

Slovenia & Croatia: Lake Bled, Rovinj & Istria

Air Package Itinerary

Prowling Istria's oak forests with a truffle hunter and her 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 award-winning wine at a family-run 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 her canine assistant in the Mirna River valley.
- Arrive on foot at the winery of an 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

Your vacation is about to begin! Spend your first night aloft and arrive ready 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 in the lobby of the InterContinental Ljubljana hotel.

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 at a local restaurant on Lake Bled, where you'll enjoy a lunch of traditional comfort foods. Afterward, continue on foot along a lakeside trail (or via minibus on a 5 to 10 minute drive) to your charming accommodations just above 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 one of the most stunning lakes in the Alps. Settle into your hotel and relax and 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

Lake Bohinj. Independent exploration of Bled

5 miles, easy to moderate

After a hearty buffet breakfast of fresh bread, homemade jams, cured meats, eggs 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 hiking trail follows the lake's edge, offering stunning views of the clear water and the surrounding Julian Alps. This region offers diverse flora, from orchids to the Carniola and Turk's cap lilies to numerous Alpine flowers, many of which are used in the local teas and liqueurs. The 2.5 hour hike culminates at a farm-to-table restaurant in the small settlement of Stara Fužina, where you savor a traditional meal of soup and farm-raised chicken, topped off with a typical apple strudel.

Afterward, explore the well-preserved home and hay racks and barns of a nearby open-air museum of sorts, learning about life in the community over the past two centuries. 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 cliff top 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Triglav National Park and Radovljica

Vrata Valley; 3-4 miles, easy to moderate and 1 mile, easy

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." Admire the turquoise-blue streams and the emerald-green moss clinging to trees and rocks along the way. 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 majestic Triglav north wall and a monument commemorating fallen Partisan Alpinists—a giant carabiner and rock piton. Enjoy a coffee and traditional snack break at Aljažev dom mountain hut, named for the great mountaineering writer and composer Jakob Aljaž.

Continue by minibus approximately 30 minutes 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 time to explore and enjoy lunch on your own, 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.

Dinner is enjoyed in the hotel's panoramic restaurant or (weather permitting) on the outdoor terrace. In either location, admire spectacular views over Lake Bled. 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

Rackov Škocjan. Travel to Rovinj, Croatia

3 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 approximately one hour, you enter into a unique karst valley at the northern base of the Javorniki hills and the oldest landscape park in Slovenia—protected since 1949. Partially formed by the collapse of a cave roof and the River Rak, the area boasts karst features including two natural stone bridges and two gorges. Embark on a tranquil circuit through fir and beech forest, replete with yellow and wood anemone, primroses and the protected dog-tooth violet in springtime.

Afterward, bid Slovenia farewell and journey across the border into Croatia. Your first stop is at a family estate in the Mirna River valley, just outside the pretty truffle capital of Buzet, where you can find rare Istrian white truffles (*tuber magnatum*) as well as black truffles. You indulge in a unique experience, savoring a lunch of delicious products before heading out with a truffle hunter and her specially trained dogs on an actual search for these underground tuberous fungi (as you've already discovered, they are a gastronomic prize!)

You continue south (on a 75-minute drive) to the port town of Rovinj, on Istria's west coast. Check into your home for three nights, a splendid seaside property, 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 town's narrow alleyways as well as the 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.

Your tour culminates at the main square; afterward, 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

Parenzana Trail and Motovun winery visit

Završje to Grožnjan; 5 miles, easy

This morning, after a leisurely breakfast, you head into Slovenian wine and olive oil country, stopping first for an invigorating walk along a converted rail-trail dubbed the Parenzana, or "Friendship Trail", from medieval Završje (also known as the Piedmont of Istria) to the artsy village of Grožnjan. Mostly abandoned after World War II, Grožnjan is located high on a sandstone hill and began to revive in 1965 when artists moved into the many empty houses. Today, the village is a beehive of activity in the summer, inhabited by musicians and actors as well as artists. On arrival, wander the maze of cobbled streets and enjoy some time to browse the galleries, studios, and artisan shops, or find a café with a terrace; to soak in views of the surrounding hillside villages.

Continue on to Motovun, whose medieval hilltop village is perched 900 feet above the valley. Your destination is a family-run winery, situated at the foothills of town, where you'll enjoy a light lunch of prsut (local prosciutto and cheeses along with some of their own olive oil), and taste some of their award-winning vintages. The young and dynamic vintner has had a stratospheric rise in the industry, receiving top prize in the national Croatian wine competition for his very first ruby red Teran wine in Croatia at the age of 22 (and numerous awards over the past decade).

Return to Rovinj late afternoon, with time to unwind poolside or indulge in a spa treatment before an independent dinner.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6

Brijuni National Park and Pula

4 miles, easy. 1 mile, easy

You travel south today (approximately 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 Zagreb 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	✓	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
One extra night in Ljubljana and one extra night in Zagreb	✓	
Airport car service for arrival and departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	