

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

### Tour-Only Itinerary

Prowling Istria's oak forests with a truffle hunter and his hounds, you're uncovering a regional culinary secret at its source. Your furry companion starts digging furiously, and you see this afternoon's lunch emerge from the cool earth. Seeking hidden treasures is what it's all about in this gorgeous corner of Europe. Wandering the forests, gorges and meadows of Triglav National Park. Plying Slovenia's pristine Lake Bled on a traditional *pletna* boat. Admiring the majestic Julian Alps from a clifftop castle. Or walking island paths on Croatia's Adriatic coast. Whether you're sampling homegrown olive oil at a family-run wine estate or touring Pula's colossal Roman amphitheater, this walking tour in Slovenia and Croatia yields rare rewards.



### Highlights

Glide across beautiful Lake Bled on a traditional *pletna* boat to a 10th-century church, 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 the hunt for truffles with a professional truffle hunter and his canine assistant.

Learn about Slovenian alpine traditions at a cheesemaking demonstration and tasting, held at an alpine museum overlooking scenic Lake Bohinj.

Dine like royalty at Bled Castle, as you enjoy a sumptuous dinner of classic fare and modern cuisine in opulent surroundings.

Visit Brijuni Island, where you'll stroll Roman ruins and tour former president Tito's museum, which contains a collection of photos of Tito with world leaders.

## 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 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 making the level of difficulty more challenging during warmer weather. The days on this tour are quite full to allow for the inclusion of diverse regions of cultural and historical importance.

## 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.

This morning your tour begins from Ljubljana, Slovenia'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.

Vintgar Gorge takes its name from the German term for "wine garden," after the historical vineyards that thrived in the region in ancient times. The area has been a popular tourist destination for more than 100 years. This morning's walking path runs along the rock wall of the mile-long gorge, hovering just above the flowing Radovna River, where 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 snowcapped 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. Once you have settled into your hotel, you have the option of relaxing or venturing out for a walk to Ojstrica, the viewpoint just above the lake, for an iconic 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 made her silver and gold into a new bell for the church

in memory of her husband, but the ship carrying the bell sank into the lake and was never seen again. Broken hearted, the widow spent the rest of her life as a nun. 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

**Included Meals:** Lunch, Dinner

## 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 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 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 commemorating 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 homestead's residence, stables, and hay barn all dating back to the 18th century.

You return to your hotel late this afternoon, with 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 seasonal menu offerings. Perhaps you'll top your meal 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

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 3

### Mostnica Gorge and Lake Bohinj

2 miles, easy to moderate and 3.5 miles, easy

Fueled by another hearty breakfast, you 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 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 an 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 water and the distant Julian Alps. Today's lunch is at a nearby farm with a relaxed, uncrowded alpine restaurant where you can admire sweeping views while you dine on delicious Slovenian fare.

Midafternoon 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 for your final dinner at Lake Bled, indulging in the castle restaurant's delectable, modern interpretations of traditional dishes and drinks.

**Accommodation:** Hotel Triglav, Bled

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## 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 still in Slovenia, the scenery and the weather are so different from the mountainous landscape of the past few days.

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 take part in an olive oil tasting, which includes the Glavina family’s 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. Savor 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 in the late afternoon to embark on a walking tour of the historical 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 Basilica in Venice.

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



**Accommodation:** Hotel Monte Mulini, Rovinj

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## 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 you can find rare Istrian white truffles (*tuber magnatum*) as well as black truffles. You join a truffle hunter and his specially trained dogs on an actual search for these underground tuberous fungi (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

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## 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. On this island Marshal Josip Broz Tito—former president of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia—spent half of every year indulging in a 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 will see the attraction of this 1,700-acre island (the largest in the archipelago), which 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. Continue through meadows, oak and laurel forests, and past 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 mostly 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

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 7

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

After breakfast, a private transfer brings you to the Hotel Esplanade in Zagreb by 1:00 p.m., where you continue your explorations or make connections for your onward travels.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast



## 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	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