Slovenia

HIGHLIGHTS
- **Ljubljana** Slovenia’s ‘Beloved’ capital with a hilltop castle, green spaces and vibrant nightlife (p1031)
- **Škocjan Caves** A vast underground cavern straight out of Jules Verne with a raging river running through it (p1040)
- **Bovec** Probably the best outdoor activities centre in all of Slovenia (p1040)
- **Bled** An impossibly beautiful lake with an island and a hilltop castle as a backdrop (p1037)
- **Piran** Strolling through the romantic Venetian port and enjoying an alfresco seafood meal (p1042)

FAST FACTS
- **Area** 20,273 sq km
- **Budget** €35 to €60 per day
- **Capital** Ljubljana
- **Country code** 🇸🇮 386
- **Famous for** hiking and skiing, Lipizzaner horses, pršut (air-dried ham)
- **Language** Slovene
- **Money** euro (€); AS$1 = €0.55; C$1 = 0.60; ¥100 = €0.78; NZ$1 = €0.43; UK£1 = €1.12; US$1 = €0.74
- **Phrases** dober dan (hello), živijo (hi), prosim (please), hvala (thank you), oprostite (excuse me), nasvidenje (goodbye)
- **Population** 2.018 million

TRAVEL HINTS
Start with www.slovenia.info. Make use of low-cost bicycles in Ljubljana. Bring black tea; it’s not that easy to find.

ROAMING SLOVENIA
Travel north from Ljubljana to Bled and Bovec and, via Kranjska Gora, over the stunning Vršič Pass down into the Soča Valley, the Karst and the coast.

It’s a tiny place, about half the size of Switzerland, and counts just over 2 million people. But ‘good things come in small packages’ and never was that old chestnut more appropriate than in describing Slovenia (Slovenija), a pint-sized republic bordering Italy, Austria, Hungary, Croatia and the Adriatic Sea.

Soaring peaks are hemmed by forests and deep valleys, offering an unparalleled choice of affordable active sports; indeed, in recent years Slovenia really has become Europe’s activities playground. Lowland hills are covered with vines and riddled with awesome caves. The short coastline offers beaches and superb Venetian architecture at Koper and Piran. Many towns have picturesque old quarters, including Ljubljana, with important sights, atmospheric cafes and stylish shops.
Slovenia is safe, compact, friendly and multilingual, with an up-to-date infrastructure and many attractions. It may not be bargain-basement but it’s fabulously good value. And with more than half of its total area covered in forest, Slovenia truly is one of the greenest countries in the world.

**HISTORY**
Slovenes played a key role in the development of democracy. By the early 7th century their Slavic forebears had founded the Duchy of Carantania (now Karnburg in Austria), where ruling dukes were elected by ennobled commoners. This model was noted by Thomas Jefferson when drafting the American Declaration of Independence.

Austria controlled Slovenia almost uninterrupted from the mid-14th century until 1918. After some of the most ferocious fighting in WWI, western Slovenia was handed over to Italy as Austro-Hungarian postwar reparations, and northern Carinthia voted to stay with Austria. The rest of Slovenia joined fellow south (jug) Slavs in forming the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia (Jugoslavija).

Nazi occupation in WWII was for the most part resisted by Slovenian partisans, though the antipartisan Slovenian Domobranci (Home Guards) threw their support behind the Germans after Italy surrendered. The war ended with Slovenia regaining Italian-held areas from Piran to Bovec but losing Trst (Trieste) and Gorica (Gorizia).

Slovenia represented only 8% of the national population of Yugoslavia but was its economic powerhouse, producing up to 20% of the GDP. By the 1980s the federation was becoming increasingly Serb-dominated and Slovenes feared losing their political autonomy. After free elections, Slovenia broke away from Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991. A 10-day war that left 66 people dead followed; Yugoslavia swiftly signed a truce in order to concentrate on regaining control of coastal Croatia instead. Slovenia was admitted to the UN in May 1992 and joined the EU in May 2004. It shared the presidency of the EU Council with France in 2008.

**THE CULTURE**
The population of Slovenia is largely homogeneous. More than 87% are ethnic Slovenes, with the remainder being Croats, Serbians, Bosnians and Roma; there are also small enclaves of Italians and Hungarians. Slovenes are ethnically Slavic, typically multilingual and extroverts, and Roman Catholic (58%).

**ARTS**
Slovenia’s most beloved writer is the Romantic poet France Prešeren (1800–49), whose lyric poetry helped to raise Slovenian national consciousness.

Many of Ljubljana’s most characteristic architectural features were added by Jože Plečnik (1872–1957).

Slovenia’s vibrant music scene embraces rave, techno, jazz, punk, thrash-metal and chansons (eg torch songs from Vita Mavrič); the most popular local rock group is Siddharta. There’s also a folk-music revival: listen for the groups Katic and Katalena.

**ENVIRONMENT**
Slovenia is amazingly green; indeed, just under 57% of its total surface area is covered in forest. Triglav National Park (p1037) is particularly rich in native flowering plants. Among endemic fauna is a blind salamander called Proteus anguinus (see p1040), which lives deep in karst caves and can survive for years without eating.

**TRANSPORT**

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

**Air**
Slovenia’s national airline, Adria Airways (JP; ☎ 080 13 00, 01-369 10 10; www.adria-airways.com) flies to 28 European cities. With the inauguration of nonstop daily flights from London’s Stansted airport by easyJet (EZY; ☎ 04-206 16 77; www.easyjet.com)