

A HIDDEN EUROPE DISCOVERING SLOVENIA

WEDNESDAY 15 – TUESDAY 21 MAY 2024 (7 DAYS)

TOUR DIRECTOR: JAMES HILL

£3275

- Discover Slovenia's unique mixture of unspoilt alpine, rural & coastal scenery
- Explore the art & architecture of its capital, Ljubljana
- Captivating renaissance & baroque churches & castles
- Excellent Slovenian food & wine
- Comfortable & well located 4* hotel in the heart of the capital city



Lake Bled

OVERVIEW

Since independence over thirty years ago, Slovenia has truly come of age. It sits at the heart of central Europe, having emerged from the quagmire of Yugoslavia's collapse. It is a place of unspoilt beauty full of remarkably preserved monuments, economically prosperous and very welcoming to visitor. Settled by Illyrian and Celtic tribes, the emperor Augustus conquered the region, establishing two Roman provinces, Pannonia and Noricum. Roman *Emona*, now Ljubljana, developed on a river connecting the Balkans to the Danube basin, building up trade as the region flourished. After Rome's fall, the area was swept up by the Ostrogoths and later contested by both Byzantines and Lombards.

Medieval Slovenia saw first the Slavs, then the Franks, establish a vassal state, converting the people to Christianity. Subsequent Bavarian involvement initiated the 'Germanisation' of the region, though instability was always close at hand via Avar invasions from Hungary. Throughout the late Medieval and early modern eras, revolts and uprisings awoke a 'Slovene' conscience. Further stimulated by the Reformation, this gave Slovenia its first vernacular books, helping it affirm its own language, culture and identity.

As in most of central Europe, when the Habsburgs took control, the area became enmeshed in their wars against the Ottoman Turks. However, under the Empress Maria Theresa reform came, reflected in an unexpected outbreak of artistic patronage. Thereafter, the vicissitudes of the Napoleonic and Austro-Hungarian Empires of the nineteenth century need no rehearsal here. Suffice to say that after the defeat of Austria-Hungary in 1918, Slovenia was ruled from Serbia, incorporated within the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After World War II power was again based in Belgrade, this time under Marshal Tito within the new Yugoslavia. Finally, true independence in June 1991 brought a new democratic beginning, which happily continues to flourish.

We shall stay in the heart of Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, at the **4* Grand Hotel Union**, located close to the Ljubljanica River and within walking distance of the city's principal sites, restaurants and shops. The tour will be led and managed by James Hill who will be joined by a number of local guides and experts.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Wednesday 15 May – We fly from Heathrow to Ljubljana arriving late afternoon. We travel by coach the short distance to Ljubljana to check-in at our hotel, the **4* Grand Hotel Union**. We have dinner in a local restaurant close to our hotel - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Thursday 16 May – We spend our day on foot in **Ljubljana**. The unique architecture of Jože Plečnik, active between the two world wars, makes him for many the 'father' of post-modernism. His playful, eclectic and wittily irreverent designs are visible throughout the city, including his iconic **Three Bridges** and **National University Library**. Our morning's walk around the handsome old centre will also include visits to the **Church of St Francis** and the **Cathedral of St Nicholas**, a baroque feast. **Ljubljana Castle** dominates the old town where our visit

concludes with a group lunch in one of the city's best restaurants - by chance situated in one of the castle's turrets. In the afternoon we visit the **National Museum of Slovenia**, an excellent chronological introduction to the nation's history. The evening will be free.

Day 3: Friday 17 May – Today we travel northwards to **Lake Bled** in the shadow of the Julian Alps. Only in the nineteenth century did the Habsburgs fully appreciate the beauty of Bled's scenery and the purity of its waters, transforming the lake into a grand resort. We begin our day just outside of Ljubljana close to the medieval village of **Kamnik** to visit the **Volčji Potok Arboretum**. Slovenia's most important botanical garden is neatly arranged around a series of areas including a lake, a park and a series of formal gardens. After a coffee break, we continue to Lake Bled and the unlikely lakeside **Villa Bled**, one of many properties periodically enjoyed by the Yugoslav royal family and later Marshall Tito. Now a hotel, it contains murals championing Tito's socialist vision. Following our group lunch on the villa's terrace, we take a *pletna* gondola across the lake to Bled's **Islet** to visit the **Church of the Assumption**. We make our return to Ljubljana where the evening will be free.

Day 4: Saturday 18 May – Our half day of activities on foot focuses on our second exploration of **Ljubljana** with a visit to its finest baroque building, the **Ursuline Church of the Holy Trinity**. We then walk towards **Tivoli Park** and the **National Gallery of Slovenia** where the collection brings together art from both local and itinerant artists. The Baroque period is well represented and there are some superb Neo-classical, Romantic and Impressionist works of art, mostly by Slovene artists benefitting from the proximity of Vienna and Munich and their respective Art Schools. Lunch is not included and the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free.

Day 5: Sunday 19 May – Our south-easterly travels take us to the **Lower Carniola** close to the border with Croatia. Our first visit is to the little border town of **Brežice** close to the Sava River. We shall visit the sixteenth century **Brežice Castle** where the regional **Posavje Museum** contains a good introduction to the Celtic and Roman periods, along with a splendidly frescoed sixteenth century **Knight's Hall**. We then travel the very short distance to the medieval town of **Kostanjevica na Krki** where we pause for a group lunch. Prettily enclosed by the Kirka River, Kostanjevica's principle cultural attraction is its former Cistercian **monastery** which we shall visit in the afternoon. Today, it houses the **Bozidar Jakac Gallery**; a combination of a permanent display of Flemish, Italian, French and German paintings and works dedicated to the Slovene Expressionist painter of the same name. We return to Ljubljana where the evening will be free.

Day 6: Monday 20 May – We drive across the **Primórska** region to the slither that is the south-western coast of Slovenia, just minutes from its borders with Italy and Croatia. We visit the **Church of the Holy Trinity** at **Hrastovlje**, Romanesque in design, its fortifications were added ahead of the advancing Turks in 1581. The joy of this small church lies within – its interior was entirely frescoed around 1490. We continue to the Adriatic Coast and the town of **Piran**. Five centuries of Venetian rule have left an indelible mark on this delightful 'mini-Venice', perched on a partially walled spur of land. Our walk through the town will include a visit to the panoramic, baroque **Cathedral of St George**. After time for lunch (not included) on the sea-front and some free time, we return to Ljubljana. Later in the evening, our final group dinner will be in one of the country's most renowned restaurants.

Day 7: Tuesday 21 May – We travel westwards to the **Vipava Valley** to discover some of the superb wines of Slovenia. This is one of the most verdant parts of the country and we visit a notable **vineyard**, complimented by a final lunch in a renowned Michelin-starred restaurant. Following lunch, we continue into Italy and on to Venice airport and our afternoon return flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £3275 **Without Flights** £3075 **Deposit** £475

Single Supplement £595 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotel 6 nights with breakfast at the 4* Grand Hotel Union, Ljubljana

Flights British Airways – **NB. departure is from Terminal 3, and return to Terminal 5 at Heathrow**

Outward: **BA690** Departs London Heathrow (Terminal 3) **1400** arrive Ljubljana **1710**

Return: **BA469** Departs Venice Airport **1815** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1930**

Price includes 2 dinners & 4 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of James Hill and our local guides

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 4 dinners & 2 lunches



CICERONI TRAVEL

2 The Square, Aynho, Banbury, Oxfordshire, OX17 3BL
Telephone +44 (0) 1869 811167 Fax +44 (0) 1869 811188
Email info@ciceroni.co.uk Website www.ciceroni.co.uk

