



Slovenia: Julian Alps to the Adriatic Trip Notes **June 1-13, 2017**

Headlines:

- This little country is only the size of New Jersey but with about as much variety as many of our states put together.
- The 2 million inhabitants speak perfect accent free English. They look good too.
- They are part of the Baltic States and were part of Yugoslavia before independence in 1991.
- It is a wonderful tourist destination that should be on every traveler's wish list. It made me almost forget that I always pine for Paris.
- This was hardly a hike: more of a stroll with average mileage at 5.5 miles a day. Tom and I did more miles on our own.

CountryWalkers.com contradictions:

- It's hard to imagine one trip being run by the same company as another trip. There is a lack of continuity.
- Guides either welcome Tom openly, or say he can't sit with the group, and either blame the home office or the home office blames the guides.
- Difficulty of an easy-to-moderate trip can vary as much as being okay for an 80 year old in flip flops to needing trekking poles.
- Free time between the days itinerary until dinner could be a long afternoon or only 20 minutes.
- Alcohol availability can be limited to a skimpy one-bottle-for-three-persons rule at dinner to free flowing at both lunch and dinner on other tours. After dinner drinks are provided by some guides or on your own dime with others.
- Coffee or snacks mid-morning are included by some guides, and not by others. Sometimes tours when we stop at a café it's included. Some tours just offer grocery packet of cookies.
- Some tours handle luggage, and some tours only do by request.
- Despite the trips costing the same, they can be ultra-generous or very stingy. The cost to the customer is generally the same.

Always the guides are local, well-educated with an interesting specialty, reasonably young and personable. And I have more booked and might book another one.

I AM looking forward to next week's 7-day hike in Yosemite with www.ParksPlusHiking.com. I know what I'll get: one van, not too many hikers and they all fit in ONE van vs the two we had in Slovenia, always the same two very experienced guides, lots of good food and a welcoming to Tom when he chooses to accompany me, and for a super price.

Daily Notes:

Thursday into Ljubljana - that is Slovenia for those of you as geographically challenged as I was. There are a few of those S – countries but this is not Slovakia or Serbia or - damn there's one more. I am reading a book called "Balkan ghosts" and should know.

Thursday became Friday with an overnight flight.

The trip was a snap. All you have to do is pay up for first class lie flat seats and be willing to have a 3 to 4 hours overlay in Munich at the lounge and have a hotel car pick you up. I say snap, but we broke a rule and got into our hotel and immediately crashed for a nap. We are old after all.

Airline food was good, Newark lounge food was good, Munich food lounge was good, and the airlines never ceases to amaze me that they can feed so many of us multi-courses of good food. Tom had a stuffed ravioli and I had poached salmon. It took us close to seven hours after landing before we thought we were hungry again. But we did and it was eventful.

Remember the San Antonio Riverwalk? This is filled full of ancient historical and lovely European buildings all along a greenery riverfront. Friday night and a world full of beautiful people are out celebrating. The hotel sent us to Julia restaurant on the river and we were pleasantly surprised at receiving a perfect table half inside and half outside with a view of the parade of people and the river. Tom had a traditional goulash dish and I had an Istrian pasta with mushroom and asparagus dish. (We go to Istria next May.) The local Merlot accompanied it until we learned about a local beer called Union that Tom added to his taste test. Despite eating too much still again we had enough energy left to walk two or three bridges farther away to their "triple bridge" and the big grand place. These folks know how to party. The street musicians were on a multi person bicycle.

Our hotel is the noted Antiq palace, a historic residence from the 16th century and a part of Ljubljana's cultural heritage. It belongs to the luxury hotels of the world but is a collection of a small homes put together and rather eclectic. We have what is called a residence suite (850 sq ft) with the dining room complete with a piano that I can't imagine why. The garden was lovely where we had coffee while waiting for our room to be ready and where a next door music school was practicing. I liked it. Tom thought it spoiled the affect.

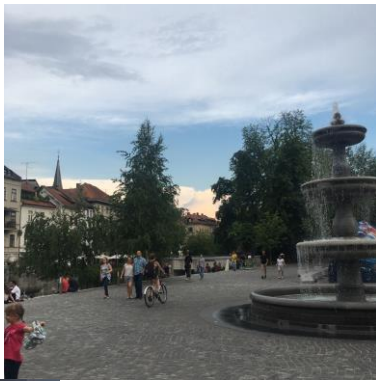


If he thinks that spoiled the effect, the evening partiers along the Riverwalk might really do it.

