's best-value midrange choice. Pleasant, well-renovated standard rooms are bright and unpretentiously well equipped. Cheaper rooms have ensuite toilet but share showers.

**Cityhotel Turist** (City Hotel, Hotel Turist; ☎ 432 91 30; www.hotel turist.si; Dalmatinova 15; s/d from €57/109; ☎) When they offer you a 'small' room here, they're not joking. This functionally businesslike property has recently had a much-needed modernisation, but the only compelling attraction remains its position. The nearby Park Hotel is less polished but better value.

Several fairly spartan student hostels with shared bathrooms only accept travellers during midsummer. Breakfast is not included. The most central are **Dijaški Dom Tabor** (☎ 234 88 40; ssljddta1s@guest.arnes.si; dm €17-20; ☎) Jul-Aug), entered from Kotnikova ul, and **Dijaški Dom Ivana Cankarja** (☎ 474 86 00; dd.lj-ic@guest.arnes.si; Poljanska c 26B; s/d/tr 3960/6520/8580SIT; ☎) Jul) with 10% student discounts. Ignore the misleading sign on the door of Poljanska c 26: the actual entrance is from the western side of block B. The correct doorway faces onto a tennis court.

## Outer Suburbs

**Prenosišča Bežigrad** (☎ 231 15 59; www.prenosciša-bezigrad.com; Podmilščakova 51; s/d/tr without breakfast 8000/11,000/14,000SIT) Bright, well-equipped new rooms off hospital-style corridors are good value, despite the road noise and semi-industrial location, 2km north of the centre (catch bus 14).

**Ljubljana Youth Hostel** (BIT Center Hotel; ☎ 548 00 55; www.bit-center.net; Litjiska 57; dm/s/d €13/28.50/40, breakfast €3.50; P) Stylish new HI bunk-dorms and functionally modern ensuite rooms are attached to the large BIT sports centre 3km east of the centre. Take bus 9 from opposite the bus and train stations to the Emona bus stop, walk 250m further east, turn north onto Pesarska c, then immediately right through an expansive car park.

North of the centre are the less convenient **Dijaški Dom Bežigrad** (☎ 534 28 67; dd.lj-bezigrad@guest.ames.si; Kardeljeva pl 28; dm from €12; ☹ Jul-Aug), which you can reach on bus 6, and **Dijaški Dom Šiška** (☎ 500 78 04; www.ddsiska.com; Aljaževa 32; dm adult/student €11/9; ☹ Jun-Aug) near pointy-towered Sv Francišek Church (Verovškova ul). Take bus 1, 3, 15 or 16 west-bound to the Stara Cerkev stop, walk 500m due north on Aljaževa, and the hostel is on your right.

## EATING

The Old Town has plenty of appealing restaurants, though the choice here isn't quite as overwhelming as that of cafés. For cheaper options you can try Poljanska c or the dull but functional snack bars around the stations.

## Old Town

**Pri Sv Florijanu** (☎ 251 22 14; Gornji trg 20; meals from 1900SIT; ☹ noon-11pm) This top-rate restaurant, housed in an old building with a stylishly modern interior, is famed for its creative nouveau-Slovene cuisine. Come before 4pm and you can choose three-course vegetarian, fish or meat menus for just 1900SIT. Or venture downstairs (open from 6pm), and you are atmospherically transported to North Africa for Moroccan food or a puff on a water pipe.

**Gostilna Vodnikov Hram** (☎ 234 52 60; Vodnikov trg 2; meals from 1700SIT; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, food to 4pm) Vegetarian and meaty lunch specials are a bargain at 780SIT to 1100SIT in this inviting vaulted pub.

**Ajdovo Zrno** (☎ 041 690 478; Trubarjeva c 7; meals from 1000SIT) Right in the centre of town, this cheery hangout serves no meat, fish or eggs and has a yummy salad bar.

**Julija** (☎ 425 64 63; Stari trg 9; meals from 1400SIT; ☹ 8am-10pm, café to midnight) At Julija, risottos and pastas are served outside or in a pseudo-Delft tiled back room behind a café decorated with 1920s prints.

**Gostilna Pri Pavli** (☎ 425 92 75; Stari trg 1; pizzas from 900SIT, meals from 1500SIT; ☹ 6am-11pm) This attractive, country-style inn serves Slovene food that's unspicacious, but surprisingly affordable for such a perfect location. Service is homely, if slow, and the atmosphere calmly sedate.

**Sokol** (☎ 439 68 55; Ciril Metodov trg 18; meals from 2500SIT; ☹ 6am-11pm) In this old vaulted house, traditional Slovene food is served on heavy tables by costumed waiters, who stop just short of Disneyesque self-parody. Pizzas and vegetarian options are available if sausage and groats don't appeal. Even if you think you'd hate blood pudding, the country feast platter may pleasantly surprise you.

**Taverna Tatjana** (☎ 421 00 87; Gornji trg 38; fish per kg 6000-20,000SIT, garnish extra 600SIT; ☹ 5pm-midnight) Looking like an old-world wooden-beamed cottage pub, this is actually a rather exclusive fish restaurant with a tiny, brilliant two-seat bar for your apéritif. As you leave, the view from the doorway is one of Ljubljana's most picturesque.

**Delikatessen Ljubljana Dvor** (Gospoška ul; pizza slices 250-350SIT; ☹ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat) Locals queue for huge, bargain pizza slices, salads and sold-by-weight braised vegetables to takeaway or stand and eat.

**Paninoteka** (Jurčičev trg 3; sandwiches 450-650SIT; ☹ 8am-1am Mon-Sat, 9am-11pm Sun) Healthy sandwich creations on olive ciabatta are sold here to takeaway or to eat outside on a lovely little square with castle views.

A good pizzeria is the riverfront **Ljubljanski Dvor** (☎ 251 65 55; Dvorni trg 1; pizzas from 850SIT; ☹ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-11pm Sun).

The minimarket **Živila** (Kongresni trg 9; ☹ 7am-9pm) is open even on Sunday.

## City Centre

**Harambaša** (☎ 041 675 155; Vrtna 8; meals from 1500SIT; ☹ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) Here you'll find Bosnian cuisine served at low tables in a charming modern cottage atmosphere with quiet Balkan music.

**Alamut Orient House** (☎ 031 545 595; Poljanska c 7; meals from 1500SIT; ☹ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) Persian rugs and Lurish swords decorate this cosy little Iranian restaurant, whose 1400SIT lunch menus are popular with intellectuals and vegetarians. Subtle herbs and yogurt are used to masterful effect in the 1200SIT *polnjen malancan* (stuffed aubergine).

**Manna** (☎ 283 52 94; Eippova 1a; meals from 3500SIT; ☹ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) Plush red interiors with Klimt prints and a tempting Viennese bar area make this the most stylishly upmarket of several eateries and pubs along an attractive tree-shaded stretch of canal, a short walk south of the city centre. Try the rocket dumplings with scampi and saffron (1500SIT).

**Joe Pena's** (☎ 421 50 00; Cankarjeva c 6; meals from 2500SIT; ☹ 10am-1am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Lazily whirring ceiling fans, earth-tone walls and wooden floors create plenty of atmosphere at Joe Pena's, Ljubljana's best, mood-lit Mexican restaurant.

**Cantina Mexicana** (☎ 426 93 25; Knafjev prehod; ☹ 11am-late) This luridly colourful Mexican place has a fabulous terrace equipped with sofas and lanterns; perfect for a preprandial margarita.

**Nobel Burek** (Miklošičeva c 30; burek 450SIT; ☹ 24hr) This place serves up Slovenian-style fast food.

**Hot Horse** (Trubarjeva c 31; snacks 350-800SIT, burgers 400-700SIT; ☹ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) Fill up with giant 'horseburgers' and veggie-burgers or pop next door for sandwiches.

**Pinkí** (☎ 544 11 11; Poljanska c 22; meals 700-800SIT; ☹ 6.30am-10pm Mon-Sat) Serving lasagnes, tortillas and pizzas, this cheap and cheerful student-oriented diner also does a 240SIT coffee-and-doughnut breakfast.

Pre-eminent pizzerias include the warmly vaulted **Foculus** (☎ 251 56 43; Gregorčičeva 3; ☹ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun), good-value **Napoli** (☎ 231 29 49; Prečna 7) and trusty **Čerin** (☎ 232 09 90; Trubarjeva c 52; ☹ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat & Sun), which has bargain 980SIT lunch menus before 3pm. Otherwise pizzas range from 1200SIT to 1800SIT almost anywhere.

The minimarket **Market Tabor** (Kotnikova 12; ☹ 7.30am-10pm) is open on Sunday.

## DRINKING

Few cities have central Ljubljana's concentration of fabulously inviting cafés and bars,

many with outdoor seating. Unless noted, those listed below open daily till late and charge from 160SIT to 200SIT for an espresso, 300SIT to 350SIT for small beers, and 900SIT to 1000SIT for cocktails. Just choose the ambience that appeals.

**Movia Vinoteka** (☎ 425 54 48; Mestni trg 2; ☹ noon-midnight Mon-Sat) If you've been disappointed by mediocre Slovenian vintages, this atmospheric 1820 wine bar beside the Town Hall is the place to taste the really good ones. Sip slowly, however, as the 0.07L measures barely wet the bottom of the giant globe glasses. And at 600SIT to 3500SIT a pop, you'll need a few before you're tipsy.

**BiKofe** (Gospoška 7) This spot has a soft, jazzy, mellow vibe, attracting both a straight and gay clientele.

**Prskelet** (Ključavničarska 5; ☹ 10am-1am) Here skeletons enjoy all-day two-for-one cocktails in an amusing *Rocky Horror*-style basement.

**Makalonca** (Hribarjevo nab) An unpretentious, cult bar on a glassed-in jetty, Makalonca is at the bottom of some easy-to-miss steps.

**Salon** (☎ 433 20 06; Trubarjeva c 23) This dazzling designer-kitsch cocktail bar features gold ceilings and leopard-skin couches.

**Petit Café** (Trg francoske revolucije 4) The wonderful Petit Café magically transports you to Montmartre.

**Oriental Café** (Metelkova 8) Many backpackers are so enchanted by the Celica Hostel's Oriental Café they forget to explore next-door Metelkova (p348).

Riverside classics:

**Maček** (☎ 425 37 91; Cankarjevo nab 19) Happy hour 4pm to 7pm.

**Zlata Ladja** (☎ 241 06 95; Jurčičev trg) Has DJs at weekends.

**CN7 Patisserie** (Cankarjevo nab 7; coffee 200SIT, beers from 350SIT; ☹ 8am-1pm) CN7's willow-whipped stools offer arguably the best-positioned riverbank perch.

For *Clockwork Orange* designer cool try **Fraga Gallery-Bar** (Mestni trg 15), audacious, white-on-white **Minimal** (Mestni trg 4; small beers 450SIT) or the less exclusive cake-café **Zvezda** (☎ 121 90 90; Wolfova 1).

If it had longer opening hours, Gostilna Vodnikov Hram (opposite) would knock the spots off Anglo-Irish pubs like **Patrick's** (Prečna 6), **Sir William's** (Tavčarjeva 8a; ☹ closed Sun) or the ever-popular **Cutty Sark** (☎ 425 14 27; Knafjev prehod).



Quaint 'olde'-style places include **Café Antico** (☎ 426 56 28; Stari trg), wood-paneled **Roza** (Židovska 6) and patisserie cafés such as **Čajna Hisa** (Stari trg 3; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat) and **Slaščičarna Pri Vodnjaku** (Stari trg 30).

## ENTERTAINMENT

*Where to? In Ljubljana and Ljubljana Calling* (www.ljubljana-calling.com) list cultural events, sports and nightlife options. Glossy **Ljubljana Life** (www.ljubjanalife.com) has some refreshingly frank reviews. All are free from TICs, hotels and some restaurants.

## Nightclubs & Live Music

**Global** (☎ 426 90 20; www.global.si in Slovene; Tomšičeva 2; admission before midnight free, after midnight 1000SIT) After 11pm, Thursday to Saturday, this retro cocktail bar with Ljubljana's best city views becomes a popular dance venue. Take the bouncer-guarded elevator on Slovenska c to the top.

**K4** (www.klubk4.org; Kersnikova 4; ☎ 10pm-4am) Two stark dance floors beneath the student organisation Roza Klub (p380) – enter from rear – feature rave-electronic music Friday and Saturday (1000SIT to 1500SIT), with other styles of music weeknights, and a popular gay-and-lesbian night on Sunday (500SIT after 11pm).

**Bachus** (☎ 241 82 44; www.bachus-center.com in Slovene; Kongresni trg; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Wed, 8am-4am Thu-Sat, 6pm-4am holidays) This well-designed, smart and trendy bar-restaurant complex holds weekend discos.

**As** (☎ 425 88 22; www.gostilnaas.si in Slovene; Knafjev prehod; ☎ 9am-3am) Thursday to Saturday DJs transform this candle-lit basement bar, hidden beneath this incongruously upmarket restaurant, into a pumping, crowd-pulling nightclub.

**Jazz Club Gajo** (☎ 425 32 06; www.jazzclubgajo.com; Beethovnova 8; admission free; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 7pm-midnight Sat & Sun, closed mid-Jul–mid-Aug) For Monday night student jams, midweek concerts or just a convivial drink, the Gajo is always inviting.

**Orto Bar** (☎ 232 16 74; Grablovičeva 1; ☎ 8pm-4am) Popular for late-night drinking and dancing with occasional live music, the Orto has red padded walls, whirring steel propeller fans and a taste for Joy Division. It's just five minutes' walk from Metelkova.

**Metelkova** (www.metelkova.org) In this two-courtyard block, half a dozen wonderfully

idiosyncratic venues hide behind mostly unmarked doors, coming to life after midnight Thursday to Saturday. You might well feel uncomfortable amid the street-art, graffiti and shadow-lurking youth gangs, but this is all part of Metelkova's unique atmosphere. Entering from Masarykova c, to the right is **Gala Hala** (www.ljudmila.org/kapa/program in Slovene) with live bands and club nights. Easy to miss in the first building to the left are Club Tiffany (a gay café-club) and Monokel Club (for lesbians). Beyond the first courtyard, well-hidden Gromka (folk, improv, possibly anything) is beneath the bodyless heads. Cover charges and midweek openings are rare but erratic for all Metelkova venues.

## Theatre & Classical Music

**Cankarjev Dom** (☎ 241 73 00; www.cd-cc.si; Trg Republike) is a complex of around a dozen venues offering a remarkable smorgasbord of performance arts. Its **ticket office** (☎ 241 71 00; ☎ 11am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat, & 1hr before performances) lurks within the basement floor of Maximarket Mall.

Also check for classical concerts at the attractive Filharmonija (p343) and for ballet at the neo-Renaissance 1882 **Opera House** (☎ 425 48 40; Župančičeva ul).

## Cinemas

**Kinoteka** (www.kinoteka.si in Slovene; Milošičeva c 28; admission 1400SIT) Offers the most imaginative programme, including rare, old and cult movies, in an Art Deco mansion. If the linguistic challenges of following a Slovene soundtrack are getting you down, slope off for a drink in the atmospheric, movie-themed Marilyn Caffè (big beers 380SIT).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The shed-like **bus station** (Avtobusna postaja; ☎ 234 46 00; www.ap-ljubljana.si; Trg Osvoobodilne Fronte; ☎ 5.30am-9pm) has bilingual info-phones, and its timetable is very useful once you get the hang of it – nominate your destination first. Hourly weekday buses serve Bohinj (1940SIT, two hours) via Bled (1400SIT, 1¼ hours). Most buses to Piran (2910SIT, 2½ to three hours, up to eight daily) go via Koper (2460SIT, 2½ hours, up to 10 daily) and Postojna (1340SIT, 1¼ hours, 20 daily). Most Maribor buses (2760SIT, three hours, seven daily) leave in the afternoon. All services are much less frequent at weekends.

**Ljubljana train station** (☎ 291 33 32; Trg Osvoobodilne Fronte) has up to 19 daily services to Maribor (1710SIT to 2895SIT, 1¼ to 2¼ hours). There are five trains daily to Koper (2040SIT, 2½ hours). For international services see p382.

## GETTING AROUND

The cheapest way to **Ljubljana Aerodrome** (Brnik Airport; www.lju-airport.si) is by city bus from bus station lane 28 (740SIT, 45 minutes). These run hourly, from 5.10am to 8.10pm Monday to Friday, but only seven times daily at weekends. Another seven Marun/Adria coaches (1000SIT, 30 minutes) run daily. Big hotels offer an airport shuttle for 2500SIT per person, or 8800SIT per shuttle if there are few passengers. A taxi to the city centre costs about 7000SIT.

The heavily pedestrianised city centre's one-way system makes driving confusing. Street parking is feasible, though not always easy in the museum area and near Metelkova. Once you've found a space it's generally most efficient to walk.

Ljubljana has excellent city buses, most lines operating every 10 to 20 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 tokens in advance (190SIT) from newsstands, or pay 300SIT once aboard. Ljubljana Cards (3000SIT for 72 hours; see p342) give you free city-bus travel.

In summer you can hire bicycles at the train station, Petit Café (p347) and the STIC (p342) for 100SIT per hour, or at **Hotel Lev** (Vošnjakova 1; per day 3000SIT) and at a kiosk near Maček café (p347).

## AROUND LJUBLJANA

### Stična

☎ 01 / pop 715 / elev 325m

The abbey at Stična (Sittich in German) is the oldest monastery in Slovenia and one of the country's most important religious and cultural monuments. At only 35km from Ljubljana and within easy walking distance of the train station at Ivančna Gorica (population 1580), Stična can be visited on a day trip from the capital or en route to Novo Mesto, the valley of the lower Krka or Bela Krajina.

The monastery was established in 1136 by the Cistercians, a branch of the Bene-

dictines who worked as farmers, following a vow of silence. It became the most important religious, economic, educational and cultural centre in Dolenjska, but it was abandoned in 1784 when Emperor Joseph II dissolved all religious orders – many of them very powerful and corrupt – in the Habsburg Empire.

The Cistercians returned in 1898, and today almost the entire complex is again in use. There are seven priests (including the abbot) and six monks in residence.

## ORIENTATION

The village of Stična is about 2.5km north of Ivančna Gorica, where you'll find the **train station** (Sokolska 1).

## SIGHTS

The entrance to the walled **Stična Abbey** (Stiški Samostan; ☎ 787 71 00; www2.pms-lj.si/sticna in Slovene; Stična 17; adult/student & child 600/300SIT; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun, tours 8.30am, 10am, 2pm & 4pm Tue-Sat, 2pm & 4pm Sun), an incredible combination of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and baroque architecture, is on the eastern side across a small stream. On the northern side of the central courtyard is the **Old Prelature**, a 17th-century Renaissance building that contains the **Slovenian Religious Museum** (Slovenski Verski Muzej) on two floors. Its permanent collection (History of Christianity in Slovenian) is on the 2nd floor. The museum is a hotchpotch of antique clocks, paintings, furniture and farm implements mixed with chalices, monstrances and icons. There are a few 16th-century missals and medical texts in Latin and German, but all the medieval documents are facsimiles of the originals carted off to libraries in Vienna and Ljubljana when the order was banned in the 18th century.

On the western side of the courtyard, the **Abbey Church** (1156) was built as a buttressed, three-nave Romanesque cathedral, but it was rebuilt in the baroque style in the 17th and 18th centuries. Inside, look for the Renaissance red-marble tombstone of Abbot Jakob Reinprecht in the north transept and the blue organ cupboard with eight angels (1747) in the choir loft. The greatest treasures here are the **Stations of the Cross** painted in 1766 by Fortunat Bergant, who spelled his surname with a 'W' on the last one.

