

## Slovenia: Julian Alps to the Adriatic

### Tour-Only Itinerary

You'll experience the magnificent natural beauty and warm, friendly culture of this captivating country on our creative itinerary, enjoying highlights from the orange roofs of Bled Castle—resplendent atop dramatic white-stone cliffs—to the Venetian-Gothic alleyways of seaside Piran. In Triglav National Park, marvel at the majestic Julian Alps as you walk beside the glacial, blue-green Lake Bohinj, passing through pine forest and fields of Alpine flowers such as Turk's cap lilies and gentian. Follow the emerald waters of a rushing river on your walk through the Soca Valley, and stay at an inn where you savor the cuisine of 2017's "World's Best Female Chef." Near the hilltop town of Medana, terraced vineyards hint at the region's Venetian influences; enjoy its finest vintages during a tasting at a family-run winery. Throughout your journey, revel in the refreshing outlook of a country that greatly values conservation, local cuisine, and outdoor adventure.



### Highlights

In Velika Planina—a massive mountainside pastureland favored by shepherds for centuries—stop by a local herder's pine-shingle hut to sample cheeses made from her flock's milk.

Board a traditional *pletna* boat, and glide across beautiful Lake Bled to the iconic island at its heart, where a 10th-century church is rumored to contain a steeple bell that grants wishes.

Walk the otherworldly landscape of Secôvlje Salina Nature Park, home to some of the last traditional salt flats in the Mediterranean region, where workers use age-old techniques to harvest the mineral.

## On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

## Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures. It is rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 6 miles per day, with options on many days. There are few ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging from about 15 to 30 minutes. The terrain varies from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village exploration) to uneven, single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, rocks, and roots. Some trails are exposed to the sun. Days are quite full on this tour due to the inclusion of many regions—from the capital to the Kamnik and Julian Alps, the Soca River Valley,

wine country, and the Adriatic Coast.

## DAY 1

### Join Your Country Walkers *Slovenia: Julian Alps to the Adriatic* tour

Kamnik Alps; 2-4 miles, easy to moderate; 600-ft. elevation gain

You meet your guide(s) in Ljubljana, the country's charming capital situated between the Alps and the Adriatic (voted European Green Capital for 2016 by the European Commission). After a brief welcome and introductions, you set off for an hour-long drive to the Kamnik Alps and Velika Planina ("Big Pasture" in Slovenian). Upon your arrival in Kamniska Bistrica, a short gondola ride takes you to the highlands (at an elevation of 5,286 feet). This area is one of very few shepherds' settlements of this scale preserved in Europe, and during the summer months, herdsmen bring their flocks to these highland pastures to graze. As you walk, the picturesque limestone peaks and the sound of cowbells tinkling in the air will transport you to another era, reminiscent of the *Sound of Music*. Wind your way past traditional wooden huts, with their unique conical, pine-shingled roofs that extend so low it looks from afar as though they touch the ground. Meet our friend Francka, and enjoy a tour of her hut and a well-deserved picnic featuring some of her cheeses, fresh yogurts, buckwheat dumplings, herbal teas, and even a nip of the local brandies. For those guests embarking on today's full walking circuit, the trail continues up to the chapel of Snow Mary, a beautiful structure built before World War II. (Masses are still held every Sunday in summer, as well as a midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.) Afterward, you descend back to the settlement, reuniting with guests who may have remained to chat with Francka or visit the local museum. The gondola whisks you back down to the valley, and you continue (approximately one hour) to Lake Bled, your home for the next three nights. With its fairytale castle, Lake Bled is undeniably the most stunning lake in the Alps. After settling into your hotel, you reunite for a welcome drink followed by a dinner of local specialties. Beef carpaccio from nearby Bohinj, green-pea soup with scallops, fillet of lake trout with parsley root cream, and lamb cutlet crusted with almond and wild herbs may be among the offerings, topped off with a pear tart with *tepka* pear ice cream. Dinner is served in the panoramic restaurant or (weather permitting) on the outdoor terrace.

