



## A HIDDEN EUROPE DISCOVERING SLOVENIA

SATURDAY 16 – FRIDAY 22 JUNE 2018 (7 DAYS)

TOUR DIRECTOR: JAMES HILL

£2270

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



Lake Bled

### OVERVIEW

Since independence twenty-seven 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, economically prosperous and very welcoming to visitors. Settled by Illyrian and Celtic tribes, 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, it was not until ruled by the Empress Maria Theresa that 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:** Saturday 16 June – We fly from Heathrow to Zagreb, in Croatia, arriving about midday. We travel by coach the short distance across the border into Slovenia and the small border town of **Brežice** close to the Sava River. After lunch, not included, we 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 continue our journey westwards for one hour to Ljubljana and our hotel, the **4\* Grand Hotel Union**. We have dinner in a local restaurant - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

**Day 2:** Sunday 17 June – We spend our first full day on foot in **Ljubljana**. The unique architecture of Jože Plečnik, active between the two world wars, places him for many as the father of Post-Modernism. His playful, eclectic designs are visible throughout the city including his iconic **Three Bridges** and **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 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 introduction to the city's Roman period of history. We return to the hotel via a gentle boat trip along the river after which the evening will be free.

**Day 3:** Monday 18 June – 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 visit at the unlikely lakeside **Villa Bled**, one of many properties periodically enjoyed by Marshall Tito. Now a hotel, it contains murals championing his socialist vision! We then take the *pletna* gondolas across the lake to Bled's **islet** to visit the **Church of the Assumption**. We end our morning at **Bled Castle** where, sitting high above the lake, it contains a **Museum** and a very good restaurant, where we shall lunch. We make our return to Ljubljana via the medieval village of **Kamnik** and the **Volčji Potok Arboretum**, neatly arranged around a series of formal parks. On our return the evening will be free.

**Day 4:** Tuesday 19 June – We depart on foot and continue our 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 Art Schools. Lunch is not included and the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free.

**Day 5:** Wednesday 20 June – Our eastward travels take us to the medieval town of **Ptuj** via the **Basilica of Mary the Patroness** or **Ptujska Gora**. This important pilgrimage church is one of the finest Gothic churches in Slovenia, commanding quite splendid views of the gentle countryside. On arrival at Ptuj we break for coffee. Once a Roman military outpost on the Drava River, Ptuj equals Ljubljana in historical importance. From the ninth to the sixteenth century it came under the control of Salzburg. Happily in the nineteenth century the new Vienna-coastal railway bypassed the town, thus leaving Ptuj to remain as one of Slovenia's most handsome survivors. After a walking tour around the town we have our group lunch facing the **Drava River**. In the afternoon we visit **Ptuj Castle**, fortified in the sixteenth century in defence of the advancing Turks, and once owned by the Scottish Leslies who left in 1802. Today it houses a collection of wide ranging objects including paintings, tapestries and furniture. After our visit we return to Ljubljana where the evening will be free.

**Day 6:** Thursday 21 June – We drive across the **Primórska** region to the south-western coastal slither of Slovenia, minutes from the borders with Italy and Croatia, where 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** where we break for lunch, not included. 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** where, after some free time, we return to Ljubljana and our final group dinner in one of the country's most renowned restaurants.

**Day 7:** Friday 22 June – We depart Ljubljana for our journey to Zagreb Airport and our flight to the UK.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £2270                      **Without Flights** £2110                      **Deposit** £275

**Single Supplement** £329 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

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

**Flights** British Airways

Outward:            **BA848** Departs London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **0815** arrive Zagreb **1135**

Return:              **BA849** Departs Zagreb **1230** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1400**

**Price includes** 2 dinners & 3 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 & 3 lunches



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