South of the church is Stična's celebrated **vaulted cloister**, which mixes Romanesque and early Gothic styles. The cloister served as an ambulatory for monks in prayer and connected the church with the monastery's other wings. The arches and vaults are decorated with frescoes of the prophets and Old Testament stories as well as allegorical subjects such as the Virtues, the Four Winds and so on. Look for the carved stone faces on the western side that were meant to show human emotions and vices – upon which the clergy were expected to reflect.

On the southern side of the cloister is a typically baroque monastic **refectory** with an 18th-century pink ceiling and decorative swirls and loops made of white stucco. One floor above is the much impoverished **library**. **Neff's Abbey**, built in the mid-16th century by Abbot Volbenk Neff, runs to the west. The arches in the vestibule on the ground floor are painted with a dense network of leaves, blossoms, berries and birds.

The Cistercians sell their own products (honey, wine, herbal teas, liqueurs) in a small **shop** (☎ 8am-12.30pm & 1-3pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat) at the abbey entrance.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Grofija** (County; ☎ /fax 787 81 41; Vir pri Stični 30; per person €20) This 19th-century farmhouse with four rooms for guests is 2km southeast of the abbey. Horses are available for hire. A major Hallstatt settlement dating from 800 BC once stood near the site of the tennis court here.

**Krčma Deseti Brat** (☎ 787 80 62; Stična 27; meals from 2200SIT; ☎ 8am-10pm Tue-Sun) Just uphill from the monastery, the '10th Brother Tavern' serves up dishes of game, Dolenjska sausage, wild mushrooms and *struklji* (dumplings).

**Pri Jurčku** (At the Mushroom; ☎ 787 71 10; Ljubljanska c 38; pizzas 1100SIT; ☎ 10am-10pm) This cute little place in Ivančna Gorica, about 150m northeast of the train station and just off the road to the abbey, serves local favourites and quite decent pizza.

In Stična you'll also find a small super-market called **Vele** (Stična 27a), just up from the abbey.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Stična is served by up to 14 buses (one hour) a day from Ljubljana on weekdays, reducing to five on Saturday.

## JULIAN ALPS

Dramatic rocky mountain spires straddle the Italian border. Within Slovenia these Julian Alps (named for Caesar) climax at tri-peaked Mt Triglav (2864m), the country's highest summit. Along with the neighbouring mountains, forests and breathtakingly beautiful valleys, the area forms the Triglav National Park. At weekends, half of Ljubljana's population decamps here to ski, cycle, fish, climb or hike. There are adventure sports to suit every level of insanity, many based in Bovec, and few places in Europe offer better rafting, paragliding or canyoning at such affordable prices.

### KRANJ

☎ 04 / pop 37,000

Backed by a threatening battalion of mountains, Kranj's old core looks most picturesque when seen from across the Sava River, looking to the northeast. This is a view you'll enjoy briefly from the right-hand windows of buses headed from Ljubljana to Bled/Kranjska Gora, between gaps in the light-industrial foreground.

The frequent weekday buses between Kranj and 'Ljubljana Aerodrome' (in Brnik) make it possible to head straight from the plane to the Julian Alps without diverting to Ljubljana. While awaiting your Bled- or Kranjska Gora-bound bus, consider poking around the mildly appealing Kranj Old Town. It starts near the Art Nouveau **former post office** (Maistrov trg), a 500m walk south from the bus station. Most places of interest are along just three southbound pedestrianised streets – Prešernova, Britov and Tomišičeva ulicas – two of which bring you to the impressive **Sv Kancijan Church**, with its frescoes and ossuary. As far south again, the Old Town dead-ends near the **Serbian Orthodox church** with a 16th-century **defence tower**.

If you need a place to stay, there's the overpriced **Hotel Creina** (☎ 202 45 50; www.hotel-creina.si; Koroška c; s/d/tr 13,500/18,000/21,900SIT), south of the former post office.

Colourfully stylish, student-oriented **Cuk-rama** (Britov 73; beers 400SIT; ☎ 11am-late) is a great place for a drink, and boasts a gas-heated balcony overlooking an abyss.

From Kranj it's a relatively easy 10km excursion to **Škofja Loka**, which has one of Slovenia's most beautiful town squares (Mestni trg) and a fine **castle** (Loski Grad; 13 Grajski pot) containing a decent **ethnographic museum** (☎ 517 04 00; adult/child 600/400SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct). Buses run approximately hourly from Kranj (490SIT, 25 minutes).

### BLED

☎ 04 / pop 5467

Genteel, millennium-old Bled is the gateway to the mountains. Its attraction is an absolutely idyllic setting on a 2km-long subalpine lake with a castle crag and romantic island placed exactly where you'd want them. It's a scene that seems designed for some god of tourism, not for the 13th-century bishops of Brixen. Bled town is not architecturally memorable, but it's small, convenient and a delightful base from which to simply stroll and gaze. Beware: in midsummer the beauty is diluted a little by the ever-expanding crowds and prices.

### Information

**Bled Health Centre** (☎ 575 40 00; Mladinska c 1; ☎ 7am-7pm)

**Kompas** (☎ 572 75 00; Bled Shopping Centre; ☎ 9am-7pm) Sells maps, hires bicycles, offers tours and changes money.

**SKB Banka** (Bled Shopping Centre; ☎ 9-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) One of several banks with an ATM.

**TIC** (☎ 574 11 22; www.bled.si; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun, later in summer) On the lakefront near the Park Hotel.

**Union 99** (www.union-bled.com; Ljubljanska c 9; per 15min 300SIT; ☎ 8am-midnight) An appealing upstairs café-bar with an Internet connection.

### Sights

On its own romantically tiny island (Blejski Otok), the baroque **Church of the Assumption** (☎ 8am-dusk, variable in winter) is Bled's photogenic trademark. Getting there by piloted *plenta* (gondola; €10 per person, 1½ hours return) is the archetypal tourist experience. Gondola prices are standard from any jetty, and you'll stay on the island long enough to ring the 'lucky' bell. Ordinary row-yourself boats cost 2000SIT per hour.

Topping a sheer 100m-cliff, **Bled Castle** (☎ 578 05 25; Blejski Grad; adult/student 1200/1100SIT; ☎ 8am-8pm May-Sep, 8am-5pm Oct-Apr) is the perfect backdrop to lake views, notably those

from Mlino, on the lake's southern bank. One of many access footpaths leads up from beside Bledec Hostel. Admission includes a historical **museum** section and the fabulous views.

Hidden away in its own lakeside park beyond Mlino is **Vila Bled** (☎ 579 15 00; www.vila-bled.com; C Svobode 26). This is now a Relais & Chateaux hotel, but it started life as Tito's summer retreat. Its basic design is somewhat forbiddingly 1950s, but there are some brilliant communist murals and a delightful outside terrace between arches of a colonnade. It's well worth the price of a drink to look around.

### Activities

For perfect photos, stroll right around the lake. This 6km walk should take around two hours, including the short, steep climb to the brilliant **Osojnica viewpoints**.

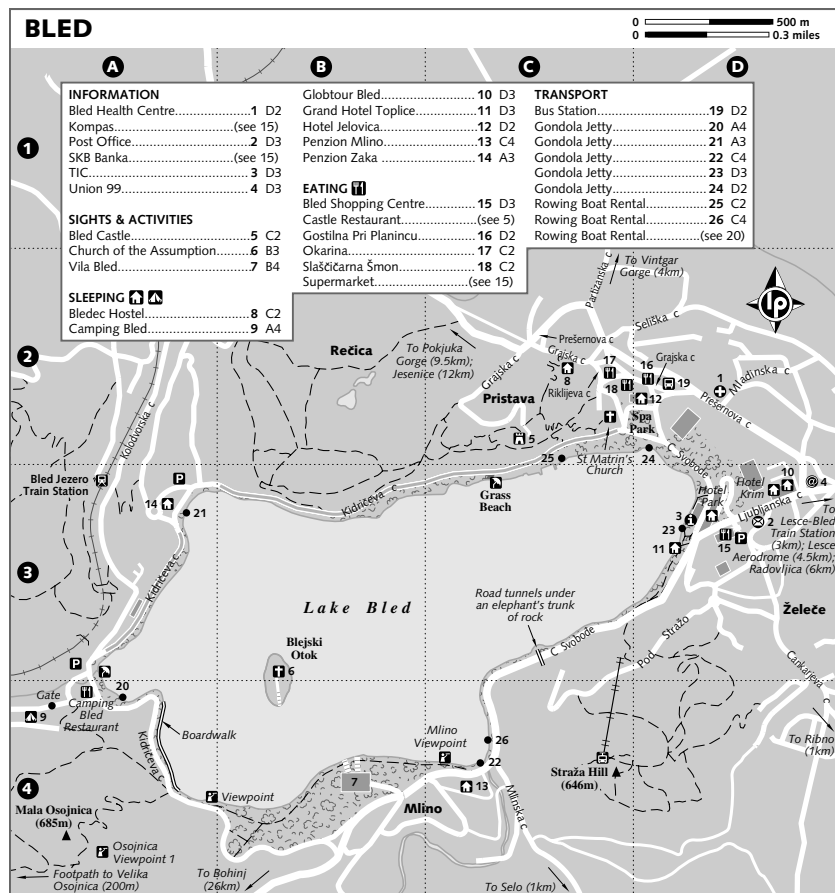
Another popular, easy walk is to and through the 1.6km-long **Vintgar Gorge** (adult/child 900/600SIT; ☎ May-Oct). The highlight is an oft-renovated, century-old wooden walkway (no bicycles) which crisscrosses the fizzing Radovna River for the first 700m or so. Thereafter the scenery becomes tamer, passing a tall railway bridge, a spray-spouting weir, and ending at the anti-climatic **Sun Waterfall**. The gorge is officially but not physically closed in winter. Easiest access is via the appealing Gostilna Vintgar (an inn), three well-signed kilometres away on quiet, attractive roads from the Bledec Hostel. An alternative path back to Bled via Zasip is easy to lose track of before St Catherine's Church (Cerkev Sv Katarina).

For something tougher ask at the tourist office about multiday **hikes** and **mountain-bike** routes between semiabandoned, roadless hamlets in the mountains. The TIC can also help you arrange **gliding** (from €30) from nearby Lesce aerodrome. What a view!

### Sleeping

*Sobe* (private rooms) are offered by dozens of homes. Agencies Kompas and **Globtour Bled** (☎ 574 18 21; www.globtour-bled.com; Hotel Krim, Ljubljanska c 7) have extensive lists, with prices for singles starting at €17. There is a 30% surcharge for stays under three nights.

**Grand Hotel Toplice** (☎ 579 10 00; www.hotel-toplice.com; C Svobode 12; s €100-170, d €130-200, ste €210-250; P ☎ ☎) With a history that goes



back to the mid-19th century, the 87-room Toplice is Bled's 'olde worlde' hotel, with attractive public areas, exquisitely outfitted rooms and superb views of the lake on its northern side. The hotel also has a couple of restaurants. The hotel's two extensions – the **Trst** (C Svobode 19; s €45-75, d €60-90), just opposite, and the more attractive **Jadran** (C Svobode 23; s €45-75, d €60-90), up on the hill – are half the price.

**Penzion Mlino** (☎ 574 14 04; www.mlino.si; C Svobode 45; s/d Nov-Apr €35/50, May-Oct €40/60) The lake-facing Mlino is on the Bohinj road, 900m southwest of town. The great views of the castle and lake counter the slightly cramped rooms and *Fawlty Towers*-style breakfast service.

**Hotel Jelovica** (☎ 579 60 00; www.hotel-jelovica.si; C Svobode 8; s/d July & August €50/76, rest of year €40/56) This handily central hotel is a decently renovated communist-era resort, and charges €5 extra for lake-glimpse rooms.

**Penzion Zaka** (☎ 574 17 09; www.bled-zaka.com; Župančičeva 9; s/d Sep-Jun €32/48, Jul & Aug €40/64) This *penzion* offers seven spacious if unsophisticated rooms with balconies and kitchenette above the good-value Regatni Center restaurant. Four of the rooms have lake views.

**Bledcic Hostel** (☎ 574 52 50; www.mlino.si; Grajska c 17; dm low/high season €17/19, IYHA discount €2; ☑) Outwardly a typical *penzion*, this well-organised youth hostel has new four-bed dorms with attached bathrooms. It's quiet

yet very central. Laundry (1500SIT per load) is available and Internet costs 500SIT per half-hour).

**Camping Bled** (☎ 575 20 00; www.camping.bled.si; adult/child €10/7; ☑ Apr-mid-Oct) This well-kept, popular site fills a rural valley behind a waterside restaurant at the western end of the lake. It hires mountain bikes (2500SIT per day) and can arrange ballooning, rafting, parachuting and more.

## Eating

The venerable old Grand Hotel Toplice conjures up the best dining in town and there's a choice of restaurants. The most formal dining is at the toney (and aptly named) **Grand Restaurant** (meals from 5000SIT), where seafood and game done up in sauce rule the menu. Julijana is 'smart casual' and offers lighter more adventurous food with a Mediterranean accent for about the same price. The cheaper Panorama overlooks the lake and offers a wide range of well-prepared dishes. And there's no classier place to nibble a slice of cake or linger over cocktails than the hushed, hallowed lounge bar where princes, diplomats and celebrities have passed.

**Okarina** (☎ 574 14 58; Rikljevka c 9; meals €11-22; ☑ 6pm-midnight) Like its cuisine, Okarina's décor is an imaginative assortment of top-quality traditional Slovene and exotic Indian dishes. Relatively affordable vegetarian curries are available.

**Gostilna Pri Planincu** (☎ 574 16 13; Grajska c 8; meals from 1500SIT; ☑ noon-10pm) This 1903 village pub serves good-value food in its back rooms and pizza in the airy new bar upstairs.

**Slaščičarna Šmon** (Grajska 3; ☑ 7.30am-9pm) This renowned patisserie-café is the place to try *krema snežna rezina*, Bled's scrumptiously light if anaemic-looking speciality, cream-and-custard pastry.

**Castle Restaurant** (Restavracija Blejski Grad; ☎ 574 16 07; meals from 3500SIT, beers 470SIT; ☑ 9am-10pm) Enjoy a meal or just a sunset beer on the superbly situated terrace of this restaurant.

Stock up on supplies at the supermarkets on Prešernova c or in **Bled shopping centre** (Ljubljanska c 4). The latter also has several decent café-bars.

## Getting There & Around

Hourly buses to Bohinj (from 7.20am) and Ljubljana (1460SIT, 1½ hours) use the help-

fully central **bus station** (Gtajska c). Buses to Radovljica via Lesce-Bled station (370SIT, 15 minutes) run every 30 minutes. Bled has no central train station. Trains for Most na Soči and Nova Gorica use sweet little Bled Jezero station, which is 2km west of central Bled – handy for the camping ground and Pension Zaka but nothing else. Trains for Austria (up to eight daily) and Ljubljana (1050SIT, 55 minutes, frequent) use Lesce-Bled station, 4km to the east of town. However, if you're off to Ljubljana it's much nicer (if marginally less convenient) to wait for your train in attractive Radovljica.

In summer, pint-sized 'tourist-trains' (adult/child 550/350SIT) trundle around the lakeside every 40 minutes, passing *penzions* Mlino and Zaka.

## RADOVLJICA

☎ 04 / pop 9590 / elev 488m

A charming town full of historic buildings, Radovljica enjoys an enviable position atop an outcrop 75m above a wide plain called the Dežela (Country). A short distance to the west, two branches of the Sava join to form Slovenia's longest and mightiest river.

Radovljica (Ratmansdorf in German) was settled by the early Slavs and grew into an important market town by the early 14th century. With increased trade on the river and the addition of iron forgeries at nearby Kropa and Kamna Gorica, Radovljica expanded. The town was built around a large rectangular square fortified with a wall and defence towers. Radovljica's affluence in the Middle Ages can be seen in the lovely buildings still lining Linhartov trg today.

Radovljica is an easy day trip from Bled, just 6km to the northwest.

## Orientation

The centre of old Radovljica is Linhartov trg; the new town extends primarily northward along Gorenjska c towards Lesce. Radovljica's bus station is 500m northwest of Linhartov trg on Kranjska c. The train station is below the town on C Svobode.

## Information

**Gorenjska Banka** (Gorenjska c 16; ☑ 8am-6pm

Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

**Post office** (Kranjska c 1; ☑ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat)



**SKB Banka** (Gorenjska c 10; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Tourist office** (☎ 531 53 00; tdradovljica@s5.net; Gorenjska c 1; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

## Sights

### BEEKEEPING MUSEUM

Although it might not sound like a crowd-pleaser, this **museum** (Čebelarški Muzej; ☎ 532 05 20; www.muzeji-radovljica.si; Linhartov trg 1; adult/child 500/400SIT; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10am-noon & 3-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun Mar, Apr, Nov & Dec) is one of the most interesting in the country, and there isn't a whole lot you won't know about things apian after an hour inside. The museum is housed in **Thurn Manor**, which began life as Ortenburg Castle in the early Middle Ages but was rebuilt with a large hall on the ground floor after the earthquake of 1511. The cream-and-white structure has interesting reliefs and stucco work on its façade.

The museum's exhibits take a close look at the history of beekeeping in Slovenia (which was at its most intense in the 18th and 19th centuries), the country's unique contribution to the industry with the development of the Carniolan grey bee species (*Apis mellifera carnica*) and the research of men like Anton Janša (1734–73), who set up a research station in the Karavanke and is considered around the world to be the father of modern beekeeping. And the museum doesn't fail to pass on a few 'fun facts to know and tell'. Did you realise that bees cannot see the colour red but go gaga over yellow? The museum's collection of illustrated beehive panels (*panjske končnice*) from the 18th and 19th centuries, a folk art unique to Slovenia, is the largest in the country.

### LINHARTOV TRG

Radovljica's main square – named in honour of Slovenia's first dramatist and historian, Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756–95), who was born here – is lined with houses from the 16th century and is an absolute delight to explore. It has been called 'the most homogeneous Old Town core in Slovenia', with interesting details at every step.

Several lovely buildings are opposite the Beekeeping Museum, including **Koman House** (Linhartov trg 23), which has a baroque painting on its front of St Florian, the patron saint of fires (he douses, not sets, them) and **Mali**

**House** (Linhartov trg 24), which has a barely visible picture of St George slaying the dragon. The 17th-century **Vidič House** (Linhartov trg 3) has a corner projection and is colourfully painted in red, yellow and blue.

The most important house here is 16th-century **Šivec House** (Šivčeva Hiša; ☎ 532 05 20; Linhartov trg 22; adult/child 400/300SIT; ☎ 10am-noon & 6-8pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 10am-noon & 5-7pm Tue-Sun Jun & Sep, 10am-noon & 4-6pm Tue-Sun Jan-May, Oct-Dec), which is an interesting hybrid: Renaissance on the outside and Gothic on the inside. On the ground floor there is a vaulted hall, which now serves as a **gallery**, and on the 1st floor there's a wood-panelled late-Gothic drawing room with a beamed ceiling used as a wedding hall. There is also a chimneyless 'black kitchen' and an interesting collection of **children's book illustrations** by celebrated Slovenian artists. The fresco on the exterior shows the Good Samaritan performing his work of mercy.

East of the square is the Gothic **Parish Church of St Peter** (Cerkev Sv Petra), a hall church modelled after the one in Kranj. The three portals are flamboyant Gothic, and the sculptures inside were done by Angelo Pozzo in 1713. The building with the arched courtyard south of the church is the **rectory** (*župnišče*).

