



# Slavonia

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## Why Go?

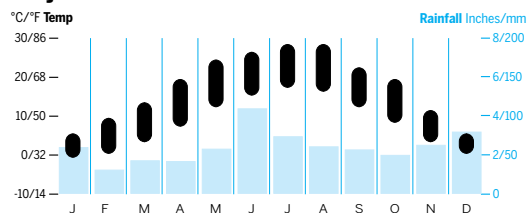
Pancake-flat, river-rich Slavonia is all but untouched by tourism, with unique natural wonders and delicious regional cuisine. The wetlands of Kopački Rit are one of Europe's finest ornithological reserves, perfect for boat tours, biking and hiking. Osijek, Slavonia's largest town, has a lovely river-front setting and fortress quarter, while the Baranja region is renowned for its wineries.

The impact of the war hit hardest in southeast Slavonia, where historic Vukovar is slowly regaining its role as an important regional city and Ilok, on the Serbian border, is again attracting visitors to its fine wine cellars and historic old town.

Bordered by three major rivers (Sava, Drava and Danube), this fascinating region has long held strong connections with Hungary, Serbia and Germany. Slavonia's key appeal lies in this culturally intriguing mix that makes it closer to central Europe than coastal Croatia.

## When to Go

### Osijek



**Apr–May** Spring in Slavonia is a real delight, with mild temperatures and almost no mosquitoes.

**Jun–Sep** Catch any number of festivals, from urban music to sculpture.

**Oct–Mar** The short days are an ideal time to savour paprika-rich Slavonian stews and game.

## History

Before the 1991 war displaced tens of thousands of inhabitants, Slavonia contained one of the most ethnically diverse populations in Europe. Settled by Slavic tribes in the 7th century, the region was conquered by the Turks in the 16th century. Catholic residents fled, and Serbian Orthodox settlers, who were better received by the Turks, arrived en masse.

In 1690 Serb supporters of Vienna, in their battles with the Turks, left Kosovo and settled in the Srijem region around Vukovar. The Turks ceded the land to Austria in 1699 and the Habsburgs turned a large part of the region into a Vojna Krajina (Military Frontier).

The Muslim population left but more Serbs arrived, joined by German merchants; Hungarian, Slovak and Ukrainian peasants; Catholic Albanians; and Jews. Much land was sold to German and Hungarian aristocrats, who built huge baroque and classical mansions around the towns of Osijek, Vukovar and Ilok.

The large Serbian community prompted Slobodan Milošević to attempt to incorporate the region into a 'Greater Serbia'. This assault began with the destruction of Vukovar and the shelling of Osijek in 1991. A ceasefire prevailed in 1992, but it wasn't until January 1998 that the region was returned to Croatia as part of the Dayton peace agreement.

The fighting may be over but the war's impact remains profound. In towns such as Vukovar, Serbs and Croats lead almost totally separate lives. Efforts are being made to bring the communities together, but with limited success so far.

## ⓘ Dangers & Annoyances

Osijek and its surrounds were heavily laid with landmines during the war in the 1990s. Although the city and its outskirts along the main road have been de-mined and are completely safe, it would be unwise to wander through the swamp-land north of the Drava River, which leads to Kopački Rit. Most mined areas are marked; be on the lookout for signs.

In summer, Kopački Rit is besieged by mosquitoes. Wear long sleeves and trousers or slather on plenty of repellent.

## Osijek

☎ 031 / POP 107,784

A historic, leafy university town with a stunning waterfront promenade along the broad Drava River and an imposing 18th-century fortress, Osijek is well worth a visit.

The city suffered terribly in the 1990s from Serb shelling and pockmarks still scar some structures, but most of Osijek's grand buildings (including some fine 19th-century Secessionist mansions) have been renovated.

This elegant regional capital is steadily regaining its poise, boosted by the return of exiles, booming student numbers, new hotels and restaurants and an increasing flow of tourists. You'll find Osijek perfect as an intriguing, cosmopolitan and enjoyable base for day trips to Slavonia's countryside and the wonderful Kopački Rit Nature Park.

## 👁 Sights

### 👁 Tvrđa

Built under Habsburg rule as a defence against Turkish attacks, the 18th-century citadel was relatively undamaged during the recent war. This baroque complex of cobblestone streets, spacious squares and stately mansions reveals a remarkable architectural unity, lending it the feel of an open-air museum.

The main square, Trg Svetog Trojstva, is marked by the elaborate **Holy Trinity Monument**, a baroque pillar erected in 1729 to commemorate the victims of the 18th-century plague that swept the city.

### Gloria Maris Museum

MUSEUM

([www.gloria-maris.hr](http://www.gloria-maris.hr); Svodovi bb; adult/concession 20/10KN; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue, Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, to 1pm Sat & Sun) Housed inside vaults of the old citadel, this museum is dedicated to sea-shells and marine and freshwater life. It's the labour of love of Vladimir Filipović, who has amassed around one million shells in his 48 years of collecting, from all corners of the globe. Enter through the street to the right side of the church.

Check out the most poisonous creature in the ocean (the remains of an octopus from the Philippines), fossils from 650 million years ago, a megalodon tooth and a vast array of exotic shells.

### Museum of Slavonia

MUSEUM

(Muzej Slavonije Osijek; [www.mso.hr](http://www.mso.hr); Trg Svetog Trojstva 6; adult/concession 15/10KN; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) Houses a huge collection of treasures and artefacts relating to Slavonian history, including Bronze Age implements, Roman artefacts from the colony of Mursa, beautiful textiles, weavings, jewellery and fine furniture. Exhibits rotate