

Cycling Safaris

MAGICAL SLOVENIA 2010 Group guided



Slovenia was formerly part of Yugoslavia (gaining Independence in 1992) and was one of the ten accession countries that joined the EU in May 2004. A relatively small country in terms of size and population (just two million) it has a very varied geography. To the north it is bordered by Austria, to the west by Italy, to the south by Croatia and to the east by Hungary. Culturally, these neighbours have exerted influences over the Slovenian peoples (as it has changed hands many times, from the Roman Empire through to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its time behind the Iron Curtain). The geography of the country seems to reflect these influences, with the North West predominantly Alpine, the South West Mediterranean and the East consisting of low lying plains.

The stunning beauty of the country is certainly a good reason to come and visit, but for many, the friendliness of the Slovenians would be reason enough in itself. Many speak impeccable English (as well as other languages) and are delighted to share their country with foreign visitors.

Our tour concentrates on the North West and is a great introduction to the country. The local guide ensures you get the most from your cycling adventure – from the spectacular Triglav National Park to the charming Capital of Ljubljana and not forgetting the smaller towns and villages that other tourists seldom visit.

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1 **Saturday** **Arrival in Bled**

Our meeting point, and first night's accommodation is Hotel "Vila Bojana" in Bled, located on Ljubljanska cesta, Bled 4240 (Tel: 0038 6313 98692). The Vila has a great location. Close to the lake but set back off the main road. Our guide will meet you at 18.30 on Saturday night and answer any questions you might have on the week ahead. We will have dinner after the introductory chat.

Bled is a beautifully located town in the Northwest of Slovenia. The town sits on the edge of the pristine glacial lake of the same name, against the backdrop of the Julian Alps and the majestic Trivlav (highest mountain in Slovenia and its national symbol). The view is further enhanced by the Baroque Church of the Assumption, perfectly placed on a small island in the middle of the lake. Boat trips can be taken to the island from various locations around the lake. Bled Castle sits high above the town on a rocky outcrop. It is open to the public and is a one-kilometre walk (up a steep path). It is worth the trip up just to enjoy the panorama of the lake and surroundings. A path follows the lakeshore around Lake Bled and takes around an hour to walk (5km approx).

DAY 2 **Sunday** **Bled to Kranjska Gora** **58 km**

After breakfast in the hotel the guide will organise your bikes and give a briefing on the day ahead.

Leaving Bled we head towards the valley of Krma. We pass farming communities and typical alpine villages as we descend into the valley and follow the river until we reach the centre of the stunningly beautiful Triglav National Park. There are a variety of different routes around the park but whichever you take you will be impressed by the amazing views. After lunch, we follow the Alps until we reach Kranjska Gora, the most western town in Slovenia - only 7kms from the Italian and Austrian borders. Much of the afternoon's cycle is along a purpose-built cycleway, constructed along a disused railway line.

We spend the night in a typical Slovenian pension in the old part of Kranjska Gora.

DAY 3 **Monday** **Kranjska Gora to Kobarid** **58 km**

Our day starts with a transfer from Kranjska Gora to the pass of Vrsic. From here we get back on the bikes and have a lovely day's cycle downhill! Vrsic Pass is the highest road in Slovenia and was built by the Russians during World War 1 - full of history and interesting landmarks as well as passing through the heart of the Julian Alps. The ascent takes us via 24 hairpin bends until we reach 1611m. Here we can take refreshments in a mountain hut before we make the thrilling descent down to the Trenta and Soca valley - taking another 26 hairpin bends along the way. We can stop at the botanical gardens or numerous other viewpoints as we follow the turquoise Soca River to Kobarid - Hemmingway's "Farewell to Arms" area.

Our night's destination is the town of Kobarid, a lovely town dwarfed by towering mountains ideal for hiking, climbing, biking and fishing.

DAY 4 **Tuesday** **Rest day in Tolmin**

Tolmin is the perfect place for our rest day. There numerous options available today. A popular trip is a visit to nearby Kobarid, a historic small town idyllically located at the meeting point of two valleys making it an ideal place to relax and enjoy the area. Its current tranquillity belies a very turbulent past that has included much military action from the Romans and Napoleon to the devastating blow dealt by the German/Austrian armies to the Italians in 1917. There is an award-winning museum here that sensitively portrays events and relates them to the adventures of well-known celebrities such as Ernest Hemmingway and Erwin Rommel.