## DAY 2

### Lake Bohinj and Mt. Vogel

5-6 miles, easy; optional 2-3 miles, easy to moderate

After a hearty buffet breakfast of fresh bread, homemade jams, cured meats, and cheeses, you depart to walk Lake Bled's untamed brother, Lake Bohinj, in the heart of Triglav National Park. The day begins with a cable car up to Mt. Vogel, a popular ski resort in the wintertime. Sitting 3,000 feet above the lake, you have an amazing vantage point from which to admire the picture-perfect Julian Alps. Afterward, descend back to the valley, and embark on an easy walking circuit skirting the shores of the lake—Slovenia's largest glacial lake. Surrounded by majestic mountains and dramatic cliffs, this region also offers diverse flora, from orchids to the Carniola and Turk's cap lilies to many Alpine flowers, including the Triglav (literally "three-headed") gentian—named after the highest mountain in the heart of the park. A scenic lakeside spot is selected for a picnic lunch of fresh bread, local cold cuts and cheeses, seasonal fruit, and cookies. You return to Bled by late afternoon (via a 30-minute transfer). Enjoy time to relax or take a quick swim before transferring to nearby Radovljica. The old town of Radovljica is one of the best-preserved in Slovenia, with houses dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The town sits atop a natural promontory, overlooking the Dezela plain to the east and the Sava River valley to the west, the Julian Alps dominating the background. Noteworthy attractions include the Museum of Apiculture, which offers a fascinating insight into Slovene beekeeping traditions. After a brief stroll through town and opportunity for independent exploration, you continue to Lectar Restaurant for a dinner of local fare served up by staff in traditional dress. The menu features hearty soups, home-baked bread, seasonal salads, *štruklji* (rolled dough dumplings with a range of fillings), and local beer or wine from some of the country's renowned cellars. Save room for dessert—likely to be a *potica* (a sweet yeasted dough rolled with nuts or other fillings) or apple strudel. After dinner, take a peek into the cellar workshop, where gingerbread hearts continue to be made in the time-honored tradition.

## DAY 3

### Vintgar Gorge and Lake Bled

2 miles, easy, or 4-5 miles, easy to moderate; 1-2 miles, easy

This morning, after another bountiful breakfast, you head north to explore the Vintgar Gorge. The gorge takes its name from the German term for "wine garden," as there used to be vineyards in the region, and it has been a popular tourist destination for more than a hundred years. The walking path runs along the rock wall of the mile-long gorge, hovering just above the flowing Radovna River, whose emerald waters rush through cascades and rapids, and form mesmerizing crystalline pools. The gorge ends at the delightful Šum Waterfall, the highest river fall in Slovenia at 82 feet. After taking in the falls and the old stone railway bridge, you may choose to retrace your steps to the entrance of the gorge or, for a longer

walk, you can continue up to Hom Hill, through green meadows and past St. Catherine Church, looping back to the starting point. By midday, you return to Bled for lunch on your own at one of the many lakeside cafés, with recommendations from your guides, of course. Be sure to try the famous local desserts such as *kremšnita* (cream cake) or *grmada* (akin to rum-raisin pudding and literally translated as “bonfire”). Afterward, you may wish to climb up to Bled Castle. Built on a clifftop in 1004, the castle was the seat of the Austrian bishops of Brixen. Even if you opt not to visit the castle itself, the views of the lake and mountains are worth the climb. Mid-afternoon, you may join your guides to return along the lakeside footpath to the hotel, passing great villas, most from the beginning of the 19th century— including Tito’s former residence, now a hotel. Enjoy a swim, or relax with a book on the terrace before reconvening for a special early-evening aperitif and visit to the romantic island on the lake. You board traditional pletna boats and savor a glass of wine while sailing to the 10th-century church on the small island of Otok. You continue on to a favorite lakeside restaurant where local specialties are served in a cozy, convivial atmosphere, either on the lakeside patio or in the dining room.

## DAY 4

### Lake Bled to Soca Valley

2-4 miles, easy

This morning, you bid farewell to Lake Bled and drive to Kranjska Gora, a cosmopolitan village that’s a 10-minute drive from both Italy and Austria, and the site of many World Cup ski races. As you wind your way over the Vršic Pass (5,316 feet) along one of the most scenic mountain roads in Europe (and the highest road in Slovenia), you enter the Soca Valley, the mountainous World War I battleground vividly described in Ernest Hemingway’s novel *A Farewell to Arms*. (In fact, it’s rumored that your hotel tonight is where Hemingway penned the piece!) The stunning turquoise waters of the Soca are especially popular with kayakers. You walk along the Soca Trail, beginning in the quaint village of Trenta (one of two in the horseshoe-shaped valley) and continue along the banks of the river to the Jelincic family farm, where you stop for a visit and lunch. Fresh fish from the river, award-winning organic sheep cheese, fresh bread, and *compe* (boiled potatoes) refuel you for the optional hour-long walk through picturesque forests and meadows (or you may wish to visit the small falls just past the farm). By late afternoon, you reach Kobarid and the Hiša Franko, a charming countryside villa and your home for the night. Hiša Franko is also home to one of Slovenia’s (and the world’s) best chefs— Ana Roš. Ana is considered one of the most progressive chefs in southern Europe, and she is completely self-taught. In early 2017, she was named world’s best female chef by “The World’s 50 Best Restaurants” academy. Together with her sommelier husband, Valter, she creates an unforgettable foray into Slovene food and wine. After you check into your