## Activities

There is a public **swimming pool** (☎ 531 57 70; Kopalniška c; ☎ 9am-9pm Jun-Aug) near the camping ground, with tennis courts nearby.

The **Sport Riding Centre** (☎ 532 52 00; per hr 400SIT; ☎ 7am-7pm) at Podvin Castle (Grad Podvin; opposite), about 4km southeast of Radovljica, has horses available for riding individually or with an instructor.

## Festivals & Events

The biggest event of the year is the two-week long **Festival Radovljica** (<http://festival-radovljica.amis.net>), one of the most important festivals of ancient classical music in all Europe, held in mid-August.

## Sleeping

**Camping Sobec** (☎ 535 37 00; www.sobec.si; Šobčeva c 25; camping per person €9.20-10.70, bungalows for 2 €73-87; ☎ May-Sep) The largest (15 hectares) and arguably the best-equipped camping ground in Slovenia is in Lesce, about 2.5km northwest of Radovljica. Situated on a small

lake near a bend of the Sava Dolinka River, the camping ground can accommodate 1350 people, which this popular place often does in summer. In a small pine wood in the centre are bungalows for up to six people.

**Hotel Grajski Dvor** (☎ 531 55 85; www.hotel-grajski-dvor.si; Kranjska c 2; s/d 8700/12,600SIT; ☎) Radovljica's only hotel, the four-storey, 65-room 'Castle Courtyard' has recently been renovated although the décor remains rooted in the 1970s. At least check out the delightful Grajska Gostilnica restaurant.

**Grad Podvin** (☎ 532 52 00; www.robas.si/grad-podvin; s/d €54/67; ☎ ☎) It's a rather boxy affair about 4km southeast of Radovljica in the village of Mošje but, hey, it's still a castle. Podvin Castle is surrounded by a lovely park and has tennis courts, an outdoor pool and a popular horse-riding centre.

## Eating

**Grajska Gostilnica** (☎ 531 44 45; meals 1500-2400SIT; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat) The flagship at the Hotel Grajski Dvor, this place has quickly become the town's best. It has a mixed cuisine of Italian and Slovenian, a great wine list and an atmospheric cellar below. All the metalwork was produced by UKO in Kropa (see p356).

**Gostilna Lectar** (☎ 537 48 00; Linhartov trg 2; meals from 2000SIT; ☎ noon-11pm Wed-Mon) The Lectar, in yet another historic Linhartov trg house, is highly recommended by locals.

**Gostilna Augustin** (☎ 531 41 63; Linhartov trg 14; lunch Mon-Fri 1100SIT; ☎ 8am-midnight) This welcoming bar-restaurant has a terrace out the back with stunning views towards Triglav.

## Shopping

**Vinoteka Sodček** (☎ 531 50 71; Linhartov trg 8; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) This shop has an excellent selection of Slovenian wines.

## Getting There & Away

Buses leave from Radovljica almost every half-hour between 7am and 10pm for Bled and Ljubljana. They go hourly to Bohinjska Bistrica (via Bled), Kranj, Kranjska Gora and Kropa. Other destinations, and daily frequencies, include: Bovec via Kranjska Gora and the Vrščič Pass (one bus daily in July and August), Brezje (one), Jesenice via Vrba (up to six), Novo Mesto (one at the weekend), Škofja Loka (one) and Tržič (up to four).

Radovljica is on the rail line linking Ljubljana (780SIT, 50 minutes) with Jesenice (340SIT, 20 minutes) via Škofja Loka, Kranj and Lesce-Bled. Up to 15 trains a day pass through the town in each direction. About eight of the northbound ones carry on to Villach in Austria.

## KROPA

☎ 04 / pop 840 / elev 531m

While in Radovljica, don't miss the chance for an easy half-day trip to this delightful village. The inhabitants of Kropa (Cropp in German) have been 'workhorses' for centuries, mining iron ore and hammering out the nails and decorative wrought iron that can still be seen in many parts of Slovenia. Today Kropa has turned to screws – the Novi Plamen factory is based here – but artisans continue their work, clanging away in the workshop on the village's single street. The work of their forebears is evident in ornamental street lamps shaped like birds and dragons, weather vanes and shutters.

## Sights

### BLACKSMITH MUSEUM (KOVAŠKI MUZEJ)

The fascinating collection at the **museum** (☎ 533 67 17; Kropa 10; adult/child 400/300SIT, with film & forge display 500/400SIT; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10am-noon & 3-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun Mar, Apr, Nov & Dec) traces the history of iron mining and forging in Kropa and nearby Kamna Gorica from the 14th to the early 20th centuries. Nail manufacturing was the town's main industry for most of that period: from giant ones that held the pylons below Venice together to little studs for snow boots, Kropa produced 130 varieties in huge quantities. You did not become a master blacksmith here until you could fit a horseshoe around an egg – without cracking the shell.

The museum has working models of forges, a couple of rooms showing how workers and their families lived in very cramped quarters (up to 45 people in one house) and a special exhibit devoted to the work of Joža Bertonec (1901–76), who turned out exquisite wrought-iron gratings, candlesticks, chandeliers and even masks. The museum shows a period-piece black-and-white film about the town and its work produced in the very socialist 1950s.

The house itself was owned by a 17th-century iron baron called Klinar, and it

contains some valuable furniture and paintings. Among the most interesting pieces is a 19th-century wind-up 'jukebox' from Bohemia.

#### OTHER SIGHTS

The **UKO forgers' workshop** (☎ 533 73 00; Kropa 7b; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) across from the museum can be visited. The smiths sell their wares at the **shop** (Kropa No 7a) next door, which keeps the same hours.

An 18th-century furnace called **Purgatory Forge** (Vigenj Vice) lies a short distance north of the museum near the Kroparica, a fast-flowing stream that once turned the wheels that powered the furnaces for the forges. Close by is the birthplace of the Slovenian painter Janez Potočnik (1749–1834), whose work can be seen in the baroque **Church of St Leonard** (Cerkev Sv Lenarta), on the hill to the east, and in Kamnik. Kropa has many other lovely old houses, including several around **Trg Kropa**, the main square, which also has an interesting old wayside shrine.

#### Eating & Drinking

**Gostilna Pri Kovač** (☎ 533 63 20; Kropa 30; meals from 2500SIT; ☎ 10am-11pm Tue-Sun) Convivial 'At the Smith's' is an interesting old house just north of the museum.

**Pri Jarmu** (☎ 533 67 50; Kropa 2; pizzas from 1000SIT; ☎ 10am-midnight Fri-Tue) This humble *gostilna* at the southern end of Kropa serves hearty pizzas but is more a place to drink than eat.

#### Getting There & Away

Public transport from Radovljica is minimal. You need your own car.

#### BOHINJ

☎ 04

Bohinj is not a town but a delightful valley of quaint meadowland villages culminating at magnificent Lake Bohinj. The mirrored waters are hemmed by high mountains that rise almost vertically from the walking trail along the lake's 3km-long northern shore.

The minuscule main tourist hub is **Ribčev Laz**, at the lake's eastern end. Its five-shop commercial centre contains a supermarket, pizzeria, post office (with ATM) and the obliging **tourist office** (☎ 572 32 70; www.bohinj.si; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun mid-Sep–Jun, 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug), which changes money, sells fishing licences and

can help with accommodation, including mountain-hikers' huts. **Alpinsport** (☎ 572 34 86; www.alpinsport.si; ☎ closed Apr) hires kayaks, canoes, bicycles and skis from a kiosk near the stone bridge.

For brochure-worthy photos of Lake Bohinj, climb 25 minutes up Peč Hill from Stara Fužina village, 1.5km further north. Stara Fužina also has an appealing little **Alpine Dairy Museum** (Planišarski Muzej; ☎ 572 34 86; adult/child 400/300SIT; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm Tue-Sun, 11am-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug). Along with similarly attractive villages **Studor** and **Češnica**, it makes a delightful but easy bike ride from Ribčev Laz. The route is dotted with specially fine *kozolci* and *toplarji*, Slovenia's unique single and double hayracks.

Summer tourist boats (€6.50 return, 15 minutes, seven or eight per day) from Ribčev Laz terminate in Ukanc (aka Zlatorog) at the lake's far western end. Just 300m from the jetty a cable car (return €7, half hourly from 9am to 6pm, or 8am to 8pm July and August) whisks you up a vertical kilometre to 1540m; from here, ski lifts or hiking paths, according to season, continue up **Mt Vogel** for astonishing views.

**Bohinjska Bistrica** (population 3080), Bohinj's biggest village, is 6km east of Ribčev Laz and useful mainly for its train station.

#### Sleeping & Eating

Private rooms (€8.50 to €14.10 per person), mainly in outlying villages, are available through the tourist office. Nightly rates are cheaper for three-day stays.

**Hotel Ski** (☎ 572 16 91; d €36-40) With a stupendous position at the top of the Mt Vogel cable car, this is one of five hotels run by **Alpinum** (☎ 577 80 00; www.alpinum.net).

**Penzion Rožic** (☎ 572 33 93; www.penzion-rozic.com; per person without breakfast €19-27; ☎) This unpretentious chalet-style guesthouse and restaurant is cheaper than most Ribčev Laz hotels. It's just 100m east of the tourist office, behind a bike-hire kiosk.

**Hotel Jezero** (☎ 572 91 00; hotel.jezero@cc-line.si; s/d from €51/62) This relatively comfortable place is the closest hotel to the lake, right by the stone bridge in Ribčev Laz. Rooms with a balcony cost slightly more.

**Autokamp Zlatorog** (☎ 572 34 82; camp sites per person 1700-2400SIT; ☎ May-Sep) A pine-shaded caravan site, with camping spots too, right beside the Ukanc jetty.

#### Getting There & Around

Buses run hourly (except Sunday) from Ukanc to Ljubljana via Ribčev Laz (470SIT), Bohinjska Bistrica and Bled, with six extra buses daily between Bohinjska Bistrica and Ukanc. Buses to Ukanc will be marked to 'Bohinj Zlatorog'. From Bohinjska Bistrica, passenger trains to Nova Gorica (1040SIT, 1½ hours, eight daily weekdays, less on weekends), plus six daily Avtovlak trains to Most na Soči (470SIT, 50 minutes), use a long tunnel that offers the only direct option for reaching the Soča Valley. Avtovlak trains carry cars for 2600SIT.

#### KRANJSKA GORA

☎ 04 / pop 2000

As ski resorts go, compact little Kranjska Gora is relatively cute and sits right beside the ski lifts to Slovenia's best-regarded pistes. There are world record-setting ski jumps 4km west at Planica.

Borovška c, 300m south of the bus station, is the old heart of the village, with an endearing **museum** (Borovška 61), an attractive **church** and a few wooden-roofed old houses. At its newer western end it passes the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 588 17 68; www.kranjska-gora.si; Tičarjeva 2; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Jul-Aug, 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Sep-Jun), a bank with ATM and money exchange, a couple of supermarkets and the post office.

Several places, including **Skipass Travel** (☎ 582 1000; Boroškova 5; www.skipasstravel.si), hire skis, poles and boots and sell lift passes.

The in-your-face mountain valleys also beckon summer climbers, hikers and anglers alike. For cyclists and motorists there's the awesome drama of the Vršič Pass.

#### Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation pricing is very complex, peaking December to February, at Mardi Gras and in midsummer. April is the cheapest season, though many hotels close for repairs at this time. Private rooms (single/double from €18/26) and mountain huts can be arranged with help from the tourist office.

**Hotel Kotnik** (☎ 588 15 64; kotnik@siol.net; Borovška 75; d €56-64) In the old centre, this appealing, very well-appointed hotel has 'turrets', red-tiled roofs, and flowers in the window boxes. It's painted in unmissable bright yellow.

There's a cosy little lounge, a well-reputed restaurant and a good pizzeria attached.

**Gostilna Pri Martinu** (☎ 582 03 00; Borovška 61; d €46-52, meals around 1700SIT; ☎ 10am-10pm, bar 10am-11pm) This atmospheric tavern-restaurant serves up giant portions and offers four vegetarian options. It's *ajdova kaša* (buckwheat with fresh mushrooms in garlic-cream sauce) is superb. It also has rooms.

**Youth Hostel Nika** (Penzion Portentov Dom; ☎ 588 14 36; Čičare 2; dm €13; ☎ 8am-11pm) Somewhat institutional dorm-rooms are available in this large black-and-lilac house 800m north-east of the centre, some 200m beyond the Shanghai Chinese restaurant.

#### Getting There & Away

Buses run hourly to Ljubljana via Jesenice (change for Bled or Villach), and direct to Bled at 9.15am and 1.10pm, weekdays only. In July and August there's a service to Bovec (1530SIT, 1¾ hours, one daily) via the spectacular Vršič Pass.

#### TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK

pop 2705 / elev to 2864m

Although there are 40 country (or 'landscape') parks and two regional ones in Slovenia, this is the country's only gazetted national park, and it includes almost all of the Julian Alps lying within Slovenia. The centrepiece of the park is, of course, 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.

#### Kranjska Gora to Soča Valley

One of the most spectacular – and easy – trips in Triglav National Park is simply to follow the paved road, open from May to October only, from Kranjska Gora via the Vršič Pass to Bovec, about 50km to the southwest. Between July and September, you can do the trip by bus. At other times, you'll need your own transport – be it a car or mountain bike.

The first stop from Kranjska Gora is **Jasna Lake** (Jezero Jasna), about 2km south of town. It's a beautiful, almost too-blue glacial lake with white sand around its rim and the little Pivnica River flowing alongside. Standing guard is a bronze statue of that irascible old goat **Zlatorog**, the mythical

chamois (*gams* in Slovene) with the golden horns who once lived on Mt Triglav and guarded its treasure. Travellers might recognise Zlatorog's face; it's on the label of the country's best beer.

As you zigzag up to just over 1100m, you'll come to the **Russian Chapel** (Ruska Kapelica), a little wooden church erected on the site where more than 400 Russian prisoners of war were buried in an avalanche in March 1916 while building the road you are travelling on.

The climbing then begins in earnest as the road meanders past a couple of huts and corkscrews up the next few kilometres to **Vrščič Pass** (1611m), about 13km from Kranjska Gora. The area was the scene of fierce fighting during WWI, and a high percentage of the dead lay where they fell (at 1525m there's a **military cemetery** to the east of the road). The Tičarjev Dom mountain hut is also east of the road. To the west is Mojstrovka (2366m), to the east Prisank (2547m) and to the south the valley of the Soča River points the way to Primorska. A hair-raising descent of about 10km ends just short of the **Julius Kugy Monument**. Kugy (1858–1944) was a pioneer climber and author whose books eulogise the beauty of the Julian Alps.

From here you can take a side trip of about 2.5km northwest along the **Soča Trail** (Soška Pot) to the **source of the Soča River**

(Izvir Soče). Fed by an underground lake, the infant river bursts from a dark cave before dropping 15m to the rocky bed from where it begins its long journey to the Adriatic.

Not long after joining the main road again you'll pass the entrance to the **Alpinum Juliana**, a botanical garden established in 1926 and showcasing the flora of all of Slovenia's Alps (Julian, Kamnik-Savinja and Karavanke) as well as the Karst. The elongated mountain village of **Trenta** (population 115; elevation 662m) is about 4km to the south.

In lower Trenta the **Dom Trenta** (☎ 05-388 93 30; Trenta 31; ☞ 10am–6pm late Apr–Oct) contains the **Triglav National Park Information Centre** (☎ 04-578 0200; www.tnp.si) and the **Trenta Museum** (Trentarski Muzej; adult/child/student 900/600/550SIT), which focuses on the park's geology and natural history as well as the Trenta guides and pioneers of Slovenian alpinism.

The equally long village of **Soča** (population 144; elevation 480m) is another 8.5km downriver. The **Church of St Joseph** (Cerkev Sv Joža), from the early 18th century, has paintings by Tone Kralj (1900–75). Completed in 1944 as war still raged in Central Europe, one of the frescoes on the ceiling depicts Michael the Archangel struggling with Satan and the foes of humanity, Hitler and Mussolini.

### CLIMBING TRIGLAV

Marked trails in the park – many of them under repair – lead to countless peaks and summits besides Triglav. Favourite climbs include Mangart (2678m) on the Italian border (the 12km road that descends to the Predel Pass is the highest road in Slovenia), the needlepoint of Jalovec (2645m) in the north, and the sharp ridge of Razor (2601m), southeast of Vrščič.

To commune with nature in solitude, try climbing from Trenta. Because it's more difficult to reach from major population centres, the western approach to Triglav is quieter than the other routes. Get ready for a long climb starting from an altitude of just over 600m. From Trenta, an hour's hike along the Zajdnica Valley leads to the foot of Triglav's western face. Follow a long but relatively easy trail as it zigzags up the mountain to the Dolič saddle and the mountain hut **Tržaška Koča na Doliču** (☎ 04-574 4069) at 2151m. From here you can follow the normal route to the summit via **Dom Planika pod Triglavom** (☎ 04-574 4069) mountain hut at 2401m or take the slightly more difficult western ridge.

But the Triglav National Park is not only about climbing mountains. There are easy hikes through beautiful valleys, forests and meadows, too. Two excellent maps are the PZS 1:50,000 *Triglavski Narodni Park* and Freytag and Berndt's 1:50,000 *Julische Alpen Wanderkarte*. The new *Triglav National Park: Two Guides in One* (Založba Mladinska Knjiga), which comes as a 104-page booklet with a map, is also worth a look. Before setting out on a hike, it's wise to check with the Triglav National Park Information Centre (above) or local tourist offices for advice on current conditions. Mountaineering shops are another good source of information.

Bovec, the recreational centre of the Upper Soča Valley (Gornje Posočje), is 12km west of Soča.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Gostišče Jasna** (☎ 04-588 57 00; Vršička c 41; meals from 1200SIT; ☞ 10am–10pm) This inn with a terrace overlooking Jasna Lake is a great place for a meal or a drink before pushing on for the Vrščič Pass and beyond.

There are several mountain huts on or near the Vrščič road. **Erjačeva Koča na Vrščiču** (☎ 04-586 60 70, 050-610 031; Vršička c 90) is at 1525m. **Tičarjev Dom na Vrščiču** (☎ 04-586 60 70, 050-634 571; plan.drustvo@siol.net; Trenta 85; ☞ late Apr–late Oct) sits right on the pass.

Near the source of the Soča River at 886m is the **Koča pri Izviru Soče** (☎ 04-586 60 70, 041 603 190; plan.drustvo@siol.net; ☞ May–Oct).

Camping grounds abound in the park. In Trenta there's **Kamp Trenta** (☎ 041 615 966; Trenta 60a; per person 1100–1350SIT; ☞ May–Oct) and **Kamp Triglav** (☎ 041 388 93 11; Trenta 18; per person 1000SIT; ☞ Apr–Sep). The staff at the **Dom Trenta** (☎ 05-388 93 30) in Trenta can book private rooms (3500SIT per person) and apartments (apartment for four from 11,000SIT).

### UPPER SOČA VALLEY

☎ 05

The bluer-than-blue water of the **Soča River** changes tone with the seasons, but is always surreally vivid. It has carved out one of the loveliest valleys in the Julian Alps.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Public transport in the area is poor. Week-day buses from Bovec via Kobarid run five times daily to Nova Gorica (1710SIT, two hours) and thrice to Ljubljana (3150SIT, 3¼ hours), passing Most na Soči train station (for Bled and Bohinj). In July and August only, six daily buses cross the spectacular Vrščič Pass to Kranjska Gora; from here hourly buses continue to Ljubljana.

