

## Slovenia & Croatia: Lake Bled, Rovinj & Istria

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Enter a land where ancient history endures amid turquoise lakes, thundering waterfalls, and stunning coastline. From Lake Bled's fairy-tale castle to Triglav's towering peak, your walking holiday in Slovenia takes you to the country's wild and beautiful heart. In Croatia, you'll enter "Green" Istria, home to vineyards, olive groves, and rare, Istrian white truffles. Meanwhile, in coastal "Blue" Istria, the historic city of Rovinj will charm you with its cobblestone streets and distinctive hilltop steeple. On nearby islands, the remains of Roman temples still stand amidst protected greenery. Each day you'll relax in comfort at a boutique seaside hotel, while throughout your walking tour of Croatia and Slovenia, you'll feast on farm-to-table fare, while raising a glass of excellent Croatian or Slovenian wine.



### Highlights

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.

Hike through lush valleys and past magnificent waterfalls in Triglav National Park, with the snow-capped peaks of the Julian Alps as a backdrop

Join a professional truffle hunter and his canine assistant as they search for rare Istrian white truffles in the scenic Mirna River Valley

Tour the fascinating medieval coastal town of Rovinj and the well-preserved Roman amphitheater at ancient Pula with expert guides

Sample fresh Adriatic seafood, farm-to-table fare, and exquisite Croatian and Slovenian wines throughout your journey

## 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 - Full Walking Adventures. It is rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 6 miles per day, with options on some 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.

## DAY 1

### Join your *Slovenia & Croatia: Lake Bled, Rovinj & Istria* tour

Vintgar Gorge; 2-4 miles, easy to moderate and Ojstrica; 2 miles, optional afternoon walk

Your guide(s) meet you at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby of the InterContinental Ljubljana hotel in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

You meet your guide(s) in Ljubljana, the country's charming capital situated between the Alps and the Adriatic (voted European Green Capital in 2016 by the European Commission). After a brief welcome and introductions, you set off for Vintgar Gorge.

The gorge takes its name from the German term for "wine garden," after the historic vineyards that thrived in the region in ancient times. It has been a popular tourist destination for more than a hundred years. This morning's 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, forming mesmerizing crystalline pools. The gorge ends at the delightful Šum Waterfall, the highest river waterfall in Slovenia at 82 feet. After taking in the falls and the nearby 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.

Lunch today is at Talež, in a charming, wooden mountain lodge where you'll enjoy traditional comfort foods while gazing out at spectacular views of serene Lake Bled, the vast Gorenjska Plain, and the towering snow-capped peaks of the Alps.

After lunch, continue to Lake Bled, where you'll stay for the next three nights. Surrounded by soaring mountain peaks and with a fairy-tale castle overlooking its serene turquoise waters, Lake Bled is undeniably the most stunning lake in the Alps. After settling into your hotel, you have the option of relaxing or venturing out for a walk to Ojstrica, the viewpoint just above the lake for a quintessential view of the castle, the church on the island, and the Alps. Reunite with the group for a special welcome boat ride out to Bled island aboard a traditional *Pletna* boat. The island is home to a church bell that is said to grant wishes. According to local legend, a wealthy widow cast her silver and gold into a new bell for the church in memory of her husband, but the ship carrying the bell to the island sank into the lake and was never seen again. Broken hearted, the widow dedicated the rest of her life to a nunnery. After her death, a new

bell was made to fulfill her wish, and it is said that if you ring the bell three times your wish will come true.

Concluding the boat ride, you arrive at President Tito's former summer residence, now a restaurant/hotel, for a welcome drink followed by a dinner of local specialties. Retire in comfort this evening after a full day.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Triglav, Bled OR Grand Hotel Toplice, Bled (September 25-October 2, 2020 tour is at this hotel)

## DAY 2

### Triglav National Park: Vrata Valley

4-5 miles, easy to moderate

After a hearty buffet breakfast of fresh bread, homemade jams, cured meats, and cheeses, you depart for a walk in Triglav National Park. Slovenia's only national park, Triglav is home to a pristine landscape of verdant forests and vast meadows where glacial streams descend from the surrounding mountains to flow through picturesque valleys and ravines. Your walk begins along a gravel road through the famous, UNESCO-protected Vrata Valley, known as the "door to alpine paradise." Your hike leads through the valley towards imposing Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia, and the centerpiece of the National Park. Glance up for breathtaking views of this peak along the way as it gets larger and larger in your view. At the upper end of this hike, you reach the wide Triglav north wall. Time permitting, you may detour to Pericnik waterfall.

Following traditional drinks and a snack at Aljžev dom mountain hut, you can choose to continue along a gently ascending forest trail to a monument to the fallen Partisan Alpinists—a giant carabiner and rock piton. Alternatively, you can remain at the hut and continue to relax and take in the view.

From Aljžev dom hut, make your way to Psnak farm for a lunch of traditional dishes prepared with locally sourced ingredients, followed by a short hike to Pocar homestead. Here, you can explore the preserved buildings of this open-air museum, learning about alpine life beneath Triglav as you visit the home, stables, and hay barn all dating back to the 18th century.

Returning to your hotel late afternoon, there is time to walk through town or relax at the indoor pool before gathering for another delicious dinner. 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.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Triglav, Bled

OR Grand Hotel Toplice, Bled (September 25-October 2, 2020 tour is at this hotel)

## DAY 3

### Mostnica Gorge and Lake Bohinj

2 miles, easy to moderate and 3.5 miles, easy

After a hearty breakfast, transfer to the Voje Valley where you'll walk a forested path through the scenic Mostnica Gorge, past glacial pools and waterfalls. Admire the turquoise-blue waters of streams and the emerald-green moss clinging to trees and rocks along the way. The trail ends at the small settlement of Stara Fužina, where you'll visit the Alpine Dairy Museum to view a presentation of traditional cheese-making and enjoy a tasting of fresh cheese.