For those who fancy a more active day there are many fabulous hikes in the area and for the thrill-seekers, rafting and paragliding are available!

DAY 5 Wednesday Kobarid to Skofja Loka 60 km

Don't be put off by the length in today's cycle. As with other days we can offer lifts for part of the day's journey to make things a bit easier on your legs (which should be well rested from your day off in Kobarid!)

Leaving Kobarid we head back into the Gorenjska Region (Alpine region) of Slovenia and into the second oldest town in Slovenia - the walled Skofja Loka. We pass through small villages and hamlets as we wind our way along quiet trails, forests and valley roads. This a very tranquil day with a real sense of being close to nature.

We will finish the day by taking a transfer into the town of Skofja Loka. The centre has a remarkable collection of notable buildings ranging from the castle (restored after the earthquake in 1511), the former town hall, the stone (or Capuchin) bridge and the town wall itself. A short walk from our accommodation brings you into the heart of the town and the lovely medieval square.

DAY 6 Thursday Skofja Loka to Ljubljana 26 km

Today's cycle is a deliberately short one so as to give us plenty of time to explore the capital. The route from Skofja Loka to the capital is fairly flat and straightforward. We follow a track through the open countryside until we reach the outskirts of Ljubljana. We then take the trail into the suburbs before heading into the city centre and our accommodation. We should arrive in the city around 11.30am.

Ljubljana is a city with a lovely feel about it, combining the street café culture of Paris with the baroque architecture (and bridges) of Prague. It is not a large city and is ideally suited to exploring on foot. The attractions of the castle (overlooking the city), the cultural area, market, shops, fine buildings and park are all just a short stroll from our centrally located hotel.

We spend the night in the Hotel Turist - close to the city centre but in a quiet location

DAY 7 Friday Ljubljana to Bled 45km

Our last day's cycle will take us back to Bled. From the centre of Ljubljana we soon reach the peaceful countryside and head through villages and small communities including Trzic - a well known shoemaking town. We then take a slightly elevated road named the "window of Gorenjska". Here we can view the complete panorama of the Julian Alps, Karavanke Mountains, Bled and Ljubljana - a truly pleasant cycle. Along the way today we can visit the 15th century ruined castle of Kamen, pass the chocolate factory and visit the cheese making area.

Our last evening in Bled is spent in the same accommodation we started the tour in and we have an evening meal together.

Day 8 Homeward Bound

After breakfast we head home.

TOUR PRICE

€895.00 (guided tour) per person sharing

€1,095.00 for single occupancy

(if you are travelling on your own, we will endeavour to find a room mate for you)

TOUR Dates

May 29

September 18

WHAT THE TOUR PRICE INCLUDES

- Seven nights hotel and pension accommodation
- All breakfasts and two dinners
- Guide in a support van
- 21 speed touring bike with small front handlebar pannier bag

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation is allocated on a twin sharing basis based in 3* Hotels and pensions. We ensure private facilities all of the time. We would be happy to help you organise extra accommodation for the start or the end of the week, you can contact the office directly for this and we will help with bookings.

WHAT TO BRING

- We would recommend that you bring padded cycling shorts or even a gel saddle cover to make your days cycling more comfortable (if you wish to bring your own saddle this is no problem). Cycling gloves are also a good investment.
- Although it is not obligatory to wear a helmet we highly recommend that you wear one. If you own a bicycle helmet please bring it, otherwise there will be helmets available in the van.
- Don't forget sun cream, sunglasses and sun hat.
- If you wish to use toe clips we advise you to bring your own pedals with toe clips, as the pedals on our bikes do not accommodate them.
- We provide small front handlebar pannier bags, however, it is recommended that you bring a backpack for your day-to-day items.
- Please note that back carriers and water bottle carriers are not provided with our bicycles on this tour.
- We do not provide rain gear so be sure to bring your own lightweight waterproofs.