### Bovec

pop 1610

For alpine drama, the views are best around Bovec, above which towers Mt Kanin, Slovenia's highest ski area at 2587m. Although Bovec itself is no great beauty, it makes an ideal base for hiking, biking or climbing into the marvellous valley beyond and is nationally famous for extreme sports.

The compact village square (Trg Golobarskih Žrtev) has everything you need. There are cafés, a hotel, a very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 384 19 19; www.bovec.si; ☞ 9am–9pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun summer, hr vary winter) and several adrenaline-rush adventure-sports companies: **Planet Sport** (☎ 040 639 433; www.drustvo-planet.si), **Sportmix** (☎ 389 61 60; www.sportmix.traftbovec.si), **Top Rafting** (☎ 041 620 636; www.top.si) and experienced, well-organised **Soča Rafting** (☎ 389 6200; www.SocaRafting.si).

Activities include:

**Guided canyoning** 9600SIT for two hours at Sušec.

**Hydrospeed** Like riding down a river on a boogie board; 7900SIT for 10km.

**Kayaking** Guided 10km paddle about 8400SIT per person, two-day training courses from €95, including equipment.

**White-water rafting** From 6200SIT to 10,000SIT depending on distance.

Save 10% to 15% with student cards, the TIC's 'Byways' booklet, or by simply avoiding midsummer and weekends. **Avantura** (☎ 041 718 317; www.bovec.net/avantura.html; Kot 9, Bovec) offers awesome tandem-jump paragliding (24,000SIT): in winter when the ski lifts operate you jump off the top of Mt Kanin!

Chalet-villages throughout the valley have private-room accommodation from €12 per person (plus various supplements). There is an extensive list of contacts at www.bovec.net but finding anything at all in August can be tough. The central **Alp Hotel** (☎ 388 63 70; www.bovec.net/hotelalp; Trg Golobarskih Žrtev 48; s/d €46/74.60) is smart and good value. Camping facilities are better in Kobarid, but camping ground **Polovnik** (☎ 041 641 898; www.kamp-polovnik.com; Ledina 8; camp sites from 1500SIT, showers 120SIT) is handily central.

### Kobarid

pop 1240

Nearby Kobarid village (Caporetto in Italian) is quainter than Bovec, though the woodland scenery is somewhat tamer. On its main square is extreme-sports agency **XPoint** (☎ 388 53 08; www.xpoint.si; ☞ 8am–8pm daily Jun–Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct–May) and Internet-equipped **Bar Cinca Marınca** (Trg Svobode 10; per 30min 250SIT; ☞ 8am–11pm). Right in the town centre, the **tourist office** (☎ 389 00 00; www.kobarid.si) is within Kobarid's **museum** (adult/student 800/600SIT; ☞ 9am–6pm, to 7pm Apr–Sep), which is otherwise devoted mainly to the region's



WWI battles. These killed over 200,000 people and formed the backdrop to Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*. The daring Austro-German breakthrough at Kobarid in October 1917 invented blitzkrieg. Remnant WWI troop emplacements as well as numerous Roman and 6th-century archaeological sites can be seen on an easy-to-follow, half-day hiking loop to the impressive **Slap Kozjak** (Kozjak Waterfalls).

Not far from Kobarid's central church, **Apartmaji-Sobe Ivančič** (☎ 389 1007; apartma-ra@siol.net; Gregorčičeva 6C; s €18-30, d €30-50) is a popular central homestay. It's neat and clean, with bathrooms shared between pairs of cheaper rooms.

**Lazar Kamp** (☎ 388 53 33; www.lazar-sp.si; per person €6.50-9; ☹ Apr-Oct) is perched idyllically above the Soča River, 1.7km southeast of Kobarid, halfway to Slap Kozjak. Probably Slovenia's finest camping ground, the multi-lingual owners are conscientious and hospitable. Their wild west-style saloon-café serves delicious *palučinka* crepes. Go on, try the 'bear's blood'!

The renowned **Restaurant Kotlar** (mains 1500-3000SIT; ☹ noon-11pm Thu-Mon) is also located on Kobarid's main square.

## NOVA GORICA/GORIZIA

Nova Gorica, a green but dull casino- and border-town, was torn from Italian-held old Gorizia after WWII. Today the two towns lie side-by-side on each side of the border. Nova Gorica is useful mainly as a money-saving public transport route between Italy's budget airline-served western cities of Trieste and Treviso and Slovenia's Julian Alps. Part of the mini-'Berlin Wall' dividing the cities was pulled down to great fanfare in 2004, leaving the anomalous Piazza Transalpina straddling the border right behind Nova Gorica station. At the piazza there's no fence and (usually) no guards, so in reality there's rarely anything to physically stop you wandering across to the Italian side, where the frequent Italian bus 1 will pick you up and conveniently whisk you to Gorizia station. Bizarrely, however, this is NOT a legal border crossing, and it won't be until Slovenia joins the Schengen Convention in October 2007. Meanwhile EU (plus Icelandic, Norwegian and Swiss) citizens may use a less direct shuttle bus (€1, 25 minutes, almost hourly)

between the two train stations, or cross on foot at the **Gabrielle border crossing** (☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat; no banks). Gabrielle is a two-minute stroll south of Nova Gorica train station, or 10 minutes southwest from the bus station: head straight down Erjavčeva which becomes Via San Gabriele in Italy. Continue five minutes to the five-way junction Piazza Medaglie d'Oro to pick up southbound Italian bus 1 for Gorizia station.

Other nationalities can't use the Gabrielle crossing. Instead they are expected to use the 24-hour Rožna Dolina-Cassa Rosa crossing (where there are banks with ATMs). This is reached by half-hourly buses (any number) from Nova Gorica bus station, or by walking 20 minutes south from the train station: follow the railway line through the cycle-tunnel, immediately thereafter cross the tracks on a footbridge and continue along 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.

There are banks with ATMs at Rožna Dolina and Nova Gorica bus station but not at Gabrielle, nor at the train station, which nonetheless does accept euros for tickets (at some 10% below market rates).

Nova Gorica's best-value place to stay is **Prenocišče Pertout** (☎ 303 21 94; www.prenocišceperout.com; s/d 5000/7000SIT), a well-marked house just 50m east then north from the Rožna Dolina border crossing. It's surprisingly peaceful and comfortable.

Buses travel between Nova Gorica and Ljubljana (2380SIT, 2½ hours) approximately hourly via Postojna, and five times daily to Bovec via Kobarid.

Trains run to Bohinjski Bistrica (1190SIT, 1½ hours) and Bled or via Sežana and Divača to Postojna and Ljubljana.

## KARST & COAST

Slovenia's 45km sliver of coastline has no beach worthy of the name, although that hasn't stopped Portorož becoming a major resort. The coast's real appeal lies in its charming old Venetian ports: Koper, Izola and picture-perfect Piran. En route from Ljubljana you'll cross Karst (Kras), Slovenia's west-central region, which is synonymous with eccentrically eroded limestone

landscapes and riddled with magnificent caves. Slovenia's two most famous caves – theme park-style Postojna and quietly awesome Škocjan – couldn't be more different.

## POSTOJNA

☎ 05 / pop 8500

Slovenia's foremost tourist attraction, **Postojna Cave** (☎ 700 01 00; www.postojnska-jama.si; adult/student/child 3690/2770/2390SIT) is a very obvious 2km stroll northwest of unremarkable Postojna town. Inside, impressive stalagmites and stalactites stretch almost endlessly in all directions, as do the chattering crowds who shuffle past them. A visit involves a 1.7km walk, with some gradients but no steps. It culminates in a quick encounter with a cute, endemic *Proteus anguinus* 'human-fish'. The very jolly highlight which both starts and finishes the tour is chugging between the limestone formations on an underground train. Dress warmly or hire a coat (700SIT): even on blistering summer days it's only 8°C to 10°C inside the cave, the train seats may be wet, and there's some wind chill on the open carriages.

Entry times are fixed. At a minimum there will be departures at 10am and 2pm daily plus at noon and 4pm on weekends. Frequency rises steadily towards summer, becoming hourly (from 9am to 6pm) between June and October.

Idyllic **Predjama** village is 9km northwest of Postojna. It consists of half a dozen houses, a rural inn, a mock-medieval jousting course and a remarkable **castle** (☎ 700 01 00; adult/student 1100/830SIT; ☹ 10am-4pm Jan-Mar & Nov-Dec, 10am-6pm Apr & Oct, 9am-7pm May-Sep) which appears to grow out of a yawning cave. Although a castle has stood on the site since 1202, the one you see today dates from the 16th century. Then – as now – the four-storey fortress looked unconquerable.

The castle's eight museum rooms contain little of interest, but it does have an eyrie-like hiding place at the top called **Erazem's Nook**, a drawbridge over a raging river, holes in the ceiling of the entrance tower for pouring boiling oil on intruders, a very dank dungeon and a 16th-century chest full of treasure (unearthed in the cellar in 1991).

Beneath the castle are stalactite-adorned **caves** (1100SIT, cave-castle combination ticket adult/student 2000/1500SIT), a 6km network of gal-

leries spread over five levels. Much of it is open only to speleologists, but casual visitors can see about 900m-worth.

## Sleeping & Eating

Dozens of Postojna houses rent rooms (single/double from 4500/7500SIT). Central **Kompas** (☎ 72 14 80; www.kompas-postojna.si; Titov trg; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) or the cave-side **tourist office** (www.postojna.si; ☹ 10am-4pm Sep-Apr, 9am-6pm May-Oct) can help.

**Gostilna Požar** (☎ 751 52 52; tw €46; ☹ closed Wed) Facing the cave-mouth castle in Predjama, this brilliantly situated inn has simple rooms with new bathrooms, and is above the village restaurant.

**Hotel Kras** (☎ 726 40 71; www.hotel-kras.com; Titov trg; s/d €33/47) This unlovely and somewhat tatty concrete box-style hotel is right on the central square, a 200m stroll north of the bus station.

## Getting There & Away

Buses from Ljubljana to Koper, Piran or Novo Gorica all stop in Postojna (1¼ hours). The train is less useful as the station is 1km east of town near the bypass, ie 3km from the caves. There's no public transport except five local buses on school days from Postojna bus station to Bukovje village (390SIT). That's just 1.3km short of Predjama, a delightful, well-signposted walk.

## CERKNICA

☎ 01 / pop 3550 / elev 559m

Cerknica is the largest town on a lake that isn't always a lake – one of Slovenia's most unusual natural phenomena. The town itself is not particularly important as a destination, but it is close to the 'intermittent' Lake Cerknica, the country park around Rakov Škocjan Gorge, Mt Snežnik and Snežnik Castle.

## Orientation & Information

Cerknica lies about 3km north of Lake Cerknica. C 4 Maja is the main street in the centre of town. The bus station is on Čabranska ul, about 100m to the south-west and behind the post office. The **tourist office** (☎ 709 36 36; vlستا.kolenc@postojna.si; C 4 Maja 51; ☹ 7.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) is on the ground floor of the Notranjska Ecology Centre (Notranjski Ekološki Center).

## Sights

### LAKE CERKNICA

Since ancient times periodic Lake Cerknica has baffled and perplexed people, including the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (63 BC–AD 24), who called the mysterious body of water Lacus Lugeus (Mourning Lake). It wasn't until Valvasor (a 17th-century historian who published the first major study of Slovenia) explained how the water system worked that it was fully understood.

Cerknica is a *polje*, a field above a collapsed karst cavern full of sinkholes, potholes, siphons and underground tunnels that can stay dry for much of the year but then floods. From the south, the *polje* is fed by a disappearing river, the Stržen, and to the east and west it collects water underground from the Bloke Plateau and the Javornik Mountains. During rainy periods in the autumn and spring, all this water comes rushing into the *polje*. Springs emerge and the water begins to percolate between the rocks. The sinkholes and siphons cannot handle the outflow underground, and the *polje* becomes Lake Cerknica – sometimes in less than a day.

The surface area of Lake Cerknica can reach almost 40 sq km, but it is never more than a few metres deep. During dry periods (usually July to September or later), farmers drive cattle down to the *polje*.

The lake really begins at the village of Dolenje Jezero (population 225), about 2.5km south of Cerknica, where you will find the **Lake House Museum** (Muzej Jezerski Hram; ☎ 709 40 53; www.jezerski-hram.si; adult/child 550/450SIT, multimedia 200/150SIT; ☎ demonstration 3pm Sat & Sun), with a 5m by 3m, 1:2500 scale working model of Lake Cerknica, showing how the underground hydrological system works. There's also an ethnological collection and multimedia presentation.

### RAKOV ŠKOCJAN

Protected Rakov Škocjan is a gorge 6km west of Cerknica. The Rak River, en route to join the Pivka River at Planina Cave, has sculpted 2.5km of hollows, caves, springs and **Veliki and Mali Naravni Most**, the Big and Little Natural Bridges. There are several hiking trails through and around the gorge.

From Rakek train station (right), you can reach the gorge on foot in about an hour.

## Activities

The **Cerknica Mountain Trail** heads southwest from Cerknica to thickly forested **Veliki Javornik** (1269m). From here you can take a side trip of about two hours to the gorge at Rakov Škocjan. The trail then skirts the southern shore of Lake Cerknica and carries on north to **Križna Gora** (856m) and its nearby cave. It continues northwest to **Slivnica** (1114m), home of the witch Uršula and other sorcerers, where you will find a 32-bed mountain hut, **Dom na Slivnici** (☎ 709 41 40; ☎ daily May–Sep, Sat & Sun Oct–Apr). The next day you walk north to **Stražišče** (955m) and then back to Cerknica.

## Festivals & Events

Cerknica is famous for its **Carnival** (Pustni Karneval) that takes place four days before Ash Wednesday (late February/early March) when merrymakers wearing masks of Uršula, who makes her home on Mt Slivnica, and other legendary characters parade up and down C 4 Maja while being provoked by upstarts with pitchforks.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Telič Vilma** (☎ 709 70 90; drago.telic@siol.net; Brestova 9; s/d 5500/8500SIT) This small B&B on the eastern edge of town with two double rooms with shared bathroom and toilet has stunning views over the lake.

**Valvasorjev Hram** (☎ 709 37 88; Partizanska c 1; meals from 1500SIT; ☎ 8am–11pm) Serves pizza and has its own wine cellar.

You'll find a central supermarket (it's divided into two buildings) – a large **Mercator** (C 4 Maja 64; ☎ 7am–8pm Mon–Fri, 7am–1pm Sat, 8am–noon Sun) and another **Mercator** (C 4 Maja 64; ☎ 7am–9pm Mon–Sat, 8am–noon Sun) – diagonally opposite the tourist office.

## Getting There & Away

Buses run between nine and 12 times a day to/from Ljubljana, and about half a dozen go to Lož, Rakek and Stari trg pri Ložu. Other destinations include Postojna (five during school term). Two or three buses a day cross the Croatian border to Previd.

Rakek, about 5km northwest of Cerknica, is on the rail line that connects Ljubljana with Sežana. About 10 trains a day to/from the capital stop at Rakek. Heading south, all stop at Postojna and Pivka, but only about half continue to Divača and Sežana.

## SNEŽNIK CASTLE

☎ 01 / elev 593m

Just south of the village of Kozarišče (population 240), in the secluded Lož Valley (Loška Dolina) 21km southeast of Cerknica, stands 16th-century Renaissance **Snežnik Castle** (Grad Snežnik; ☎ 705 78 14; adult/student & child 700/600SIT; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–6pm Wed–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr–Oct). It is one of the loveliest and best-preserved fortresses in Slovenia. The entrance to the castle, which is surrounded by a large and protected park, is through a double barbican with a drawbridge and moat. The **exhibits** in the main building are the chattels and furnishings (notice the room done up in Egyptian handicrafts) of the Schönburg-Waldenburg family, who used what they called Schneberg as a summer residence and hunting lodge until WWII. The castle also contains an **art gallery**.

Adjacent to the castle, a 19th-century dairy building houses the **Dormouse Collection** (Polharska Zbirka; ☎ 705 76 37; Kozarišče 70; 10am–1pm & 2–5pm Wed–Fri, 10am–1pm & 2–7pm Sat & Sun). The dormouse (*glis glis*) or loir (*polh*) is a tree-dwelling nocturnal rodent, not unlike a squirrel, which grows to about 30cm and sleeps through several months of the year. It is a favourite food in Notranjska, and the hunting and eating of it is associated with a lot of tradition. The fur is used to make the *polhovka*, the distinctive fur cap worn by Božiček, Slovenia's version of Santa Claus, and dormouse *mast* (fat) is a much-prized machine oil. According to popular belief, the dormouse is shepherded by Lucifer himself and thus deserves its fate in the cooking pot.

**Križna Cave**, about 7km north of Snežnik Castle and a kilometre or so after you turn off the main road from Cerknica, is one of the most magnificent water caves in the world. It is 8.5km long and counts 22 underground lakes filled with green and blue water as well as a unique 'forest' of ice stalagmites near the entrance. The dry part of the cave, which includes a short boat ride, can be toured (1100SIT) at 3pm on Sunday from May to October in an hour. To go as far as the Kalvarija chamber by rubber raft via 13 lakes (5500SIT to 7000SIT), you must contact the guide, **Alojz Troha** (☎ 041 632 153) in Bloška Polica (house No 7) in advance. It's a four-hour tour if you elect

to do the entire cave, and the price includes all equipment.

A stage of the E6 European Hiking Trail leads from near Snežnik Castle for about 15km to **Snežnik** (1796m), whose peak remains snowcapped until well into the spring. It is the highest non-Alpine mountain in Slovenia. There is accommodation at the hut **Koča Draga Karolina na Velikem Snežniku** (☎ 041 333 198; pd.sneznik@email.si; ☎ Sat & Sun May–Jul, Sep & Oct, daily Aug).

## Festivals & Events

The big occasion in these parts is **Dormouse Hunting Night** (Polharska Noč). It's held on the first Saturday after 25 September during the brief period when it's open season for trapping the incredible edible dormouse.

## Getting There & Away

Snežnik's isolation makes it tough to reach by public transport. Without a car, bicycle or horse, you'll have to take a bus from Cerknica to Stari trg pri Ložu (up to six a day) and walk 4km.

## ŠKOCJAN CAVES & DIVAČA

☎ 05

The perky church tower of a tiny, red-roofed hamlet pokes jauntily through fluffy forests. Just beneath, the limestone earth cracks like broken eggshells, releasing the turbulent Reka River from the immense **Škocjan Caves** (www.park-skocjanske-jame.si; adult/student 2500/1800SIT). Harder to reach and much less commercialised than Postojna, these caves have been declared a Unesco World Heritage site. With relatively few stalactites, the attraction here 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. Year-round departures are assured at 10am and 1pm daily plus 3pm Sundays. June to September they leave additionally at 11.30am, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm and 5pm daily. Unlike Postojna the caves warm up somewhat in summer so there's no need for unseasonable coats.

The nearest town with accommodation is Divača, 4km to the northwest. The best place is **Gostilina Malovec** (☎ 763 12 25; Kraška 30a; s/d €20/40), 500m northeast of the train

station. On the way, you'll pass the modest **Gostilna Risnik** (☎ 763 00 08; Kraška 24; s/tw 3500/7000SIT) over a bar 200m from the train station.

Ljubljana-Koper buses and trains stop at Divača half an hour after Postojna. Kindly staff at the train station often give visitors a photocopied route map for walking to the caves. Alternatively, stay on the bus a couple of minutes longer and get dropped off at a signposted junction just 1.6km from the caves. Timetables rarely mesh with cave-visit times, but you can make pleasant short hikes around the cave's visitor centre, where there's a bar and restaurant for those conserving their energy.

