



# Štajerska & Koroška

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## Why Go?

Štajerska (Styria in English), far and away Slovenia's largest province, gets a bum rap from other Slovenes. They dismiss the province as one huge industrial farm and tease the locals for being country bumpkins. It's true that Štajerska has more big agricultural land than any other part of Slovenia, but it also has the Savinja Alps, to the west, and the Pohorje Massif, an adventure-land of outdoor activities, to the north. Those in search of culture will be drawn to three of the country's most fascinating historical centres: Maribor, Celje and that little gem, Ptuj.

In stark contrast is tiny Koroška, a mere shadow of what it was before being truncated after WWI. Basically just three valleys, Koroška is a region of forests, mountains and highland meadows and is tailor-made for outdoor activities, including skiing, mountain biking, horse riding and hiking.

## Best Places to Eat

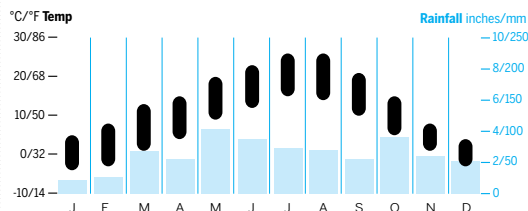
- » Gostilna Ribič (p177)
- » Pri Florjanu (p181)
- » Lastoria (p189)
- » Gril Ranca (p180)

## Best Places to Stay

- » MCC Hostel (p189)
- » MuziKafe (p176)
- » Hotel Mitra (p176)
- » Hostel Pekarna (p179)

## When to Go

### Maribor



**Dec–Mar** Skiers head to Maribor Pohorje, Slovenia's biggest downhill skiing centre.

**Lent** Crowds flock to Ptuj for the annual masked Kurentovanje carnival parade.

**Aug–Oct** Good for walking and climbing in Logarska Dolina.

## ŠTAJERSKA

Štajerska has long been the crossroads of Slovenia and virtually everyone has 'slept here' – Celts, Romans, early Slavs, Habsburgs and the Nazi occupiers. In the 14th century the German-speaking Counts of Celje were among the richest and most powerful feudal dynasties in Central Europe and they challenged the Austrian monarchy's rule for a century. Štajerska suffered more than most of the rest of Slovenia during WWII, when many of its inhabitants were murdered, deported or sent to Nazi labour camps.

### Kozjansko Region

Kozjansko is a remote region along the eastern side of the Posavje Mountains and the 90km-long Sotla River, which forms part of the eastern border with Croatia. It is an area of forests, rolling hills, vineyards, scattered farms and the site of one of Slovenia's three regional parks, with much to offer visitors in the way of spas, two important castles, hiking, cycling and excellent wine.

#### PODČETRTEK & AROUND

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Most people make their way to this village, on a little bump of land extending into Croatia, to relax at the Terme Olimia thermal spa. Looming overhead are the remains of a castle originally built in the 11th century and an important fortification during the wars with the Hungarians 300 years later.

The town's seemingly unpronounceable name comes from the Slovene word for 'Thursday' – the day the market took place and the district court sat.

The centre of Podčetrtek is at the junction of four roads. All buses stop at the crossroads as well as at the spa and the campground. There are three train stations. For the village centre and the castle, get off at Podčetrtek. Atomske Toplice is good for Terme Olimia and the spa hotels. Podčetrtek Toplice is the correct stop for the campground.

#### 👁 Sights

##### Podčetrtek Castle

CASTLE

(Grad Podčetrtek) The enormous Renaissance-style Podčetrtek Castle, atop a 355m-high hill to the northwest of town, went up sometime in the mid-16th century but was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1974. The castle (not open to the public but offering views) can be easily reached by walking

north along Trška cesta and then west on Cesta na Grad for about 1.5km.

##### Olimje Minorite Monastery

MONASTERY

(Minoritski Samostan Olimje; ☎582 91 61; www.olimje.com; Olimje 82; pharmacy adult/child €1/0.50; ☼pharmacy 10am-noon & 1-7pm Mon-Sat) The Olimje Minorite Monastery, 3km southwest of Podčetrtek, was built as a Renaissance-style castle in about 1550. Its **Church of the Assumption**, boasts 17th-century ceiling paintings in the presbytery, one of the largest baroque altars in the country and the unbelievably ornate **Chapel of St Francis Xavier**. On the ground floor of one of the four corner towers is the monastery's greatest treasure: a 17th-century **pharmacy** painted with religious and medical scenes. The Franciscan monks here grow their own herbs and medicinal plants.

##### Čokoladnica Olimje

CHOCOLATE FACTORY

(Olimje Chocolate Boutique; ☎810 90 36; www.syncerus.si; Olimje 61; ☼10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm Sep-May) Čokoladnica Olimje is a short distance from the Olimje Minorite Monastery and makes and sells the most famous chocolate in Slovenia.



#### Activities

##### Terme Olimia

SPA

(☎829 70 00; www.terme-olimia.com; Zdraviliška cesta 24) Formerly known as Atomske Toplice (thus the train station name, Atomske Toplice), Terme Olimia, about 1.2km north-east of Podčetrtek centre, has thermal water (28°C to 35°C) full of magnesium and calcium for health. These days, however, it places most of the emphasis on recreation and beauty. The eight indoor and outdoor pools connected by an underwater passage at the **Termalija** (☎829 78 05; nonguests adult/child Mon-Fri €10.50/8, Sat & Sun €12.50/9.50; ☼8am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat) pool and spa complex alone cover an area of 2000 sq metres. In addition, the complex has two wellness centres: the **Spa Armonia** at the Hotel Sotelia and the luxurious **Orchidelia**.

##### Hiking & Biking

HIKING, BIKING

Some of the most rewarding hikes and bike trips in Slovenia can be made in this area. The free 1:26,000-scale *Podčetrtek-Terme Olimia* tourist map lists and outlines two dozen excursions for walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers. The easiest walks on marked trails take a couple of hours (though the 6.6km-long circuitous one northeast to the 18th-century Church of St Emma at 345m