



## Walking in Slovenia

A green and historic nation

**11–18 September 2023 (MJ 861)**

8 days • £3,480

Lecturer: Professor Cathie Carmichael

Five country walks with beautiful and diverse scenery: vineyards, lakes, gorges, forests and coastline.

A small country with a fascinating history, ancient and modern.

Under-appreciated wines and varied cuisine, influenced by close neighbours.

The lecturer is Professor Cathie Carmichael, co-author of *Slovenia & the Slovenes*.

One of Europe's smallest countries, Slovenia is distinguished by vivid and varied landscapes and its intelligent, bookish locals, who have a clear respect and love for their inheritance which is reflected in every aspect of life from recycling and housing to literature and the arts. According to seventeenth-century writer Baron Valvasor, the Slovenes already were skiing on the Bloška planota to get around in winter, while saving the copious shellfish in their lakes to take to the towns. The stunning Adriatic white buildings on the coastline betray a Venetian past, best seen on the quayside in Piran. On the other side of the country in Ptuj, a town dominated by its twelfth-century castle, there is a clear Austrian legacy. Simon Clements, an English wine merchant who travelled here in 1715, described the country as 'wonderfully cultivated' with 'vineyards and little churches' and 'pretty fair buildings on the tops and sides of the hills'. A visit to the tranquil Lake Bled, one of the loveliest spots in Europe, will confirm his opinions.

Slovenia's proximity to Austria, Hungary, Croatia and Italy give it a complex history of different cultures interacting during times of harmony and conflict. The unique Slavonic Slovene language has some archaic characteristics and is spoken by just over two million people, almost all of whom are bi- or tri-lingual in other languages. In 1991 the Slovenes left their Yugoslav past under Marshall Tito and his successors behind them, but reminders from that era can be seen in bakeries, coffee shops and Balkan grilled meats. It is home to some surprising historic gems including the First World War site of memory at Kobarid, elegant onion-domed Catholic churches and the quirky modernist architecture of Jože Plečnik in the



Ljubljana, wood engraving c. 1890.

capital, Ljubljana. Slovenia is an ideal place to appreciate on foot before tasting the local grape varieties cultivated since medieval times and sampling cuisine that takes its notes from the best of Central Europe.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Ljubljana.** Leave from Ljubljana airport following the arrival of the flight from London Gatwick (Easyjet, currently arriving 7.35pm). *Flights are not included - see practicalities.* First of three nights in Ljubljana.

**Day 2: Vintgar Gorge, Lake Bled.** Drive north for a walk in the Vintgar Gorge: 6 km, c. 2 hours 30 minutes. The walk begins by passing through small villages and countryside, with views of Bled, Triglav (Slovenia's highest peak), and across the Alps to Austria. The narrow wooden walkway through the gorge itself makes for a stunning finish. In the afternoon admire Slovenia's jewel, Lake Bled, from above at the 17th-century castle and travel by gondola to its picturesque island with a tiny church containing Gothic frescoes.

**Day 3: Kobarid.** Travelling north-west to the Italian border, visit the town of Kobarid, home of an excellent museum examining the WW1 Battle of Caporetto in 1917. A lovely walk by the

turquoise waters of the Soča river follows the Italian line of defence, and takes in the Italian cemetery commissioned by Mussolini in 1938, army trenches and a waterfall: 5 km, c. 3 hours.

**Day 4: Ljubljana, Ptuj.** Absorb the wide-ranging architectural styles of the capital's historic core, vigorously reconstructed by the architect Jože Plečnik following the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy. See fine Baroque churches, Neo-Renaissance government buildings, and the enchantingly picturesque riverside with its incomparable nexus of Plečnik's bridges. Drive east to Ptuj for the first of two nights.

**Day 5: Jeruzalem, Ptuj.** A delightful morning walk, graded moderate. Follow farm tracks, forest paths and country roads through the rolling hills of the Jeruzalem and Ljutomer vineyards with views to Slovenia's four neighbouring countries: 7 km, c. 2 hours 30 minutes. Visit en route the pilgrim church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Jeruzalem. Return to Ptuj in the afternoon, one of Slovenia's oldest cities, with a fine medieval centre and pedestrian streets. Visit the majestic castle with its excellent regional museum.

**Day 6: Vipava Valley to the Istrian Peninsula.** Drive to the west of Slovenia to Goče, an enchanting wine village in the Vipava Valley with over sixty cellars. After a tasting and lunch, continue to the coast and walk from Strunjan to Piran, 5 km, c. 2 hours. This is an easy walk that begins by crossing Strunjan salt pans, established in AD 804 and an important source of income to the region in the Middle Ages. Thereafter there are fine views of the Gulf of Trieste, the Slovenian and Italian coastlines, and St George's campanile indicates our arrival in the beautiful Venetian town of Piran. First of two nights in Piran.

**Day 7: Hrastovlje, Piran.** Morning walk from the Romanesque Church of the Holy Trinity in Hrastovlje with exquisite frescoes depicting the *danse macabre*: 4 km, c. 2 hours. This is a circular walk that climbs to the abandoned village of Zanigrad, below the karst plateau, with wonderful views. Return to Piran after lunch. Once a group of medieval fishing villages, this coastal town was developed by the Venetians into a centre of civilisation, producing composers such as Giuseppe Tartini and other notable figures.

Walking in Slovenia  
continued

**Day 8: Piran.** Drive mid-morning to Venice Marco Polo Airport in time for the Easyjet flight to London Gatwick, arriving at 5.30pm.

**Combine this tour with** *The Johann Sebastian Bach Journey, 4–10 September 2023* or *Albania, Crossroads of Antiquity, 20–29 September 2023.*

## Lecturer

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**Professor Cathie Carmichael.** Historian specialising in Eastern Europe, with a focus on the former Yugoslavia. She studied International History at the London School of Economics, Ethnology at the University of Ljubljana, and European Studies at the University of Bradford. She is the editor of the *Journal of Genocide Research* and the author of *Genocide before the Holocaust*.

## Practicalities

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**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,480. **Single occupancy:** £4,070.

**Flights** are not included in the cost of the tour as the most convenient flights are with EasyJet and we cannot make a booking without knowing the passenger name. We can book flights on your behalf, quoting the fare at the time of booking, or you can make the bookings yourself. Suggested flight details are provided with your confirmation of booking.

**Included:** hotel accommodation as described below; coach travel; breakfasts; 5 lunches (1 is a picnic) and 5 dinners (1 is light) with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guide.

### Accommodation. Grand Hotel

#### Union Eurostars, Ljubljana

(grandhotelinioneurostars.com): the city's oldest hotel, rated 4-star. **Hotel Mitra, Ptuj** (hotel-mitra.si): a centrally located, 3-star hotel.

**Hotel Piran** (hotel-piran.si): a simple 4-star hotel with sea views. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

**How strenuous?** This is a walking tour, graded moderate. There are 5 walks, 1 graded easy and 4 are moderate. It is essential for participants to have appropriate walking footwear, be in good physical condition and to be used to country walking with uphill and downhill content. If you are used to them you may find walking poles useful. Average distance by coach per day: 82 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.