## LIPICA

☎ 05 / pop 130

Since the 18th century, Lipica has been breeding snow-white Lipizzaner horses for the world-famous Imperial Spanish Riding School in Vienna. The village is basically just a hotel complex and the **Stud Farm** (☎ 739 15 80; www.lipica.org; tours per adult/student from 1500/800SIT), which offers equestrian fans a variety of rides, lessons and tours (hourly from 11am to 3pm, finishing later in summer). For comprehensive timetables and prices check the website carefully. The **Hotel Maestoso** (www.lipica.org; s/tw low season €50/78, mid-season €58/90, high season €65/100) has excellently appointed rooms looking over the golf course-like landscape. For cheaper places drive 3km west to Basovizza in Italy.

Divača to Lipica is only 10km but there's no viable public transport. With your own wheels stop halfway there in the village of **Lokev**, where the intriguing 1485 **Tabor tower** houses a cheap bar and a little **armaments museum** (☎ 767 01 07; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Wed-Fri), just off (and easily visible from) the main Divača-Lipica road.

## KOPER

☎ 05 / pop 24,000

As you swing around it on the motorway, Koper appears to be a sprawling, industrial town dominated by container-port cranes. Yet its central core is delightfully quiet, quaint and much less touristy than nearby Piran. Also, being a working city, its accommodation is not quite as stretched as Piran's in summer.

Koper grew rich as a key Venetian salt-trading port. Known then as Capodistria, it was 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 (bicycle hire available) is 1.4km southeast of central Titov trg. To walk into town, just head towards the cathedral's Moroccan-style bell tower; alternatively, take Bus 1, 2 or 3 to the Muda Gate. Pristaniška and Vojkovo nab mark what was once the southern coast of the medieval island.

## Information

**Banka Koper** (Kidričeva 14; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Changes money.

**Hospital** (☎ 664 71 00; Dellavallejeva 3; ☎ 24hr) **Libris** (www.libris.si in Slovene; Prešernov trg 9; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Bookshop with postcards.

**Maki Currency Exchange Bureau** (Pristaniška ul; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm Sat) Compare rates with Ilirika across the road.

**Net Bar** (Vojkovo nab 33; ☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat, noon-11pm Sun) Twenty minutes free Internet access when you buy a drink (beers 330SIT).

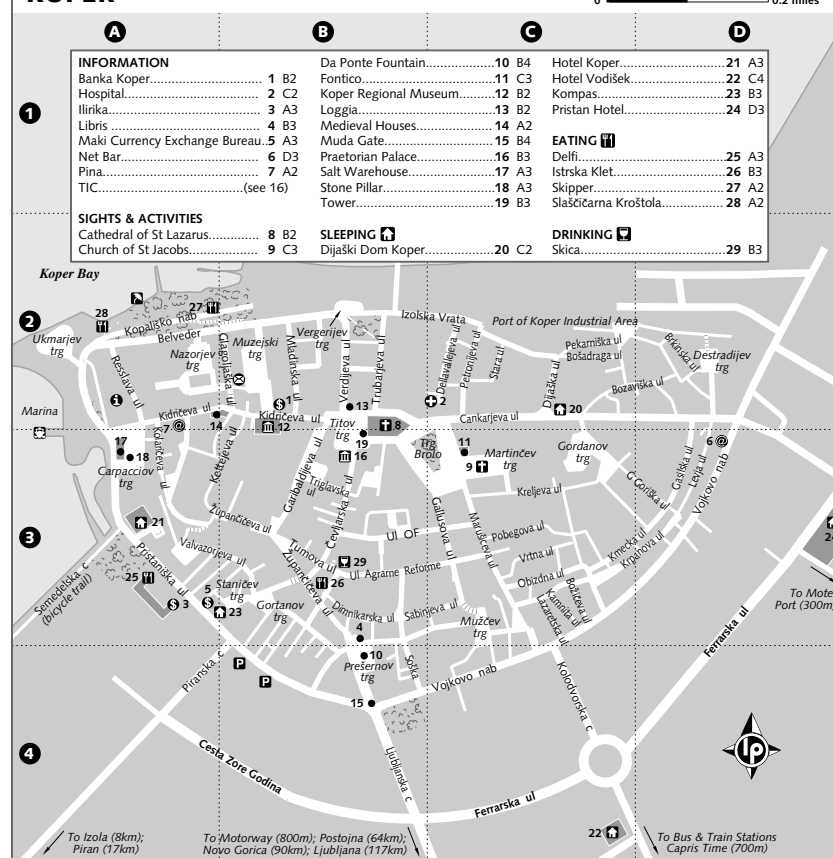
**Pina** (☎ 630 03 20; Kidričeva 43; per min adult/student 15/5SIT; ☎ 9am-8pm) Internet.

**TIC** (☎ 664 62 30; www.turizemvokopu.com; Praetorian Palace, Titov trg 3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun Jul & Aug) The TIC's useful tourist map includes potted histories of key buildings.

## Sights

The greatest attraction of Koper is simply purposeless wandering. You change centuries abruptly passing through the 1516 **Muda Gate**. Continue north past the 1666 **Da Ponte Fountain** (Prešernov trg) and up Čevljarska ul, the petite commercial artery, to reach Titov trg. This fine central square is dominated by the 1480 **tower** attached to the part-Gothic, part-Renaissance **Cathedral of St Lazarus**. The renovated 15th-century **Praetorian Palace** (Titov trg 3; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-2pm & 3.30-7pm) contains the city hall and an old pharmacy which is now a museum, as well as the tourist office.

## KOPER



Several more fine façades face Trg Brolo, a wide, peacefully Mediterranean square. One such is the shield-dotted **Fontico** that started life as a 1392 grain warehouse. Beside this, with a small, simple campanile, is the 14th-century stone **Church of St Jacobs** (Martinčev trg).

The **Koper Regional Museum** (☎ 663 65 70; Kidričeva 19; adult/student 350/250SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jun, 9am-1pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug) is within the Belgramoni-Tacco mansion and features an Italianate sculpture garden. Kidričeva also has a few appealing **medieval houses** with beamed overhangs. It leads west into Carpaccio trg, the former fish market with a 15th-century **salt warehouse**, a 1571 **stone pillar**, a pub and a couple of street cafés.

## Sleeping

The station-based **Capris Time** (☎ 631 15 55; www.capristime-sp.si; Kolodvorska 11; d Sep-Jun from €28, Jul & Aug from €32; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) agency arranges private rooms with discounts for three-day stays. Similarly priced rooms are offered by **Kompas** (☎ 627 15 81; Pristaniška 17; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat).

**Hotel Koper** (☎ 610 05 00; www.terme-catez.si; Pristaniška 3; s/d €55/102; ☎) This very smartly renovated business hotel is Koper's most central.

**Pristan Hotel** (☎ 614 40 00; fax 614 40 40; Ferrarska 30; s/d 13200/19,800SIT; ☎) Yet another hotel catering to the business traveller, with starkly modern rooms and suites that include a computer.



**Hotel Vodišek** (☎ 639 36 68; www.hotel-vodisek.com; Kolodvorska c 2; s/d early Sep–mid-Jul €40/60, mid-Jul–early Sep €56.80/85; (P) ♿) Halfway to the bus and train station, this somewhat anonymous new hotel has clean, no-nonsense motel-style rooms.

**Motel Port** (☎ 639 32 60; Ankaranska 7; r 11,000SIT) Hidden on the top floor of a Mondrianesque shopping centre, this brand-new place has excellent ensuite rooms. However, its position beside the truck terminal results in a deep traffic rumble, and the mainly male, lorry-driver clientele may discourage single women. Air-con costs 1000SIT extra.

**Dijaški Dom Koper** (☎ 662 62 50; www.d-dom.kp.edus.si; Cankarjeva 5; dm 3500SIT; (J) Jul-Aug) In July and August this brilliantly central student dorm becomes a hostel.

## Eating & Drinking

**Istrska Klet** (☎ 627 67 29; Župančičeva 39; meals from 1200SIT; (M) 7am–9pm) Squeeze together with fellow diners at the two communal tables of this characterful old wine cellar-restaurant. Meals are authentic and accompanied by typical, inexpensive Teran wine from the cask.

**Loggia café** (☎ 627 41 71; wine per glass from 250SIT; (M) 7am–10pm) Opposite the Praetorian Palace, this splendid 1463 building now houses an elegant yet affordable café with several good wines by the glass.

**Skipper** (☎ 626 18 10; Kopalniško nab 3; meals from 1900SIT; (M) 9am–10pm) In the sunshine, the marina-view terrace of this otherwise rather characterless, upstairs restaurant is the place to eat fresh fish (7700SIT per kilogram).

**Delfi** (Pristaniška ul; snacks 190–400SIT; (M) 10am–10pm) Good-value *burek* (a pie made with various fillings and filo pastry) and pizza slices that you can eat on a fairly pleasant terrace. There are other bars and eateries in adjoining units.

**Slaščičarna Kroštola** (ice-cream cones 160SIT; (M) 8am–9pm) Perched on Koper's pitifully small pebble beach, the Kroštola is the best positioned of several alluring ice-cream parlour cafés.

**Skica** (☎ 627 2242; Čevljarska 29; (M) 7.30am–midnight Mon–Sat, noon–11pm Sun) This rough-edged, thoroughly local bar has a little photo-gallery and a taste for blues music, and serves screwdrivers made with freshly squeezed oranges. Squint and you'll see Janis Joplin.

## Getting There & Away

Buses run to Piran (610SIT, 30 minutes) frequently on weekdays from 5am to 10.15pm, and every 40 minutes at weekends. Up to 10 buses daily run to Ljubljana (2620SIT, two to 2½ hours), though the train is more comfortable (2040SIT, 2¼ hours, four daily).

Buses to Trieste (690SIT/€3, one hour, Monday to Saturday) run nine times daily, usually winding along the coast via Ankaran and Muggia. Destinations in Croatia include Rijeka (2000SIT), Rovinj (3.55pm daily June to September), Pula (2700SIT, 2pm) via Poreč (1700SIT) plus up to three to Poreč only, notably at 7.30am Monday to Friday. There are summer ferries to Istria and Zadar, Croatia (see p404).

## IZOLA

☎ 05 / pop 11,000

Overshadowed by much nicer Piran and swamped by vacationing local children, foreign visitors tend to bypass Izola. However, it does have a minor Venetian charm, a few narrow old alleys, and some nice waterfront bars and restaurants. The **TIC** (☎ 640 10 50; Sončno nabrežje 4; 10am–5pm Mon–Fri Oct–May, 9.30am–noon & 2–6pm daily June–Sep) can help find private rooms or you can head to the most centrally located hotel, the **Hotel Marina** (☎ 660 41 00; www.belvedere.si; Veliki trg 11; s 12,000–19,000SIT, d 13,400–20,600SIT (P)) right on the main square. More expensive rooms have sea views. Out in Izola's industrial suburbs, **Ambasada Gavioli** (☎ 641 82 12; www.ambasada-gavioli.com; Industrija c; (M) Sat & party nights from midnight) is Slovenia's top rave club, featuring a procession of international star DJs.

Regular Koper–Piran bendy-buses drive via Izola.

## PIRAN

☎ 05 / pop 4400

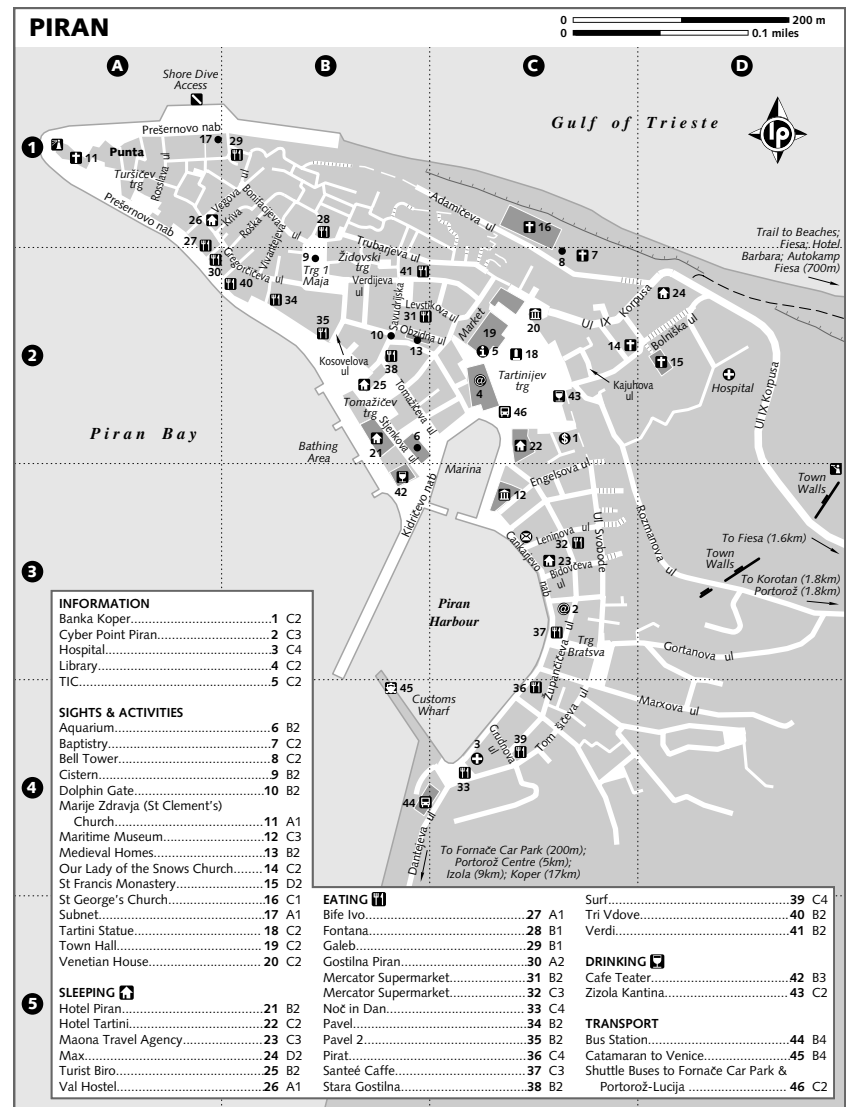
Little Piran (Pirano in Italian) is as picturesque a port as you can imagine, especially when viewed at sunset from the saw-toothed 16th-century walls that guard its hilly western flank. In summer the town gets pretty overrun by tourists, but in April or October it's hard not to fall in love with the winding Venetian-Gothic alleyways and tempting fish restaurants. The name derives from *pyr* (Greek for fire), referring to the Punta lighthouse at the tip of the town's peninsula. Since misty antiquity, this lighthouse

has helped ships reach the great salt-port at Koper.

## Orientation

Buses from everywhere except Portorož arrive at the bus station, just a 300m stroll along the harbourside Cankarjevo nab 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. You could take a ticket and drive on in to the centre 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; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) Money exchange and ATM.

**Cyber Point Piran** (☎ 671 00 24; Zupaničeva 14; per hr 1000SIT; ☎ 9am-noon & 6-8pm Mon-Fri) Student centre and Internet connection.

**Hospital** (☎ 677 33 20; Cankarjevo 9; ☎ 24hr)

**Library** (☎ 671 08 70; Tartinijev trg; membership 500SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Housed in the attractive old courthouse building, the library has one rather slow Internet computer for members.

**TIC** (☎ 673 02 20; www.piran.si; Town Hall, Tartinijev trg; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct-May, 9am-1pm & 3-9pm daily Jun-Sep) Has maps, accommodation listings and excursion ideas.

## Sights & Activities

Piran is dominated by **St George's Church** (Adamičeva 2; ☎ temporarily closed for renovation) whose soaring 1609 **bell tower** was clearly modelled on the San Marco Campanile in Venice. The 1650 octagonal **baptistry** (*krstilnica*) has imaginatively recycled a 2nd-century Roman sarcophagus for use as its font. **St Francis Monastery** (Bolniška 20), just west of Tartinijev trg, has a delightful cloister and while you're passing, notice the superb 15th-century arch painting in nearby **Our Lady of the Snows Church**. The **Maritime Museum** (☎ 671 00 40; Cankarjevo nab 3; adult/student 600/500SIT; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) is in a fine marina-side mansion with 2000-year-old Roman amphorae (jars) beneath the glass ground floor, and lots of impressive model boats upstairs.

One of Piran's most eye-catching structures is the red 15th-century **Venetian House** (Beneške Hiša; Tartinijev trg 4), with its tracery windows and stone lion relief. When built this would have surveyed Piran's inner port; however, the inner port was filled in 1894 to form Tartinijev trg. The square was named for violinist and composer Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) who was born at what's now No 7. His **statue** stands in the square's middle. The square is dominated by the large, porticoed 19th-century **Town Hall**, which houses the tourist office.

Piran's greatest appeal is probably the chance to wander idly through the narrow alleys as they burrow and weave between antique houses. Behind the market, **medieval homes** (Obzidna ul) have been built into an ancient defensive wall that's punctured by the **Dolphin Gate** (Dolfinova Vrata).

The anachronistically named Trg 1 Maja (1st May Sq) may sound like a socialist parade ground but in fact it's one of Piran's cutest squares, with a 19th-century, statue-guarded **cistern pool** in the middle.

Punta, the historical 'nose' of Piran, still has a **lighthouse**, but today's is small and modern. Just behind it, however, the round, serrated-top tower of 18th-century **Marije Zdravja Church** (alternatively referred to as St Clement's) evokes the ancient *pyr* beacon that made Piran's name.

Back near the centre, there's a mini-**Aquarium** (☎ 673 25 72; Kidričevo nab 4; admission 500SIT; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-7pm Sep-mid-Jun, 9am-10pm mid-Jun-Aug) which shows living examples of several species that might soon grace your plate in a nearby restaurant. The most unusual underwater sight hereabouts is the wreck of a WWII seaplane in Portorož Bay. To see that you'll need to go scuba diving. **Subnet** (☎ 041 590 746; www.sub-net.si; Prešernovo nab 24), a well-equipped dive shop offering PADI open-water courses, can organise the necessary boat dives from €21.50 per person (minimum four divers).

## Sleeping

Piran's accommodation options are limited. For loads more choice but less style, try Portorož, stretched out 2km to 7km away. Finding a room in both Piran and Portorož is very tough indeed in midsummer, when you might do better to visit Piran as a day trip from Izola or Koper.

**Max** (☎ 041 692 928; IX Korpusa 26; www.maxpiran.com; d €60-70) Piran's most romantic accommodation has only six rooms, each named rather than numbered. Upper floors look out towards the church tower.

**Hotel Barbara** (☎ 690 40 00; www.metropolgroup.si; s 15,000-22,000SIT, d 19,000-27,200SIT; ☎) This good-value holiday hotel is one of two at Fiesa pebble-beach, a 1km-long shore-front walk east along the north coast from St George's Church.

**Hotel Tartini** (☎ 671 16 66; www.hotel-tartini-piran.com; Tartinijev trg 15; s/d/apt €66/96/178) Right on the central square, Hotel Tartini's façade looks misleadingly traditional, yet the interior attempts a dramatic display of trendy modernism. The effect is impressive and the apartment amazing. However, several of the ordinary rooms already have touches of peeling paint and some 'balconies' are so

minuscule they barely exist. Add a supplement of €5 for rooms with views.

**Hotel Piran** (☎ 676 21 00; www.hoteli-piran.si; Stjenkova 1; s from €53-68, d from €82-108; ☎ ☎) Smart, business-standard accommodation in the town centre's ugliest building. More expensive rooms have sea views and air-con but everyone gets Internet and wi-fi access.