BIKE AND FITNESS

Although this tour has a couple of longer days and some quite challenging hills it has been deliberately interspersed with transfers and easier, shorter days to keep it within reach of everyone. There is a back-up van available to give you peace of mind and everyone will have their own details so they can take things at their own pace. It is recommended that you do some cycling beforehand as this will make it easier for you.

GROUP, GUIDE AND BACK-UP SERVICE

The group size typically varies from 6 to 14 people. Each group is lead by a guide driving a support van. He/She will sweep the road during the day to check on cyclists. In the afternoon they will be gone for about 2 hours to leave the luggage at your accommodation so may not be on hand to give you a lift, but there is no rush and you have all day to complete the ride. As soon as the guide has delivered the luggage to your accommodation they will sweep back to do a final check on cyclists.

Contact telephone numbers are provided in the route description so that you can contact or leave a message with the guide during the day if necessary. This provides a sense of freedom in that you can travel at your own pace in the security that the guide is there for you in the event that you might need them. Most importantly, the guide hopes to set the right tone, to make you feel welcome to the country and to help you in whatever way possible so that each day you are free to leave your worries behind.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is the currency and how much money should I bring?

Slovenia now uses Euro.

By UK/US/Irish standards Slovenia is a cheap destination with a ½ litre of beer costing around €1.50 and a glass of wine €2.00. A Pizza would be about €5 euro and a decent 3-course meal with a couple of drinks €10 - €15 euro.

What is the Language?

The official language is Slovenian. Most Slovenians speak good English and many speak German and Italian as well! Lots of places will have menus in several languages and, if not, the ever-helpful locals are more than happy to explain. The guide is, of course, fluent in English.

What happens if I am delayed on the first night?

If you know in advance that you will be late please contact our office. If you are unexpectedly delayed you should call the meeting point on Saturday evening and leave a message as to what time you expect to arrive.

What is the weather like?

Slovenia is a small country that enjoys a varied climate based around its distinct regions - Alpine, Continental and Mediterranean. It is known for being on the sunny side of the Alps. The summer days can be extremely warm (30 C) and sunny with rainfall occurring late into the afternoon (5.00 pm or thereabouts).

When does the tour finish up?

The tour arrives back in Bled on Friday night for a last evening meal together. Accommodation is included for that night and you are free to head your separate ways on Saturday morning.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Slovenia is a relatively small country with a small dispersed population (around 2 million inhabitants). Therefore the entry/exit points are fairly limited and it is often better served by places outside of the country.

The main access point is to fly into Ljubljana (the capital). There is a direct bus service from the airport to the centre of Bled. From Ljubljana buses depart from Bay 7 at the main bus station every hour on the hour and takes 1 hour and 15 minutes. You can also take a train up to Bled (the train station in Bled is called "Lesce Bled"). The journey takes just under an hour.

The national airline is Adria Airways and it has a number of direct flights to major European cities including London (Gatwick), Manchester and Dublin (depart Dublin Friday Nights/returning Saturdays only). For more information check (www.adria-airways.com).

Easyjet fly daily into Ljubljana from Stansted (www.easyjet.com)

There are also many alternatives connections through other European hubs such as Frankfurt, Paris, Prague and Budapest with most of the major European Flag Carriers.

Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) fly to Trieste on the Italian side of the border where again you can take a train to and from Bled. The service to and from Trieste is more complicated (as you may have to change trains and train stations in Nova Gorica or Ljubljana) so you should take care in your travel plans if coming to and from this airport. The airport is actually called Ronchi and is some 30km outside the city, which is actually closer to Gorizia (which is one of the trains stopping points).

All the details for the above train journeys are on the website

<http://reiseauskunft.bahn.de/bin/query.exe/en>

(remember that the train station in Bled is called "Lesce Bled" and is 7km from the town of Bled itself)

We can pre-order taxis for you from various locations on request, so please contact us well in advance of the tour if you would like help.

The approximate cost per transfer each way (for a minivan that can take up to 8 people)

Ljubljana airport – Bled	€45.00	Ljubljana city – Bled	€80.00
Bled to Trieste	€150.00		