From Stara Fužina, you'll join a trail along the shores of scenic Lake Bohinj. The largest permanent lake in Slovenia, Lake Bohinj is a green oasis in the heart of Triglav National Park. Bohinj lacks Bled's glamour, but it makes up for it with a beautiful, rugged wildness. Your easy trail follows the lake's edge, offering stunning views of the lake and the Julian Alps.

Today's lunch is at a nearby farm, a relaxed, uncrowded alpine restaurant where you can enjoy sweeping views while you dine on delicious Slovenian fare.

Mid-afternoon you return to your accommodation on Lake Bled to enjoy free time, or, join your guide on a tour of Bled Castle. You may choose to walk to the castle (30 minutes) or transfer via shuttle. Purported to be the oldest castle in Slovenia, Bled Castle was built on a clifftop in 1004, and 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 (and the fabulous meal) are worth the climb.

Tonight, you gather to enjoy your final dinner at Lake Bled, indulging in the castle restaurant's delectable, modern interpretations of traditional dishes and drinks.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Triglav, Lake Bled

OR Grand Hotel Toplice, Bled (September 25-October 2, 2020 tour is at this hotel)

## DAY 4

### Slovenian wine and olive oil country. Transfer to Rovinj, Croatia

2 miles, easy to moderate and evening guided walking tour of Rovinj; 1-2 miles, easy

Bid farewell to Bled as you make your way south. In two hours, you enter into a Mediterranean landscape – this is “Green” Istria, with fertile plains home to vintners and olive oil producers. It’s hard to believe you’re in the same country, the scenery and the weather are so different.

Your last stop in Slovenia is an estate, where for over 50 years the Glavina family has been tending vineyards and olive groves, making wine and olive oil in the Slovenian Istrian tradition. This morning you’ll enjoy an olive oil tasting, including their distinctive Šmarje olive oil, as well as a tour of the mill.

After your tasting, follow your guide on an easy walk from the winery/olive oil mill to the nearby village of Padna before departing Slovenia and journeying across the border into Croatia.

Lunch today is at a *konoba*, a Croatian tavern, featuring local dishes and microbrews or wine. Enjoy your first Croatian meal, and then transfer to the port town of Rovinj, on Istria’s west coast. Check into your home for three nights, a splendid seaside property.

Enjoy a welcome drink, and settle into your room. Maybe pop down to one of the pools or the sea (for a dip) before gathering late afternoon to embark on a walking tour of the historic heart of Rovinj with a local guide. Medieval, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque periods are reflected in the buildings rising from ancient cobblestone streets. You explore the outdoor market, landmark buildings, and the town’s symbol: St. Euphemia Parish Church, an impressive three-nave church built in 1736 over the remains of earlier Christian churches. Its striking bell tower is similar to the iconic tower on St. Mark’s in Venice.

Later this evening, stop into one of the waterfront *konobas* or fine eateries, or savor an independent meal back at your chic hotel.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Mulini, Rovinj



## DAY 5

### Truffle hunt and Motovun walk and vineyard visit

2 miles, easy and 2 miles, easy

This morning, after a leisurely breakfast, you head into the green heart of Istria and the Mirna River valley, where rare Istrian white truffles (*tuber magnatum*) as well as black truffles can be found. You join a truffle hunter and his specially trained dogs on an actual search for these underground tuberous fungus (a gastronomic prize!).

Continue on to Motovun, a medieval hilltop village, where you enjoy a special lunch. Truffles will accent the fare; perhaps atop the chef's signature dish.

Satiated, you descend from Motovun following an easy trail. Your destination is a nearby winery where you'll tour the property and vineyards, with a chance to taste some of their award-winning vintages.

Return to Rovinj late afternoon, with time to unwind poolside or indulge in a spa treatment before dinner in the hotel's elegant restaurant.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Mulini, Rovinj

## DAY 6

### Brijuni National Park and Pula

4 miles, easy; 1 mile, easy

You bid Rovinj farewell today and head to "Blue Istria," first traveling 35 minutes down the coast to Fažana, where you catch a ferry to Veliki Brijun, an island where Marshal Josip Broz Tito—former president of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia—spent half of every year enjoying a very lavish lifestyle. Tito's first visit was in the late 1940s when he immediately set about restoring the island to its former glory. Thereafter, his villa hosted more than 100 heads of state, film stars, and other VIPs.

On a fascinating circuit walk, you quickly see the attraction of this 1,700-acre island (the largest in the archipelago) that was established as a national park in 1983, following Tito's death. Your walk passes

Roman ruins from the first century AD—a Temple of Venus and a Roman residential villa. You walk through meadows, oak and laurel forests, and see some 1,000-year-old olive trees.

Returning to the mainland, you enjoy an independent lunch before a guided tour of Pula – whose complex political history dates from 177 BC, when it was conquered by the Romans. Despite millennia of devastating wars and changes in governance, Pula’s Roman amphitheater—one of the six largest in the world—has survived largely intact and is still in use. A local historian brings the site to life on a brief tour. Afterward, a 45-minute transfer returns you to your seaside resort where you relax before reconvening for a farewell celebration to toast the week’s adventures.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Mulini, Rovinj

## DAY 7

### ***Your Slovenia & Croatia: Lake Bled, Rovinj & Istria tour concludes***

*Dovidenja!* After breakfast, transfer to Zagreb, where your walking tour of Croatia and Slovenia ends. Begin your journey home, or discover Croatia’s capital on your own.



## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 lunch and 1 dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