**Val Hostel** (☎ 673 25 55; www.hostel-val.com; Gregorčičeva 38A; dm IYHA member €18-23, nonmember €20-24) Book well ahead for this superbly central hostel-*penzion* with shared bathrooms. There's a €2 surcharge for one-night stays.

**Autokamp Fiesa** (☎ 674 62 30; camp sites per person low/high season €7.50/8.35; ☎ May-Sep) This insecure handkerchief of grass behind a grotty caravan park is nonetheless packed full in summer, being just 1km from Piran, near Hotel Barbara.

Private rooms are available through **Maona travel agency** (☎ 674 03 63; www.maona.si; Cankarjevo nab 7; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm some Sun) starting at €19/31 a single/double in high season plus an additional 50% for stays shorter than three days. **Turist Biro** (☎ 673 25 09; www.turistbiro-ag.si; Tomažičev trg) lists similarly priced rooms but asks a €14 reservation fee.

## Eating & Drinking

One of Piran's attractions is its plethora of fish restaurants, though don't expect any bargains. Virtually all charge around 1300SIT to 1500SIT for a plate of grilled squid, from 8000SIT per kilogram for fish and 400SIT to 500SIT for potatoes. Almost all open from 11am to 10pm or later in summer.

**Galeb** (☎ 673 32 25; Pusterla 5; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6-11.30pm Wed-Mon) Many visitors adore Galeb's 'family atmosphere' and the home-style Slovenian food is equally popular.

**Santée Caffè** (Cankarjevo nab; sandwiches 300-500SIT; ☎ 7am-midnight) This café has sandwiches and salads, and walls painted in colours as vivid as its excellent ice creams.

**Pavel 2** (☎ 674 71 02; Kosovelova 1) It's marginally the suavest of the main sea-facing row of restaurants that includes the essentially similar Gostilna Piran, Bife Ivo, Pavel and Tri Vdove.

Inland you might prefer the characterful atmosphere of **Stara Gostilna** (☎ 041 641 020; Savudrijska 2), the cistern-facing setting of **Fontana** (☎ 673 12 00; Trg 1 Maja), or smart little **Verdi** (☎ 673 27 37; Verdijeva ul), which on

summer days spills out onto the nearby square of Savudrijska ul.

Dining is marginally cheaper at **Pirat** (☎ 673 14 81; Cankarjevo nab) and **Surf** (☎ 673 11 75; Grudnova ul) towards the bus station. The latter has outdoor tables shaded by a rare little patch of greenery, and medium pizzas from 800SIT. The Hotel Piran restaurant does 1100SIT lunch deals. Hop on the No 1 shuttle bus to Portorož-Lucija for Mexican or Chinese food.

Piran has two Mercator supermarkets at Levstikova 6 and Bratsva trg 1, but mini-mart **Noč in Dan** (Cankarjevo nab; ☎ 6am-midnight) opens longer.

**Cafe Teater** (Kidričevo nab) Behind the Aquarium, atmospheric but expensive Cafe Teater is Piran's top pub and has a lively terrace.

**Zizola Kantina** (Tartinijev trg; ☎ 9am-midnight) An appealing nautically-themed bar, with tables right on the main square.

## Getting There & Away

From the bus station buses run every 20 to 40 minutes to Koper (610SIT) via Izola, five per day head to Trieste (1290SIT, 1¼ hours, Monday to Saturday) and up to eight to Ljubljana (2720SIT, 2½ to three hours) via Divača and Postojna.

From Tartinijev trg, minibuses shuttle to Portorož-Lucija (minibus 1, 400SIT) and Portorož via Strunjan (minibus 3). There's also a free shuttle to the car park, but it's generally more comfortable and often quicker to walk. Piran and Izola dispatch catamarans to Venice at least once a week.

## PORTOROŽ

☎ 05 / pop 13,000

In a long arc of woodland-backed bay, Slovenia's big hotel-resort town of Portorož (Portorose) is not unpleasant, but it's not much of an attraction either. The only beaches are pay-to-enter handkerchiefs of imported sand; if you want seaside fun you'd be better off continuing on to Croatia. Nonetheless, its vast assortment of accommodation makes Portorož a useful fall back if everything's full in nearby Piran. Greater Portorož stretches in a 5km-long arc, technically consisting of four subdistricts. From west (Piran side) to east these are Bernardin, Korotan, Portorož Centre and Lucija, though there's no noticeable boundaries between these districts. All are linked by the

5km-long curve of Obala, the main avenue and nearest road to the shore.

Full accommodation listings are available at the **tourist information office** (☎ 674 22 20; www.portoroz.si; Obala 16; ☎ 10am-5pm Sep-Jun, 9am-1.30pm & 3-9.30pm Jul & Aug) or from Piran TIC (p368). Handily close to Piran, the unusually up-market, summer-only **Hotel Riviera** and **Hotel Slovenija** (☎ 692 00 00; www.hotelimorje.si; Obala 33; s 683-119, d €110-163; ☎ ☒ ☑) are two sister hotels joined at the hip and are good choices if you want to stay someplace central. The renovated Riviera has 176 rooms, three fabulous swimming pools and the Wai Thai spa. Both have four top stars. **Prenočišča Korotan** (☎ 674 54 00; www.prenocisca-korotan.vsk-sdp.si; Obala 11, Korotan; d €89.60; ☎ ☒ ☑) has ensuite rooms and its Internet computers are open to nonguests year-round.

There are dozens of decent pizzerias all along Obala. In the Grand Hotel Metropol, **San Lorenzo** (☎ 690 10 00; Obala 77; meals around 3500SIT) is arguably Portorož's best. For a change, try the very atmospheric Mexican taverna **Papa Chico** (☎ 677 93 10; Obala 26; meals from 2000SIT; ☎ 11am-midnight).

Every 20 minutes shuttle bus 1 from Piran trundles right along Obala to Lucija, passing the Prenočišča Korotan. From Bernardin and Korotan you could even walk into Piran in around 45 minutes, though the roads are unpleasantly busy.

## SEČOVLJE

☎ 05 / pop 200

About 7km southeast of Portorož, in no-man's-land between the Slovenian and Croatian borders, is the fascinating **Sečovlje Salt-making Museum** (☎ 671 00 40; adult/student 600/500SIT; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-May & Sep-Oct, 9am-8pm Jun-Aug). In one restored house there's an interesting little exhibition of salt-makers' equipment and lifestyles. Poignantly, many of the antique-looking photos were taken a mere 45 years ago. However, 'museum' is a misleading term, as the main attraction is the eerily desolate landscape sparsely dotted with abandoned old salt-diggers' homes amid a paddy-like patchwork of salt pans. Salt production here, at Koper and at Strunjan (between Piran and Izola) was once the region's economic *raison d'être*. What may look like simple square evaporation ponds are in fact the fruit of exceedingly complex engineering. Working entirely on wind and

tidal power, these were the ultimate examples of ecoenergy efficiency. Don't stand in the mud or you'll destroy a painstakingly cultivated 'skin' of protective algae which keeps the salt white. The dedicated staff laboriously maintain the delicate pools and still produce salt, which you can buy in souvenir burlap minisacks.

If you don't have your own vehicle or bicycle, the only practical way to visit Sečovlje is a 9.30am boat ride from Piran (2600SIT return, including admission). The main problem with this is that you're locked into a whole-day excursion, since boats don't usually return to pick you up until 4pm. Realistically an hour or so would be ample to get the idea.

## EASTERN SLOVENIA

The rolling vineyard hills of eastern Slovenia are attractive but much less dramatic than the Julian Alps. If you're taking a bus from Ljubljana to Zagreb (Croatia), look left immediately after leaving Novo Mesto bus station (you'll stop briefly at the station) for picturesque views of Novo Mesto's old-town core rising directly across the Krka River. Travelling by car it would be nicer to drive via charming Kamnik then cross-country via chocolate-box villages like Motnik, big but pleasant Celje and the tiny but elegant spa-village Rogaska Slatina.

If you're heading by train to Vienna via Graz (Austria) it saves money to stop in lively Maribor; international tickets are very expensive per kilometre, so doing as much travelling as possible on domestic trains saves cash. While there, consider visiting postcard-perfect Ptuj.

## KAMNIK

☎ 02 / pop 11,500

Magnificent views from the central ruins of Kamnik's **old castle** (*stari grad*) make for awesome photos, thanks to the perfect conjugation of red-tiled roofs, church towers and a dramatically close horizon of jostling snow-streaked peaks. Otherwise the town's charm is focused around its mostly pedestrianised main street, the very attractive Šutna ul/ Glavny trg, along which are several appealing **galleries** and cafés. As this is all just two minutes' walk west of the

bus station, Kamnik makes an easy half-day excursion from Ljubljana, 23km south.

Buses from Ljubljana (580SIT, 45 minutes) run almost every 30 minutes on weekdays. If you take the hourly train (470SIT, 45 minutes, hourly to 8.15pm), hop off at derelict-looking Kamnik Mesto, one stop after the main Kamnik station. The old castle is barely 100m east.

## CELJE

☎ 03 / pop 40,000

While probably not worth a special detour, Celje has a long history, Roman remains and many elements of charm. A quick stop-over is easy: all Ljubljana-Maribor trains stop here. Walk west out of the train station along grand, pedestrianised Krekov trg, which becomes Prešernova at the halfway bend. After 700m you'll reach the imposing **Narodni Dom**, in the side of which is the **tourist information office** (☎ 426 57 66; www.celje.si; Trg celjskih knezov 9; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), handy for maps and inspiration. A short dogleg south and east from here is an arcaded palace containing the interesting **Pokrajinski Museum** (www.2.arnes.si/~pokmuzce/index1.htm in Slovene; Muzejski trg; admission 800SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Far and away its greatest attraction is a truly magnificent 17th-century trompe l'oeil ceiling, the Celje Ceiling (Celjski strop), 'discovered' in 1926.

West of the museum, attractive, time-warp Glavni trg has some pleasant terrace cafés and a **plague pillar**. Swerve round **St Daniel's Church** (Sloški trg) and south down Savinjska to a fine riverside **viewpoint** (Savinjsko nab). You'll spot **St Cecilia's Church** (Maistrova ul) directly across the water, up a curious covered stairway. Harder to make out to its west is a reconstructed 2nd-century **Temple of Hercules**. Very obvious on a hill top high above to the southeast is the impressive if awkward-to-reach **Celje Castle**. From the viewpoint, walk five minutes northeast to return to the train station, passing medieval water- and defence-towers that incorporate recycled Roman stone blocks.

Trains to Ljubljana (1580SIT, 1½ hours) depart up to 28 times daily.

## Around Celje

### ŠEMPETER

☎ 03 / pop 1945 / elev 257m

Twelve kilometres west of Celje and accessible by bus and train, Šempeter is the site

of a **Roman necropolis** (Rimska Nekropola; ☎ 700 20 56; www.td-sempeter.si; Ob Rimski Nekropoli 2; adult/child 700/500SIT; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct) reconstructed between 1952 and 1966. The burial ground contains four complete tombs and scores of columns, stelae and fragments carved with portraits, mythological creatures and scenes from daily life. They have been divided into about two dozen groups linked by footpaths.

If you get hungry, **Gostišče Štorman** (☎ 703 83 00; Šempeter 5a; meals from 3500SIT; ☎ 7am-midnight), one of the first private restaurants to open in Slovenia under the former regime, is about 2km east of the site on the road to Celje.

### LOGARSKA DOLINA

☎ 03 / pop 95 / elev to 1200m

Logarska Dolina is about 40km northwest of Celje, near the Austrian border. Most of the glacial 'Forester Valley' – about 7.5km long and no more than 500m wide – has been a country park of 2438 hectares since 1987. This 'pearl of the Alpine region' with more than 30 natural attractions, such as caves, springs, peaks and waterfalls, is a wonderful place to spend a few days hiking and exploring.

### Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 838 90 04; www.logarska-dolina.si; Logarska Dolina 9; ☎ 9am-1pm Apr-Sep) In a small kiosk in the Plesnik Hotel car park.

### Sights & Activities

**Logarska Dolina Country Park** (Krajinski Park Logarska Dolina) is open year-round, but from April to September (and at weekends only in October) cars and motorcycles entering the park must pay 1000SIT and 700SIT respectively; pedestrians and cyclists get in free. A road goes past a chapel and through the woods to **Rinka Waterfall** (Slap Rinka), but there are plenty of trails to explore and up to 20 other waterfalls in the area.

The bottom of the Rinka Waterfall is a 10-minute walk from the end of the valley road. The climb to the top takes about 20 minutes. It's not very difficult, but it can get slippery. From the top to the west you can see three peaks reaching higher than 2200m: Kranjska Rinka, Koroška Rinka and Štajerska Rinka. Until 1918 they formed the



triple border of Carniola (Kranjska), Carinthia (Koroška) and Styria (Štajerska).

Opposite the mountain hut of Dom Planincev is a trail leading to **Sušica Waterfall** and **Klemenčeva Cave**.

Another magnificent and much less explored valley, the 6km-long **Matkov Kot**, runs parallel to Logarska Dolina and the border with Austria. You can reach here by road by turning west as you leave Logarska Dolina. There are several farmhouses with accommodation in the valley.

The tourist office can organise any number of activities: from **horse riding** and **coach rides** (for up to five people) to **paragliding**, guided **mountaineering** and **rock climbing**. It also hires **mountain bikes**.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Plesnik Hotel** (☎ 839 23 00; www.plesnik.si; Logarska Dolina 10; s €60, d €76-81; 📍) A 30-room hotel in the centre of the valley with a pool, sauna, a fine restaurant (open 7am to 9pm) and lovely public area.

**Juvanija farmhouse** (☎ 838 90 80; juvanija@email.si; Logarska Dolina 8; per person €19) Just inside the entrance to the park, this farmhouse has four rooms.

**Lenar farmhouse** (☎ 838 90 06; logarska@siol.net; Logarska Dolina 11; per person €19) Another farmhouse with four rooms, a couple of kilometres further south.

**Dom Planincev** (☎ 584 70 06, 031 269 785; Logarska Dolina 15a; per person €15) This mountain hut 2.5km from Rinka has a relaxed, rustic feel to it.

### Getting There & Away

From Mozirje, there is an hourly bus service to Celje on weekdays but only two on Saturday. There are five to eight buses a day to Gornji Grad, five (one on Sunday) to Solčava and six (one on Sunday) to Velenje. One bus a day on weekdays from May to September makes its way from Celje to Logarska Dolina and the Rinka Waterfall car park.

From Gornji Grad, buses go to Ljubljana (four a day on weekdays, one on Saturday and Sunday), Celje (six a day), Kamnik (five, with one or two at the weekend), Ljubno (three, with one at the weekend) and Mozirje (one during the week). There's a 7.51am bus on Sunday to Logarska Dolina from June to September only.

### PODSREDA CASTLE

☎ 03 / elev 475m

Perched on a hill south of the village of Podsreda (population 210), the **castle** (Grad Podsreda; ☎ 800 71 00; Podsreda 45; adult/child 600/500SIT; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, to 4pm Tue-Sun Mar & Apr) looks pretty much the way it did when it was built as Hörberg in about 1200. A barbican on the southern side, with walls three metres thick, leads to a central courtyard. The rooms in the castle wings, some with beamed ceilings and ancient chandeliers, now contain a rather dull glassworks exhibit (crystal from Rogaška Slatina, vials from the Olimje pharmacy, green Pohorje glass). However, the tiny Romanesque chapel is worth the visit, and there's a wonderful collection of prints of Štajerska's castles and monasteries taken from *Topographii Ducatus Stiria* (1681) by Georg Mattäus Vischer (1628-96). There's also a medieval kitchen and a dungeon hidden beneath a staircase. The view from the castle windows of the Kozjansko countryside and the pilgrimage church on **Svete Gore** (386m) above Bistrica ob Sotli are superb.

A rough, winding 5km-long road leads to the castle, but you can also reach it via a relatively steep 2km trail from Stari Trg, less than 1km southeast of Podsreda village. If you've built up an appetite climbing up and down those hills, there's a small *gostilna* called **Pri Martinu** (☎ 580 61 20; Podsreda 47; meals 1700SIT) in the village, which has a vine-covered terrace and also rents rooms (3000SIT per person).

Getting to Podsreda is tricky if you don't have your own wheels. The only option is to catch the one daily bus to Kozje from Celje and there wait for the one headed for Bistrica ob Sotli, which passes through Podsreda village.

### ROGAŠKA SLATINA

Slovenia's oldest health retreat defies easy description. It's simultaneously grand yet rural, stylish yet ugly, bustling yet tranquil. For locals, the overwhelming attraction is magnesium-rich Donat-Mg spring water, which is sold expensively in bottles throughout Slovenia, but can be drunk direct from the spring here. Well almost. Don't imagine a limpid forest pool – someone's built a multistorey 1970s glass monstrosity on top of the **spring** (admission 300SIT). However,

this eyecore is in a beautifully manicured park, and in front of it, facing the lawns of Zdraviliški trg, the Grand Hotel looks something like a golden-yellow Buckingham Palace and has a vast chandeliered ballroom to match. At the other (southern) end of Zdraviliški trg is the **tourist office** (☎ 581 44 14; www.rogaska-slatina.si; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), bus station, and the Escheresque **Hotel Slovenija**, with columns supporting nothing in particular. There are plenty more hotels (see www.termo-rogaska.si), all aimed at cure seekers who spend a week or so mooching about in dressing gowns, sipping the miracle waters – hot, cold, fizzy or flat – from curious tall, narrow glasses.

Of course, the pure air and simple living are probably as healthy as the sip-sipping. This then casts the brilliant 1904 Art Nouveau tavern **Tempel** (🕒 8am-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat) in the devil's role of temptress. Water or beer? Choose both – a half litre of Donat-Mg supposedly prevents even the most well-earned hangover after a night on the tiles. You'll find Tempel in a park just off Kidrčeva (the main Celje road), where it bypasses the southern end of Zdraviliška trg by a hundred metres or so.

Rogaška Slatina's also famous for colourful glassware, notably displayed in the Hotel Donat, on the way to its inhouse casino.

The tourist office may be able to arrange private accommodation.

The **Grand Hotel Rogaška** (☎ 811 20 00; www.termo-rogaska.com; Zdraviliški trg 10; s/d from €90/190), **Styria and Strossmayer Hotels** (s/d from €58/100; 📍 🕒 📍) – three interconnected hotels on the eastern side of Zdraviliški trg, with more than 400 beds between them – are the *crème de la crème* of accommodation in Rogaška Slatina. The three-star Styria and Strossmayer date from the mid-19th century and the spectacular Grand, with four stars, from 1913.

The only convenient public transport access is from Celje; buses (800SIT, 40 minutes) run up to twice hourly on weekdays. Also from Celje, Rogatec-bound trains (620SIT, 50 minutes, five daily) stop 300m south of Rogaška Slatina bus station.

### DOLENJSKE TOPLICE

☎ 07 / pop 750 / elev 179m

Within easy striking distance of Novo Mesto (13km to the northeast), this thermal

resort is the oldest and one of the few real spa towns in Slovenia. Located in the karst valley of the Krka River below the wooded slopes of Kočevski Rog, Dolenjske Toplice is an excellent place in which to hike, cycle, fish or simply relax.

The first spa opened here in 1658, and Strascha Töplitz, as it was then called (after the nearby town of Straža), became a great favourite of Austrians from around the late 19th century up to WWI. The complex was used as a Partisan hospital during WWII.

