



The Imperial Riviera

Trieste, Ljubljana and the Istrian Peninsula

17–23 October 2022 (M1 550)

7 days • £2,640

Lecturer: Richard Bassett

Follow in the footsteps of the Habsburgs, Europe's leading imperial dynasty.

Explore three countries from one hotel, crossing between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia.

All six nights are spent in Trieste.

Led by Richard Bassett, historian of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and author of *For God and Kaiser* and *Last Days of Old Europe*.

The Habsburg Empire vanished barely a hundred years ago but nowhere is its legacy more apparent than in the once great seaport of Trieste, its hinterland and the adjoining coastline. The region was once a progressive and prosperous international melting pot, but in the 20th century it was riven by borders, often contested. The result was that the territory became peripheral and dropped from mainstream tourist itineraries – despite the hoard of extraordinarily handsome cities and settlements, sensationally interesting history and outstanding natural beauty.

This tour evokes the memory of a multinational and multi-confessional empire. Under Vienna's tutelage, Trieste became not only the third-largest city of the Austrian Empire but also one of the greatest ports of the world. Through it came most of central Europe's coffee, fruit and colonial wares. A multinational plutocracy took advantage of light regulation and low taxation to establish fortunes in Trieste which have survived well into our times.

To the east of Trieste, the Adriatic coast was developed to accommodate the wishes of a newly prosperous imperial middle class who sought refuge from metropolitan life; the coastline rejoiced in the name Imperial and Royal Riviera. The thermal springs and bathing facilities of Opatija (Abbazia) along the Quarnero peninsula were one such attraction. With its turn-of-the-century villas and hotels the town still exudes an atmosphere of Edwardian elegance.

Inland from these charming resorts lies the Slovene capital Ljubljana. Here the architectural heritage is stamped by Imperial Austrian tradition but also by the unique stylistic vocabulary of the greatest of all Slovene architects, Jože Plečnik, a pupil of Otto Wagner



Trieste, steel engraving c. 1840.

in Vienna, a man determined to express the culture of the newly emerging southern Slavs in a vivid and original language. The result is one of the most enchanting of European capitals, if one of the smallest.

The tour also explores the relatively unknown interior of nearby Istria. Here crumbling villages marked by beautiful limestone churches punctuate a karst landscape which, ravaged in winter by the fierce north-easterly Bora wind, remains one of the wildest and least known in Europe.

Itinerary

Day 1: Trieste. Fly at c. 8.45am from London Heathrow to Venice (British Airways). Drive to Trieste, where all six nights are spent. Afternoon walk through the quarters of the Borgo Teresiano where the great Empress Maria Theresa established the foundations of Austria's greatest seaport, ending on the Molo Audace from where, in the 19th and 20th centuries several Habsburgs sailed to violent deaths in faraway lands.

Day 2: Trieste. The morning in Trieste is spent climbing the cathedral hill through the old Venetian town and visiting the grave of the 19th-century scholar of Neoclassicism, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who is buried in a picturesque lapidarium beyond the former English church. In the afternoon visit the Miramar castle, the dream of the ill-fated Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, whose last

moments alive were devoted to planning the atmospheric gardens of the castle's park.

Day 3: Ljubljana. The capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana is a city formed in the Imperial Austrian tradition, but following the collapse of the Habsburg empire it was vigorously reconstructed by the architect Jože Plečnik. See the fine Baroque churches which are the city's older glories; Neo-Renaissance government buildings; and the enchantingly picturesque riverside with its incomparable nexus of Plečnik's bridges. Walk in the Tivoli park where Marshal Radetzky had his summer residence.

Day 4: Hrastovlje, Opatija, Piran. A trip across the limestone carso of Istria, taking in the beautiful medieval church of Hrastovlje before reaching Opatija (Abbazia), the jewel of the old Austrian Riviera with its fin-de-siècle hotels, rocky promenade and views across the Quarnero. Visit also Piran, a formerly Venetian coastal town, with a fine campanile and view across the lagoons towards Venice. The Istrian coastal towns were established first as fishing villages before, in early medieval times, Venice developed them into centres of civilisation which have contributed such composers as Tartini and other notable figures.

Day 5: Trieste. In the Museo Revoltella the importance of the city's trade with the orient is underlined by a special section devoted to the opening of the Suez Canal, an event with profound consequences for the development of Trieste. Free afternoon.

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continued

Day 6: Pula, Brioni. Return to the picturesque Istrian peninsula. At the tip lies Pula (Pola), the former headquarters of the Imperial Habsburg Navy and a city rich in spectacular Roman remains including the magnificent third-century Arena built of white Istrian stone. From Pola, a boat takes 45 minutes to the charming island of Brioni where the Archduke Franz Ferdinand spent his last family holiday before his assassination in 1914. Full of pleasant promenades, this once malarial islet was transformed by the Rothschilds 120 years ago into an Adriatic paradise.

Day 7: Duino. Visit the Castello di Duino, a 14th-century fortification and later residence of the Princes Von Thurn und Taxis. Fly from Venice to London Heathrow, arriving c. 6.45pm.

How strenuous? The tour involves quite a lot of walking, some of which is uphill and some of which is in the town centres, where vehicular access is restricted. Streets are often cobbled, and a good level of fitness is necessary. The tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 78 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Lecturer

Richard Bassett. Journalist and historian. He was a foreign correspondent for *The Times* throughout the 1980s and early 90s, covering central and eastern Europe. His books include *Austrians: Tales from the Vienna Woods*, *Hitler's Spy Chief: The Wilhelm Canaris Mystery*, *Balkan Hours*, *A History of the Habsburg Army* (2014) and the widely acclaimed *Last Days of Old Europe* (2018).

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,640 or £2,480 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,050 or £2,890 without flights.

By train: London – Paris – Turin – Trieste: c. 15 hours or London – Paris – Venice – Trieste: c. 20 hours (overnight). Contact us for more information.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Savoia Excelsior Palace, Trieste (starhotels.com/en/our-hotels/savoia-excelsior-palace-trieste): a majestic 4-star hotel overlooking the Bay of Trieste, set in a historic building with 19th-century architecture. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*