

# Understand Slovenia

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As independent Slovenia celebrates its silver jubilee, there's good-ish news on the economic front and the capital wins a green award.

## **HISTORY .....228**

From *narod* (nation of people) to *nacija* (nation-state) in just a quarter-century? You've come along way, *Slovenija*.

## **SLOVENIAN WAY OF LIFE.....239**

Well-educated, self-confident, multilingual and athletic – these are just a few of the traits that make up the average Slovene.

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Culture has a special place in Slovenia, where literature, music and fine art helped keep *Slovenstvo* ('Slovene-ness') alive before independence.

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A fusion of influences from its neighbours, plus its own unique ingredients and flavours, make Slovenian cuisine a rising star in Central Europe.

# Slovenia Today

Slovenia's 25th birthday was the official reason for celebrating 2016. But what looked like the start of economic recovery after several years of recession and austerity was the real reason some people were breaking out the bubbly. And the European Commission's recognition of Ljubljana as the Green Capital of Europe after all its hard work was the icing on the cake. Is it party time again in Slovenia?

## Best in Print

**Crumbs** (Miha Mazzini, 1987) Slovenian anti-hero with a crazy obsession in the final days of Yugoslavia.

**Forbidden Bread** (Erica Johnson Debeljak, 2009) A young American follows her poet-lover to his homeland just after independence.

**Čefurji Raus!** (Goran Vojnovič, 2009) Wry look at ex-Yugoslav immigrants in Slovenia.

**Slovenia and the Slovenes: A Small State and the New Europe** (James Gow and Cathie Carmichael, 2010) Excellent analysis of Slovenian history, politics, culture and the arts.

## Best on Film

**Ekspres, Ekspres** (*Gone with the Train*, 1997) Surreal comedy on (and off) the rails.

**Rezerni Deli** (*Spare Parts*, 2003) Dark tale about the trafficking of illegal immigrants.

**Petelinji Zajtrk** (*Rooster's Breakfast*, 2007) Bittersweet romance with lots of laughs.

**Razredni Sovražnik** (*Class Enemy*, 2013) Tragedy leads students to revolt against their teacher.

## The Economy: Guarded Optimism

As the republic of Slovenia moved closer to marking its quarter-century of independence, the mood was guardedly optimistic. Yes, people were concerned with things like the lack of jobs (especially among young people), what they saw as an absence of strong leadership at the highest levels, and – something new in staunchly egalitarian Slovenia – the perceived rise of an elite class working to its own agenda.

But there was good news, and it had to do with the recovering economy. Just a few short years ago Slovenia was in deep recession, and many feared the possibility of a 'Greek scenario' and EU bailout (though on a more modest scale). In 2015, driven by a very strong export sector, lower oil and commodity prices, and increased government investment, the economy was set to grow 2.6%, a rate twice the EU average. True, the jobless rate stood at a stubborn 9.2% (though down from 11% two years before) and the public deficit stood at 5.5% of GDP, but at this point in time Slovenia seemed to be setting the pace for southeastern Europe just as it had done as the smallest but wealthiest republic in the former Yugoslavia.

## Ins & Outs of Government

Slovenia has had four different prime ministers in as many years, and this parliamentary 'revolving door' has begun to seem almost normal to many people here. The days of strong leaders or ones who were able to weather the storm more successfully – the late Janez Drnovšek and Borut Pahor spring to mind – seem a very long time ago indeed.

The current government is a coalition of three parties with very different agendas. These include Prime Minister Miroslav Cerar's centrist Modern Centre Party (SMC), which won 36 of the 90 seats in the snap election of