rooms, your evening begins with an invitation into their cellar for a tour of Valter's extensive (mostly Slovenian) wine selections and a tasting of local cheeses. Then, you proceed upstairs for a memorable dinner—menus change seasonally but feature local products from the surrounding area, and may include items as innovative as black cod in ash tempura with asparagus and truffles, followed by an apple strudel dessert.

## DAY 5

### Kobarid Museum, Kozjak Waterfall, and Goriška Brda wine region

2 miles, easy

It's an early start today, with breakfast served outdoors in the shaded garden by the brook amid views of the dramatic Kobariski Stol Mountain. After fueling up with freshly-baked bread, pastries, homemade marmalade, Alpine butter, cheese, cottage cheese, and local fruit, you bid your hosts farewell and depart for a guided tour of the World War I museum in town. Walk through history, taking in battlefield maps, country flags, and portraits of soldiers and gravestones. Afterward, there's a short transfer to the trailhead, where you stretch your legs on an easy, hour-long walk along the Kobarid Historical Trail to the "hidden" waterfall of Kozjak, with a cascade of water that falls from approximately 45 feet. A dirt road leads you across a meadow, and then you follow a path by the riverbed of the emerald Soca River. The Kozjak Brook springs from Mt. Krncica (7,028 feet), making six waterfalls in its journey to feed the Soca River. The beautiful Kozjak Waterfall flows into a natural amphitheater carved into rock. Your next destination is the wine-growing region of Goriška Brda (a one-hour drive away) and the picturesque Gorizia Hills bordering Italy's Collio region. Goriška Brda is increasingly gaining attention because of its innovative winemakers and its ancient method of aging wine in qvevri, large earthenware vessels lined with beeswax and buried below ground. The region is also well known for its fruit (cherries, peaches, and apricots) and olive oil. On arrival, you enjoy lunch and a wine tasting at Klinec—a family winery and restaurant in the pretty hilltop town of Medana, overlooking vineyards and olive and fruit orchards. The restaurant serves local, seasonal specialties, such as wild asparagus, white polenta, and pršutov toc (fried prosciutto and wine). Feeling sated and better acquainted with Slovene wines, you continue to the Adriatic Coast (a two-hour transfer) and the stunning seaside town of Piran. Time and interest permitting, you may arrive at your seafront hotel via a coastal footpath. Ideally situated on the tip of a narrow peninsula, Piran is the best-preserved cultural monument of Slovenia's Istria region. Upon arriving at your hotel, your guides provide a brief orientation, as well as recommendations for dinner on your own.

## DAY 6

### Secovlje Salina Nature Park



2-4 miles, easy

After a leisurely breakfast and delicious cup of cappuccino (the Italian influence is strong in this former part of the Venetian empire), you take a short drive to the Secovlje Salina Nature Park. The park is home to still-functioning traditional salt flats, as well as a truly unique mix of flora and fauna (including white herons) that thrive in this unique environment. Precious salt and trading routes dating to ancient Greece were of vital economic importance to Piran and the region. After an easy walk through the area, and perhaps a glimpse at the folks harvesting salt using traditional methods, you return to Piran for lunch. Mid-afternoon, your guides provide an overview of the town's importance and history on a walking tour, after which you enjoy some time on your own for strolling and exploring, or return to the hotel to relax (or indulge in a massage). You gather in the evening for a special farewell feast featuring delicious locally-caught seafood, squid with risotto, or grilled fish of the day, served with perhaps a Rebula or Cabernet—a wine from the vineyards you passed en route to the coast.

## DAY 7

### **Your *Slovenia: Julian Alps to the Adriatic* tour concludes**

After a leisurely breakfast and perhaps a stroll along the seaside promenade, you say “*nasvidenje*” to Piran and the enchanting coast. Your tour concludes at the Vander Hotel Urbani Resort in Ljubljana at approximately 12:00 p.m. for continued explorations or departures.

## What's Included

### Tour Only

Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7	✓
All meals included except one lunch and one dinner. Local wine and/or beer included with dinner.	✓
All accommodations while on tour	✓
Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International	✓
The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff	✓