

Slovenia & Croatia: Lake Bled, Rovinj & Istria

Air Package 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 cliff-top 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 in the Mirna River valley.
- Arrive on foot at the winery of a young, award-winning, vintner to sample his local Teran and Malvazija wines, just outside the medieval town of Motovun.
- Visit Brijuni Island, where you'll stroll Roman ruins and tour former president Tito's museum, which contains a fascinating 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 hiking 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.

FLIGHT DAY

Depart from the United States or Canada

All you have to do is get to the airport. On our Flight + Tour Combos, we'll take care of the rest, handling all the logistics, so you can travel with peace of mind. Spend your first night aloft and arrive refreshed for an unforgettable trip.

ARRIVAL DAY

Arrive in Ljubljana, Slovenia

Start off your first day in Ljubljana right by having a Country Walkers representative greet you at the airport. A complimentary car service will whisk you to your centrally located hotel. From here you are perfectly positioned to explore this charming city at your leisure.

DAY 1

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

Vintgar Gorge; 2.5 miles, easy to moderate and Lake Bled; 3 miles, easy optional afternoon walk

After enjoying an included breakfast, your guides meet you at 8:30 a.m. in the lobby of the InterContinental Ljubljana hotel. They'll be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Please be dressed for walking with appropriate hiking footwear.

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 translates as "place exposed to the wind," and as the first mountain gorge accessible to tourists

(for more than a century!), it is now the common term for other scenic and protected gorges throughout Slovenia. 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 continue up towards Hom Hill, through green meadows and past St. Catherine Church. Pause to admire the views over the vast Ljubljana Basin and the towering snowcapped peaks of the Alps.

Your trail culminates in the village of Zasip, where you'll enjoy a lunch of traditional comfort foods served on the outdoor terrace (weather permitting) of a local restaurant. After lunch, continue by minibuss 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. Settle into your hotel and relax, or join your guides on an optional orientation walk lakeside. On return to the hotel, there is time to refresh before gathering for a welcome cocktail and meeting in the wine cave.

Afterward, enjoy 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 dinner of local specialties, topped off with a piece of *kremšnita*, the famous cream cake dessert. Retire in comfort this evening after a full day.

Included Meals: Breakfast, 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 travel

35-40 minutes to tranquil Lake Bohinj. The largest permanent lake in Slovenia, 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 clear water and the distant Julian Alps.

Time permitting, you may detour to Peričnik 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.

Mid-afternoon you return to your accommodation on Lake Bled to enjoy an independent late afternoon and evening. You may choose to relax with a swim in the indoor pool, or perhaps explore town or embark on a walk up to Bled Castle (30 minutes away). 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 tour the castle itself, the views of the lake and mountains are worth the climb. You can even stay on for dinner, indulging in the castle restaurant's delectable, modern interpretations of traditional dishes and drinks. (Advance reservations required, please visit <https://www.jezersek.si/en/locations/bled-castle> for further information.)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Triglav National Park: Vrata Valley and Radovljica

3-4 miles, easy to moderate

Fueled by another hearty breakfast, 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.

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.

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 enjoyed in the hotel’s panoramic restaurant or (weather permitting) on the outdoor terrace. Mid-afternoon you return to your accommodation on Lake Bled to enjoy an independent late afternoon and evening. You may choose to relax with a swim in the indoor pool, or perhaps explore town or embark on a walk up to Bled Castle (30 minutes away). 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 tour the castle itself, the views of the lake and mountains are worth the climb. You can even stay on for dinner, indulging in the castle restaurant’s delectable, modern interpretations of traditional dishes and drinks.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

Slovenian wine and olive oil country. Travel 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 family's distinctive Šmarje olive oil, as well as a tour of the mill.

Afterward, 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 tasty local dishes. Savor your first Croatian meal, and then drive 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.

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 perched 900 feet above the valley. Entering town

through the town's original gates, your guides provide an overview of the main attractions along with recommendations as to where to savor the best pasta with truffles during lunch on your own. Afterward, you descend on foot from Motovun following an easy trail. Your destination this afternoon 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 an independent dinner.

Included Meals: Breakfast

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 drive returns you to your seaside resort where you relax before reconvening for a farewell celebration to toast the week's adventures.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7

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

After enjoying an included breakfast, complimentary transportation is provided to the Hotel Esplanade in Zagreb by 1:00 p.m. for your post-tour night. Lunch and dinner are on your own. We provide detailed city information to help you plan your day.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DEPARTURE DAY

Departure

Dovidenja! After an included breakfast this morning, complimentary transportation will be provided to Zagreb's Franjo Tudman International Airport based on your departure time.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Air Package

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
13 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 3 dinners	✓	✓
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 Global Assistance	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Ljubljana, Slovenia and one extra night in Zagreb, Croatia	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	