### Orientation & Information

Dolenjske Toplice lies about 1.5km south of the Krka River on a stream called the Sušica. Everything of importance is on or just off the main street, Zdraviliški trg. Buses stop just south of and opposite the post office. Contact the **tourist office** (☎ 384 51 88; www.dolenjske-toplice.si; Zdraviliški trg 8; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Sat, 10am-noon Sun) for information about the region and its activities and the **spa** (www.krka-zdravilisce.si) for information about the health and wellness treatments.

### Activities

#### HIKING

A number of walks and bike paths of less than 5km can be made from Dolenjske Toplice, or you might consider hiking in the virgin forests of Kočevski Rog.

Marked paths listed on the free pamphlet *Dolenjske Toplice Cycle and Footpaths* include a 3.5km archaeological walk west to Cvinger (263m), where Hallstatt tombs and iron foundries have been unearthed. Nature-lovers may be interested in the nature trail in the forest just west of Podturn (2km), which also takes in a small cave and the ruins of Rožek Castle.

#### THERMAL SPAS

Taking the waters is the *sine qua non* of Dolenjske Toplice: the warm mineral water (36° to 38°C) gushing from 1000m below the two covered thermal pools at the Vital Hotel is ideal for ailments such as rheumatism and can avert backache. The health resort also offers any number of other types of therapy, from underwater massage to aromatherapy.

The indoor and outdoor thermal pools in the Lagoon section of the **Balnea Wellness Centre** (🕒 9am-8pm Sun-Thu, 9am-11pm Fri & Sat)

are 300m north of the hotels, reached via a lovely park. The unusual carved wooden statues here recall the traditional occupations of this area: logging and woodcarving. In the Oasis section of the centre are saunas and steam baths; Aura has massage and treatments.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

The **tennis courts** on the hill northwest of the camping ground can be hired by nonguests (€15 per hour). Hotel guests can use them for free until 2pm.

Horse riding is available at the **Urbančič farmhouse** (☎ 306 53 36, 040 608 969; Kočevske Poljane 13; per hr €12; ☎ by arrangement) in Ločevske Poljane, 4km to the southwest. Horse-drawn carriages (€30 per hour) for four people can be hired from **Milan Novak** (☎ 041 590 877; Gregorčičeva 52).

### Sleeping

**Vital & Kristal Hotels** (☎ 391 94 00; www.krka-zdravilisca.si; Zdraviliški trg 11; s/d 14,700/28,500SIT; 📶 📺 📺) The health resort's two four-star hotels share the same facilities, including two indoor thermal pools, two saunas and a fitness centre. Both offer discounted weekend and week-long packages.

**Gostišče Račka** (☎ 306 55 10; www.gostinstvo-luzar.si; Maksa Henigmmana 15; d/apt €42/46-55; 📶 📺) This renovated village house to the east of the centre has two-, three- and four-bed rooms with bathroom and TV that are cheaper for long stays.

**Gostišče Pri Tomljetu** (☎ 306 50 23, 031 643 345; Zdraviliški trg 24; s/d/tr 2750/5000/7500SIT) None of the eight rooms in this guesthouse behind the Balnea complex has its own bathroom, but each has a sink, and cooking facilities are available.

### Eating

The health resort's main restaurant is the ornately decorated dining room of the Kristal Hotel, where most guests on half or full board take their meals.

**Gostilna Rog** (☎ 391 94 00; Zdraviliški trg 22; meals from 2300SIT; 📶 📺 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Sun) On the edge of the park, the 'Horn' serves traditional Slovenian dishes and has folk music from 8pm on Friday and Saturday.

**Gostišče Račka** (☎ 306 55 10; Maksa Henigmmana 15; meals 1500SIT; 📶 📺 8am-11pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat, 10am-11pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8am-10pm Mon-Thu,

8am-11pm Fri & Sat, 10am-10pm Sun Sep-Jun) This B&B does double duty as a restaurant and is a popular place for pizza and pasta.

### Getting There & Around

There are hourly buses to Novo Mesto between 6am and 9.05pm Monday to Saturday and one on Sunday at 9.46am. There's a weekday bus at 10.29am and one on Saturday and Sunday at 5.04pm to Ljubljana via Žužemberk.

### MARIBOR

☎ 02 / pop 116,000

Slovenia's light-industrial second city has no unmissable 'sights', but oozes with charm thanks to its delightful, patchily grand Old Town. Pedestrianised central streets buzz with cafés and student life and in late June and early July the old, riverside 'Lent' district hosts a major arts festival (check with the TIC for details). From the train station and nearby bus station, follow Partizanska c as it curls some 700m westwards to reach Grajski trg, where the nicest area of town begins with a somewhat dishevelled castle museum and the Orel Hotel.

### Information

You'll find ATMs all over town and in the bus and train stations.

**Hospital** (☎ 228 62 00; Talcev 9; 📶 24hr)

**KIT/Kibla** (☎ 252 44 40; Glavny trg 14; per 30min 150SIT; 📶 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Central, fast and modern Internet access.

**Nova KBM** (46 Partizanska c; 📶 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Changes travellers cheques.

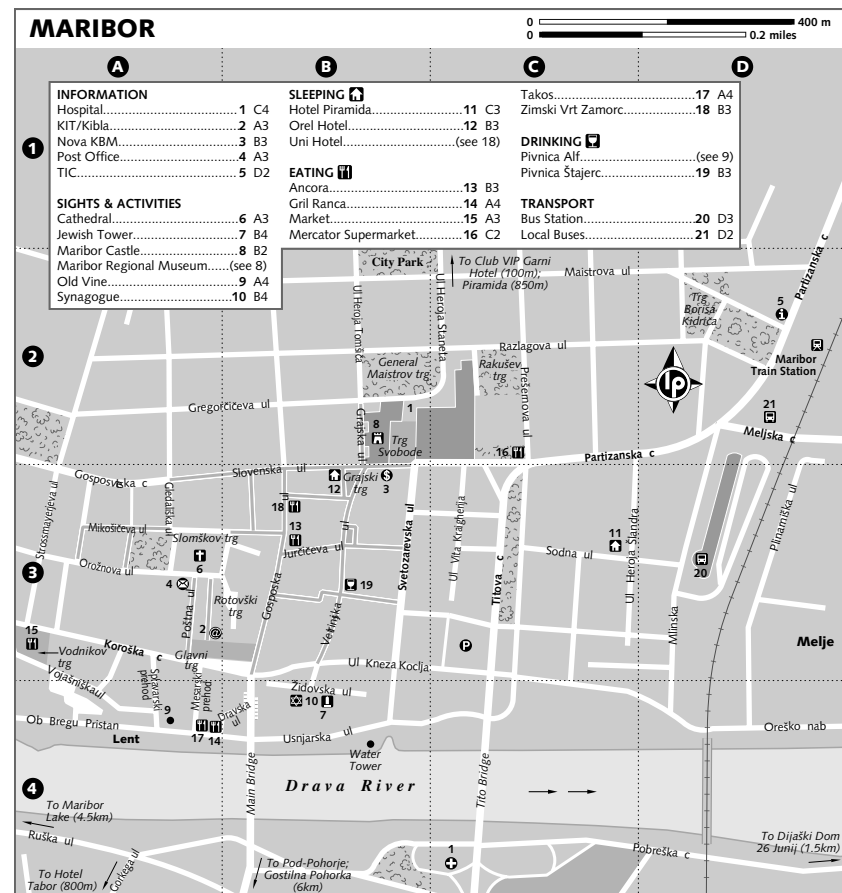
**Post office** (Slomškov Trg; 📶 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) This architectural masterpiece is painted goose-dropping green and draped with statues. Like other branches at Partizanska c 54 and Partizanska c 1, it changes money.

**TIC** (☎ 234 66 11; www.maribor-tourism.si; Partinzanska c 47; 📶 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Helpful, especially for motorists seeking *vinška cestas* (wine routes). The office is handily opposite the train station.

### Sights

The centre of the Old Town, **Grajski trg**, is graced with a 17th-century **Column of St Florian**, dedicated to the patron of fire-fighting.

**Maribor Castle** (Mariborski Grad; Grajski trg 2; adult/child 600/300SIT; 📶 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), on the square's northeastern corner,



is a successor to the Piramida fortress of medieval times. The 15th-century castle contains a **Festival Hall** (Viteška Dvorana) with a remarkably disproportionate ceiling painting, the baroque **Loretska Chapel** and a magnificent **rococo staircase** (1759), with pink walls, stucco work and figures arrayed on the banisters.

The castle also contains the **Maribor Regional Museum** (Pokrajinski Muzej Maribor; ☎ 228 35 51; www.muzej-mb.si), with one of the richest collections in Slovenia, closed for renovation at the time of writing, but there are occasional temporary exhibits.

Two café-packed blocks southwest of Grajski trg, the **cathedral** (Slomškov trg) sits in an oasis of fountain-cooled calm. Follow

little Poštna south from here into photogenic but traffic-divided **Glavny trg**. A block further south down alleys Mesarski or Splavarski Prehod is the Drava River's northern bank. Here you'll find the **Old Vine** (Stara Trta; Vojšniška 8), the world's oldest living grapevine, which has been trained along an old riverfront house. It has been a source of famous Maribor wine for over 400 years.

To the west of the water tower a set of steps lead to **Židovska** (Jewish St), the centre of the Jewish district in the Middle Ages. The 15th-century **synagogue** (☎ 252 78 36; Židovska 4; 📶 7.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) has been renovated, and the square **Jewish Tower** (Židovski Stolp; Židovska 6) is now a **photo gallery** (☎ 251 24 90; 📶 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat).

The pleasantly semirural Pod-Pohorje district is 6km south of the city centre. Much of Maribor's accommodation clusters here, near the foot of a **cable car** (www.pohorje.org; ☎ dawn-dusk) that whisks summer hikers and winter skiers alike up the lushly forested dumpling called **Pohorje**.

## Sleeping

**Club VIP Garni Hotel** (☎ 229 62 00; www.vip-garni.com; Tomišičeva 10; s/d €40/60) This new B&B has delightfully distinctive flourishes such as a gallery of contemporary paintings surrounding an open staircase. The comfortably retro rooms and its location near the City Park make the hotel a good-value choice on the Maribor hotel scene.

**Gostilna Pohorka** (☎ 614 01 10; Begova 2; s/d 5000/7000SIT) Among some dozen guesthouses in Pod-Pohorje, the best deal is the Podhorka. Here are four unpretentious but fully equipped rooms above an appealingly peaceful terraced restaurant. It's right at the forest's edge, 900m west of the cable car via Villa Merano, but a shorter walk by the woodland footpath. You can also take bus 6.

**Hotel Piramida** (☎ 233 44 00; www.termemb.si; Heroja Štandra 10; s/d €90/114; 📍) Business travellers will appreciate the glossy, modern rooms, conference facilities, 'relaxation centre' and no-nonsense service. Others may yearn for warmer, more personal touches in the décor.

**Hotel Tabor** (☎ 421 64 10; www.hotelabor.podhostnik.si; Heroja Zidanska 18; s/d from 7900/12,500SIT; 📍) A trip on bus 6 or about 20 minutes' walk (1km) southwest of Glavny trg (via Gorkega ul), this is the most central of several no-frills motel-style places dotted about the suburbs. All of these have parking, and similar price ranges, and most tend to put functional cleanliness over charm; ask at the TIC for details.

**Uni Hotel** (☎ 250 67 00; uni.hotel@termemb.si; Gosposka ul; beds €20) This fantastically central new hostel is only open to IYHA members and membership cards are not sold here. Check-in and reservations (highly advisable) are via the much better-known **Orgel Hotel** (☎ 250 67 00; www.termemb.si; Grajski trg; s/d Sep-Jun €48/70, Jul & Aug €60/86) in the block behind (east). The price includes breakfast.

**Dijaški Dom 26 Junij** (☎ 480 17 10; Železnikova 12; dm €9; ☎ Jul & Aug) This typical student dorm/

summer hostel is 2km east of the town centre. Take bus 3, 99, 10, 10 (1) or 16.

## Eating & Drinking

**Zimski Vrt Zamorc** (☎ 251 27 17; Gosposka 30; meals from 4000SIT; ☎ 11am-11pm) The 'Winter Garden', with an atrium and lots of marble and hanging vines, is just round the corner from the Orel Hotel and owned by the same group. It's one of the nicest restaurants in Maribor and serves both international specialities and Slovenian hotpot (*zamorček*) dishes.

**Ancora** (☎ 250 20 33; Jurčičeva 7; pizzas 1000SIT; ☎ 6am-midnight Mon-Sat) One of the most popular eateries in town, this ground-floor bar has a pizzeria on the 1st floor.

**Gril Ranca** (☎ 252 55 00; Dravska 10; grills from 1050SIT; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat) Simple but scrumptious Balkan grills like *pljeskavica* (spicy meat patties) and *čevpčiči* (grilled minced lamb or beef) are served up as you look over the Drava.

**Takos** (☎ 252 71 50; Mesarski Prehod 3; meals from 2200SIT, cocktails 600SIT; ☎ 9am-late Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun) This atmospheric Mexican restaurant becomes Maribor's top nightspot after the 11pm happy hour on Friday and Saturday.

**Pivnica Štajerc** (☎ 234 42 34; Vetrinjska 30) This atmospheric old tavern has a brewery downstairs that produces three different kinds of beer. If you're not a brew-buff, there's also wine and mead to wash down your Slovenian snacks (from 1500SIT).

**Pivnica Alf** (☎ 251 48 44; Splavarski Prehod 5) Walk through a giant barrel just behind the world's oldest grapevine and you enter what seems to be the world's oldest pub, with beamed ceilings and ancient smoke-stained walls.

There's a **market** (Vodnikov trg; ☎ 6.30am-3pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun) selling produce just north of the former Minorite monastery. There's a **Mercator supermarket** (☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-6pm Sat, 8am-11am Sun) at Partizanska c 7, and cheap *burek* stands outside the train station.

## Getting There & Away

Buses run to Ljubljana (2780SIT to 2950SIT depending on routing, up to 10 daily), Ptuj (970SIT, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday), Rogaška Slatina (four daily weekdays) and to various German cities.

Up to 18 direct trains daily link Maribor to Ljubljana (1710SIT, 2¾ hours). ICS trains are faster and more expensive.

## Getting Around

Maribor's bus system is extensive. Single rides cost 240SIT if you pay on board. Purchased ahead, a return ticket costs 330SIT. Most useful routes start near the train station, including bus 6 to Pod-Pohorje, which terminates at the cable car.

## PTUJ

☎ 02 / pop 19,100

Rising gently above a wide, almost flat valley, the compact Old Town of Ptuj (Roman Poetovio) forms a symphony of red-tile roofs viewed most photogenically from across the Drava River. It culminates in a well-proportioned castle containing the fine **Regional Museum** (www.pok-muzej-ptuj.si/english/ptgrad.htm; adult/child 600/300SIT; ☎ 10am-5pm, later in summer). For 10 days around Mardi Gras (usually in February) international crowds arrive to spot the shaggy Kurent straw men at Slovenia's foremost carnival. Kurent are traditional figures in Slovene lore that are analogous to a Dionysius or Shiva. The **tourist office** (☎ 779 60 11; www.ptuj-tourism.si; Slovenski trg 3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) faces a **medieval tower** in the old centre. To reach it walk south from the bus and train stations, turn west passing the Hotel Poetovio (which stocks free maps), the classic **Haloze Wine Cellars** (☎ 787 98 10; tour-tastings 1500-1800SIT; ☎ by appointment) and the street cafés of Lacova ul, Mestni trg and Morkova ul.

West of the centre along grand Prešernov ul, the 18th-century **Mala Grad** (Small Castle; Prešernova 33-35) now houses a library with Internet connection.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Krapša Guesthouse** (☎ 787 75 70; rozalija\_k@hotmail.com; Maistrova 19; per person €17; 📍) All but two rooms of this utterly delightful homestay are bright, brand new and with en suite. It's in a quiet setting between cherry trees at the dead end of a 900m (as yet) unpaved track that starts west of castle hill. There are no single or short-stay supplements and the friendly hosts are as effervescent as their homemade wines.

**Garni Hotel Mitra** (☎ 787 74 55; www.hotelptuj.com; Prešernova 6; s/d/apt 11,000/13,500/18,000SIT)

This superbly central hotel has a colourful antique façade, but rooms have somewhat less panache than the artistic stairways would suggest.

**Terme Ptuj** (☎ 782 72 11; www.terme-ptuj.si; per person Jun-Aug/off-peak €12.10/10.30; ☎ 20 Apr-10 Oct, check-in 5-8pm) This small, starkly unshaded camping ground, attached to a spa/swimming pool complex on the Drava's southern bank, is about 1.4km from the Old Town via a footbridge.

**Ribič** (☎ 771 46 71; Dravska 9; set meals 2200-3600SIT; ☎ 10am-11pm) This old house with a great riverside terrace is the ideal spot for a fish feast. Try the tasty and healthy trout with courgettes. Vegetarian plates are also available.

There's an **open-air market** (Novi trg; ☎ 7am-3pm) for self-caterers.

## Getting There & Away

Buses to Maribor (970SIT, 40 minutes) run at least hourly on weekdays but are very infrequent on Sunday. There are only five buses per week to Rogaška Slatina but if you're driving there's a delightful country road via Breg and Rogatec. The latter has a sweet little open-air museum of rural architecture. Two daily trains from Ljubljana (2½ hours) stop en route to Budapest (six hours) departing Ptuj at 9.44am, or 4.16pm (by InterCity train).

# SLOVENIA DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation listings in this guide have been ordered by preference.

Slovenia's small but growing handful of youth hostels includes Ljubljana's unbelievably trendy Celicia. However, many other hostels are moonlighting college dorms which only accept travellers in July and August. Thank goodness they do open then: in midsummer almost all other accommodation substantially raises prices and it can be hard to find a room at any price. Unless stated, hostel rooms share bathrooms. A hostel bed typically costs from €12 to €20.

Guesthouses (*penzion, gostišče* or *prenočišča*) are often cosy and better value than full-blown hotels, some of which are ugly if well-renovated Communist-era



## PRACTICALITIES

- The system used for weights and measures is metric.
- The video system is PAL, which is incompatible with the North American and Japanese NTSC standard, and the SECAM system used in France.
- Electrical supply is 220V to 240V/50Hz to 60Hz. Slovenia uses the standard European round-pronged plugs.
- Take a look through any of the following English-language publications: *Slovenia Times*, a free newspaper that comes out every three weeks or so; *Slovenija*, a glossy quarterly with a heavy focus on culture; and *Ljubljana Life*, an excellent free bimonthly magazine.
- Listen to the nightly news bulletin broadcast in English year-round at 10.30pm on *Radio Slovenija 1* (88.5, 90.0, 90.9, 91.8, 92.0, 92.9, 94.1, 96.4 MHz FM & 91.8 kHz AM).

Frankensteins. Nonetheless it can be difficult to find a double room for under €50. Beware that locally listed rates are usually quoted per person assuming double occupancy. The 150SIT to 200SIT per person tourist tax and a hefty single-occupancy supplement often lurk in the footnotes. This chapter quotes the total you'll pay. Unless otherwise indicated, room rates include ensuite toilet, shower with towels and soap, and a ham and cheese breakfast.

Tourist information offices can help you access extensive networks of private rooms, apartments and tourist farms or can recommend private agencies who will. Such accommodation can appear misleadingly cheap if you carelessly overlook the 30% to 50% surcharge levied on one- or two-night stays (this book incorporates them). 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).

Camping grounds generally charge per person, whether you're camping or caravanning. Rates usually include hot showers. Almost all grounds close November to April. Camping 'rough' is illegal, and this is enforced, especially around Bled.

## ACTIVITIES

Slovenia is a very well-organised outdoor-activities paradise.

### Extreme Sports

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

### Hiking

Hiking is extremely popular, with much of the capital's population heading for Triglav National Park at weekends. There are around 7000km of marked paths, and in summer 165 mountain huts offer comfortable trailside refuge (see the boxed text, p358). Several shorter treks are helpfully outlined in the Sunflower Guide *Slovenia* (www.sunflowerbooks.co.uk), which has excellent map-text correlation.

### Skiing

Skiing is a Slovenian passion, with slopes particularly crowded at New Year and early in February. Maribor's **Pohorje** (www.pohorje.org) is a popular choice. Although relatively low (1347m) it's easily accessible, with very varied downhill pistes and relatively short lift queues. Enjoyable **Pohorje torch parties** (☎ 041 775 175; mopa@siol.net; 3700SIT plus ski lift) are organised, where partygoers ascend the slope at night with a glass of bubbly, ski with flaming torches to a barbecue, and hope that the shots of blueberry hooch don't stop them from skiing back again.

Kranjska Gora (1600m) has some challenging runs; the world record for ski-jumping was set at nearby Planica. Above Bohinj, Vogel (1922m) is particularly scenic,

as is Kanin (2300m), above Bovec; Kanin has snow as late as May. Cerklno (1291m, www.cerkno.si in Slovene) is popular with snowboarders. Being relatively close to Ljubljana, Krvavec (1970m), northeast of Kranj, can have particularly long lift queues. See www.sloveniatourism.si/skiing for information.

### Other

The Soča River near Kobarid and the Sava in Bohinj are great for fly-fishing (season April to October). Licences (€58 per day, catch-and-release €48) are sold at TICs and hotels. Bohinj lake-fishing licences are somewhat cheaper (€45, March to September).

Mountain bikes are available for hire at Bovec, Bled and Bohinj travel agencies. However, the hire 'season' is usually limited to May through to October.

In late October there's a Ljubljana marathon (http://maraton.slo-timing.com/).

**Spa cures** (www.terme-giz.si) are very popular. Most towns have a spa complex and hotels often offer free or bargain-rate entry to their guests. The most celebrated spa resort is Rogaška Slatina.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Virtually all businesses post their opening times (*delovni čas*) on the door. Many shops close Saturday afternoon. Sunday are still 'holy': although a handful of grocery stores open, including some branches of the ubiquitous Mercator chain, on Sunday most shopping areas are as lively as Chernobyl. Museums often close on Monday. Banks often take lengthy lunch breaks and some open Saturday morning.

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

The closer winter approaches the earlier many attractions close and the fewer visits they allow. This leads to intricately complex tables of opening times that are beyond the scope of this book to reproduce in detail. Fortunately, most attractions have websites and leaflets displaying complete schedules in their full glory.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Slovenian Embassies & Consulates

Slovenian representations abroad are fully listed on www.gov.si/mzz/eng and include:

**Australia** (☎ 02-624 34830; vca@mzz-dkp.gov.si; level 6, St George's Bldg, 60 Marcell Clarke St, Canberra ACT 2601)

**Austria** (☎ 01-586 13 09; Nibelungengasse 13, Vienna; ☎ 9-11am Mon-Fri)

**Belgium** (☎ 02-646 90 99; Ave Louise 179, Brussels)

**Bosnia & Herzegovina** (☎ 033-271 250; Bentbasa 7, Sarajevo)

**Canada** (☎ 613-565 5781; 150 Metcalfe St, Suite 2101, Ottawa)

**Croatia** (☎ 01-63 11 000; Savska c 41, Zagreb; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

**Czech Republic** (☎ 02-33 08 12 11; Pod Hradbami 15, Prague; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri)

**France** (☎ 01 44 96 50 71; 28 rue Bois-le-Vent, Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-206 1450; Hausvogteiplatz 3-4, Berlin)

**Hungary** (☎ 01-438 5600; Cseppek ut 68, Budapest; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-670 5240; Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau St, Dublin)

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-310 86 90; Anna Paulownastraat 11, Den Haag)

**New Zealand** (☎ 04-567 0027; PO Box 30247, Eastern Hutt Rd, Pormare, Lower Hutt, Wellington)

**UK** (☎ 020-7222 5400; 10 Little College St, London SW1; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri)

**USA** (☎ 202-667 5363; 1525 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington DC)

## Embassies & Consulates in Slovenia

Among the embassies and consulates in Ljubljana (☎ 01) are:

**Australia** (☎ 425 42 52; Trg Republike 3/XII)

**Belgium** (☎ 200 60 10; Trg Republike 3/XII)

**Bosnia & Herzegovina** (☎ 432 4042; Kolarjeva 26) North of the centre.

**Canada** (☎ 430 35 70; Miklošičeva c 19)

**Croatia** (☎ 425 62 20; Gruberjevo nab 6)

Southwest of the centre.

**France** (☎ 479 04 00; Barjanska 1)

**Germany** (☎ 479 03 00; Prešernova c 27)

**Hungary** (☎ 512 18 82; Konrada Babnika 5)

Northwest of the centre.

**Ireland** (☎ 300 89 70; Poljanski nasip 6)

**Netherlands** (☎ 420 14 61; Poljanski nasip 6)

**New Zealand** (☎ 580 30 55; Verovškova 57)

North of the centre.

**Romania** (☎ 505 82 94; Podlimbarskega 43) Northwest of the centre.

**South Africa** (☎ 200 63 00; Pražakova 4)

**UK** (☎ 200 39 10; Trg Republike XII)

**USA** (☎ 200 55 00; Prešernova c 31)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Shaggy Kurent straw men make Ptuj carnival the place to be at Mardi Gras, though the Julian Alps villages have several lesser-known equivalents. On 30 April villages hold bonfires and 'tree raising' nights. Throughout the summer there are dozens of musical and cultural events, notably in Ljubljana, Piran and Koper. For lots more information consult [www.slovenia-tourism.si](http://www.slovenia-tourism.si).

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The typical Slovene personality, rather like the Dutch, is quietly conservative but deeply self-confident, remarkably broad-minded and particularly tolerant. **Roza Klub** (☎ 01-430 47 40; Kersnikova 4, Ljubljana) is composed of gay and lesbian branches of the Student Cultural Centre (ŠKUC).

The **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](http://www.ljudmila.org/siqrd)) and **Out In Slovenia** ([www.outinslovenija.com](http://www.outinslovenija.com)) are extensive and partially in English.

## HOLIDAYS

**New Year** 1 and 2 January. For a week hotel prices go mad especially in ski resorts.

**Prešeren Day of Culture** 8 February

**Easter Monday** March/April

**Insurrection Day** 27 April. Commemorates the insurrection against WWII Nazi occupation.

**Labour Days** 1 and 2 May. Villagers light bonfires on the night of 30 April, and indulge in 'tree raising', a local semisport where competitors take a tree trunk and have to raise it vertically.

**National Day** 25 June

**Assumption** 15 August. Around this date virtually all accommodation will be booked solid.

**Reformation Day** 31 October

**All Saints' Day** 1 November

**Christmas** 25 December

**Independence Day** 26 December

## INTERNET ACCESS

You'll find Internet access in most cities and towns but so-called Internet cafés rarely have more than one or two terminals. In some places you may have to resort to the local library, school or university. Note that Slovene keyboards are neither qwerty nor azerty but qwertz, reversing the y and z keys. Otherwise the follow the Anglophone norm.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

The website [www.slovenia-tourism.si](http://www.slovenia-tourism.si) is tremendously useful. Most Slovenian towns have very good websites often accessed by typing [www.townname.si](http://www.townname.si) or [www.townname-tourism.si](http://www.townname-tourism.si). Specially good are [www.ljubljana-tourism.si](http://www.ljubljana-tourism.si) and [www.maribor-tourism.si](http://www.maribor-tourism.si). For a particularly interesting series of Slovenian links, try [www.carantha.net](http://www.carantha.net) or [www.matkurja.com/eng](http://www.matkurja.com/eng).

## ADDRESSES & PLACE NAMES

Streets in Slovenian towns and cities are well signposted, although the numbering system can be a bit confusing with odd and even numbers sometimes running on the same sides of streets and squares.

In small towns and villages, streets are not named and houses are just given numbers. Thus Ribčev Laz 13 is house No 13 in the village of Ribčev Laz on Lake Bohinj. As Slovenian villages are frequently made up of one road with houses clustered on or just off it, this is seldom confusing.

Places with double-barrelled names such as Novo Mesto (New Town) and Črna Gora (Black Hill) start the second word in lower case (Novo mesto, Črna gora) in Slovene, almost as if the names were Newtown and Blackhill. This is the correct Slovene orthography, but we have opted to go with the English-language way of doing it to avoid confusion.

Slovene frequently uses the possessive case in street names. Thus a road named after the poet Ivan Cankar is Cankarjeva ul (although you won't see 'ul' used in this chapter; it's implied, so if it's not a trg or a cesta ('c'), it's a ulica) and a square honouring France Prešeren is Prešernov trg. Also, when nouns are turned into adjectives they often become unrecognisable to a foreigner. The town is 'Bled', for example, but 'Lake Bled' is Blejsko Jezero. A street leading to a castle (grad) is usually called Grajska ul; a road going in the direction of Trieste (Trst) is Tržaška c. The words 'pri', 'pod' and 'na' in place names mean 'at the', 'below the' and 'on the' respectively.

## LANGUAGE

Closely related to Croatian and Serbian, Slovene (*Slovensko*) sounds like Russian soaked in wine and honey. On toilets, M (Moški) indicates men, and Ž (Ženske) women. Slovene for 'no smoking' may raise a giggle if you speak Slovak, in which language the same phrase means 'no farting'. Virtually everyone in Slovenia speaks at least one other language; restaurant menus and ATMs are commonly in Slovene, Italian, German and English. See the language chapter (p419) for key phrases and words.

## MONEY

Until 2007 Slovenia's legal currency will remain the tolar (SIT) but euros are already very widely accepted. Exchanging cash is simple at banks, major post offices, travel agencies and *menjalnica* (exchange bureaux). Prices listed in this chapter are in euros or tolar, depending on which currency was quoted by the business reviewed. Travellers cheques are less convenient. Major credit and debit cards are accepted almost everywhere and ATMs are astonishingly ubiquitous. Slovenian and Italian prices are similar, and you'll find Slovenia considerably more expensive than Hungary or the Czech Republic.

## POST

An international airmail stamp costs 107SIT. Poste restante is free: address mail to, and pick it up at, Slovenska c 32, 1101 Ljubljana.

## TELEPHONE

Public telephones require a phonocard (*telefonska kartica*), available at post offices and most newsstands. The cheapest card (700SIT, 25-unit) gives about four minutes' calling time to other European countries. Most locals have a mobile phone. Some businesses quote only a mobile number, identifiable by codes 030, 031, 040 and 041.

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 112
- Fire Brigade ☎ 112
- Police ☎ 113

## TOILETS

Toilets are generally free in restaurants but occasionally you'll incur a 50SIT charge at bus stations.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

The superhelpful **Slovenian Tourist Board** ([www.slovenia-tourism.si](http://www.slovenia-tourism.si)) has dozens of Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in Slovenia and branches in nine cities abroad; see website for details. Request its free *Guide to Slovenia's Byways*, which contains tokens for 5-15% savings on various hotels, activities and sights, including the Škocjan Caves.

## VISAS

Passport holders from Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, the USA and EU countries can stay 90 days without visas. South Koreans get 15 days. Most other citizens, including South Africans, must apply for a visa (multiple entry €35) at a Slovenian embassy or consulate before arriving in Slovenia. Note that there is no consulate in South Africa. You'll need travel insurance, passport photocopies and hotel bookings plus one photo. Same-day processing is possible in Zagreb (Croatia) but elsewhere it takes from three working days (London) to a week (Budapest).

EU and Swiss citizens can enter using a national identity card for 30-day stays.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Crime is low and harassment rare, but in emergencies contact the **women's crisis helpline** (☎ 080 11 55). Normally someone there will speak English.

# TRANSPORT IN SLOVENIA

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers how to get to and from Slovenia from other countries in the Western Balkans. Information about points of entry to the Western Balkan countries is covered in the Transport chapter (p402).

## Air

Slovenia's only international airport is **Brnik** (code LJU; [www.lju-airport.si](http://www.lju-airport.si)) near Kranj, some

**DEPARTURE TAX**

A departure tax of 3600SIT is collected from everyone leaving Slovenia by air. This is usually included in the ticket price, but it's always best to check.

23km north of Ljubljana. From here the national carrier, **Adria Airways** (airline code JP; ☎ 01-239 10 10; www.adria-airways.com), has regular direct flights to Prishtina, Podgorica, Skopje and Sarajevo. **Maribor Airport** (code MPX; www.maribor-airport.si) handles charter flights and freight only.

**Land**

Whether by train or bus, chances are that you'll reach other Western Balkan countries via Croatia.

**BUS**

International bus destinations from Ljubljana include Sarajevo (9250SIT, 10 hours, 7.15pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday), Split (7150SIT, 10½ hours, daily), Rijeka (2990SIT, 2½ hours), and Zagreb (3340SIT, three hours, four daily) via attractive Novo Mesto.

**CAR & MOTORCYCLE**

Slovenia maintains about 150 border crossings with Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia, but not all are open to citizens of third countries. On country maps and atlases, those marked with a circle and a line are international ones; those with just a circle are local ones. Although it is a member of the EU, Slovenia will not be part of the Schengen border plan until 2006 at the earliest. The 670km border it shares with Croatia will then become the 'last frontier' of the EU.

International vehicle insurance is compulsory in Slovenia. If your car is registered in the EU, you are covered, and Slovenia has concluded special agreements with certain other countries, including Croatia. Other motorists must buy a Green Card valid for Slovenia at the border (€42 for 15 days, €60 for a month).

**TRAIN**

In addition to international lines (see p408), there are daily trains from Ljubljana to

Zagreb, Croatia (2781SIT, 2½ hours, eight daily), Rijeka (2759SIT, 2½ hours, one daily via Opatija) and Pula (4259SIT, five hours, one daily, summer only).

Seat reservations, often compulsory, cost 300SIT extra.

**Sea**

The **Marina** (www.losinjaska-plovidba.hr) sails from the port of Koper to Pula, Mali Lošinj and Zadar (€25.50, 13 hours) in Croatia once a week from mid-June to early September.

**GETTING AROUND**

Trains are usually cheaper but less frequent than buses. Beware: frequency on both drops off very significantly on weekends and in school holidays.

**Bus**

In recent years, bus service in Slovenia has gone from the sublime to the silly, particularly in the eastern part of the country. Bus departures have been halved (or worse), many stations are deserted and everyone seems to be behind their own wheel. Nowadays it would be very difficult to tour Slovenia exclusively by public bus but, in some areas, you don't have a choice. Bus is the only practical way to reach Bled, the Julian Alps and much of Dolenjska, Koroška and Notranjska.

You can buy your ticket at the bus station (*avtobusna postaja*) or simply pay the driver as you board. In Ljubljana you should book your seat one day in advance if you're travelling on Friday or to destinations in the mountains or on the coast on a public holiday. Bus services are severely restricted on Sunday and holidays (less so on Saturday). Many routes are serviced by more than one bus company. If you buy a return ticket you'll be limited to returning with the same company, which could mean a long wait. The 10% discount some companies offer for a return ticket may not be worth it.

Some bus stations have a left-luggage office (*garderoba*) and charge 350SIT per piece per hour. They often keep banker's hours; if it's an option, a better bet is to leave your things at the train station, which is usually nearby and keeps longer hours. If your bag has to go in the luggage compartment below the bus, it will cost 360SIT extra.

**Bicycle**

Cycling is a popular leisure pastime in Slovenia, and bikes can be carried free of charge in the baggage compartments of InterCity (IC) and regional trains. On buses, you can put your bike in the luggage compartment, space permitting. Cycling is permitted on all roads except motorways. Many towns and cities, including Ljubljana, Maribor, Celje, Ptuj and Kranj, have bicycle lanes and special traffic lights.

**Car & Motorcycle****AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATIONS**

Slovenia's national automobile club is the Avto-Moto Zveza Slovenije (AMZS). For emergency roadside assistance, motorists should call it on ☎ 19 87 or ☎ 01-530 53 53. For information on road and traffic conditions, contact the **AMZS** (☎ 530 53 00; www.amzs.si; Dunajska c 128) in Ljubljana. All accidents should be reported to the **police** (☎ 113) immediately.

**DRIVING LICENCE**

If you don't hold a European driving licence and plan to drive in Slovenia, obtain an International Driving Permit from your local automobile association before you leave – you'll need a passport photo and a valid licence. They are usually inexpensive and valid for one year only.

**FUEL & SPARE PARTS**

Petrol stations, which accept most credit cards, are usually open from about 7am to 8pm Monday to Saturday, though larger towns have 24-hour services on the outskirts. Unleaded 95-octane petrol (*bencin*) costs about 225SIT per litre.

**HIRE**

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, including unlimited mileage, collision-damage waiver and theft protection. At the time of research, **Hertz** (☎ 01-234 46 46; www.hertz.si), beside Ljubljana bus station, offered a tiny Smart at €40.

**INSURANCE**

International vehicle insurance is compulsory in Slovenia. If your car is registered in

the EU, you are covered, and Slovenia has concluded special agreements with certain other countries, including Croatia. Other motorists must buy a Green Card valid for Slovenia at the border (€150 for 15 days, €218 for a month).

**ROAD CONDITIONS**

Roads in Slovenia are generally good (if a bit narrow at times) and well maintained. Driving in the alps can be hair-raising, with a gradient of up to 18% at the Korensko Sedlo Pass into Austria, and a series of 49 hairpin bends on the road over the Vrščič Pass. Many mountain roads are closed in winter and early spring. Motorways and highways are very well signposted, but secondary and tertiary roads are not always; be sure to have a good map at the ready.

No less than US\$4 billion has been invested in the expansion of Slovenia's motorways. There are two main motorway corridors – between Maribor and the coast and from the Karavanke Tunnel into Austria to Zagreb in Croatia – intersecting at the Ljubljana ring road, with a branch from Postojna to Nova Gorica. Motorways are numbered from A1 to A10 (for *avtocesta*), and a toll is payable (eg 490SIT from Ljubljana to Postojna, 1160SIT to Maribor).

Major international roads are preceded by an 'E'. The most important of these are the E70 to Zagreb via Novo Mesto, the E61 to Villach via Jesenice and the Karavanke Tunnel, and the E57 from Celje to Graz via Maribor. National highways contain a single digit and link cities. Secondary and tertiary roads have two sets of numbers separated by a hyphen; the first number indicates the highway that the road runs into. Thus road 10-5 from Nova Gorica and Ajdovščina joins the A10 motorway at Razdrto.

**ROAD RULES**

You must drive on the right. Speed limits for cars and motorcycles are 50km/h in towns and villages, 90km/h on secondary and tertiary roads, 100km/h on highways and 130km/h on motorways.

The use of seat belts is compulsory, and motorcyclists must wear helmets. Another law taken very seriously is the one requiring all motorists to illuminate their headlights throughout the day. The permitted blood-alcohol level for drivers is 0.5g/kg.



### Hitching

Hitchhiking is fairly common and perfectly 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

**Slovenske Železnice** (Slovenian Railways; ☎ 01-291 33 32 from 5am-10pm; [www.slo-zeleznice.si](http://www.slo-zeleznice.si)) has a useful online timetable. Buy tickets before boarding

or you'll incur a 500SIT supplement, except for IC trains where the surcharge can run up to 1000SIT. Note that the fast IC trains are more expensive than the local variety.

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