Weather was fine but I could have used cooler. We are in the 70s to low 80s in the day and high 50s at night. The hotel is not air-conditioned as they cannot due to the historical preservation laws but they did bring us a single stand-alone air conditioner unit that wasn't worth much.

Pictures include:

- Looking down on part of the hotel's garden where we will have breakfast.
- One of the many squares along the river sides where there are multiple bridges.
- The perfect table and near perfect food for our first night.
- Just up the hill from our hotel is their famous castle. Fortunately it has a cable car so we might get there.
- Friday night and the river was for of partiers in a boat and clubgoers along the edge.
- Now here's a new one. There were kiosks selling ice cream rolls. Like Starbucks has a barrister, this ice cream shop has someone to chop up the ice cream and then rolled it out along a frozen stainless steel surface, and then roll it up giving you a cup of thin little ice cream pierottes. Decadent.
- Manhole covers. Some of you know that my sister Beverly collects pictures of the manhole covers. Don't laugh. Start looking as some are absolutely unique if not lovely. Here's a couple of different ones.
- Plus a shot from the hotel with the hope that Tom takes some pictures to share later.



Saturday was our first full day in Ljubljana.

We can understand why some travel writers believe Ljubljana is the next Prague. If Krakow doesn't beat it out (and we go there in September). We will come again.

Breakfast was not expansive but it was plenty elegant to include duck liver pate. Smoked salmon and caviar. This hotel is reasonably small with only 16 rooms. So guess who wanted a duck pate sandwich made for a later picnic?

4 o'clock syndrome is alive and well. Our first day, yesterday, we succumbed to a short nap and this morning at 4 o'clock we were both wide-awake. This afternoon is no exception though only one of us fell into bed. The other one may as well have.

We were up early for a morning walking tour. The town is small as evidenced by the whole country being smaller than New Jersey and only including 2 million inhabitants. We had the thought that there were that many out on the streets this morning.

It was hot. So when we were done with the tour I went shopping to find a skimpy little dress. Comfort was to be the priority but after trying on one I gave that up and got more realistic for someone in their 70s. I'm not usually one for enjoying shopping but their galleria with five floors of designer brands was an interesting experience. There is plenty of money being spent here. Best? It was cool in the galleria.

Their two main heroes are a poet and an architect. Instead of big sculptures of a general, here we met our walking tour under the statue of a poet. Architecture is strong on the Vienna look. In the 1800s they had a major earthquake and were under control of the Habsburgs and thus that architectural style.

Food choices also are a mixture from the Italian influence to the German. We are told that the typical Slovenian fare will be found outside of the city. Restaurants appear to be numerous and packed but maybe that has to do with a festival this weekend. We visited the market which is in large part food oriented and fresh food sounds to be a priority here.

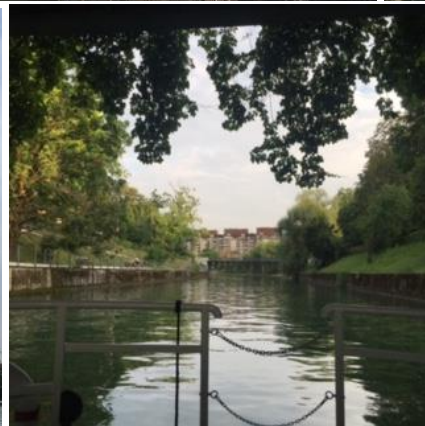
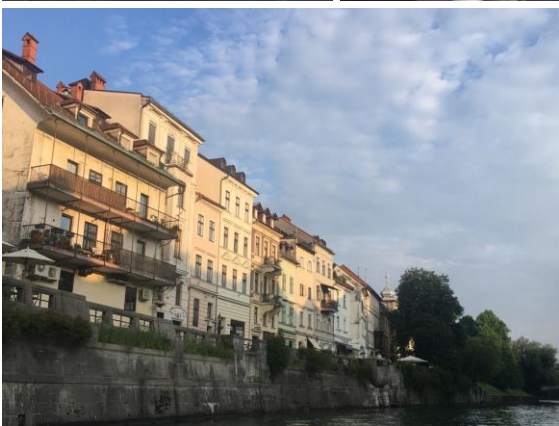
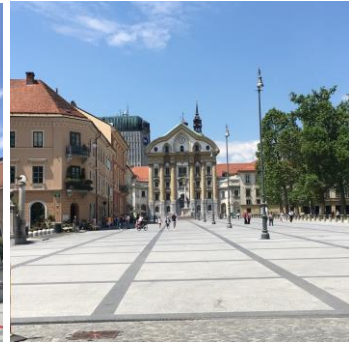
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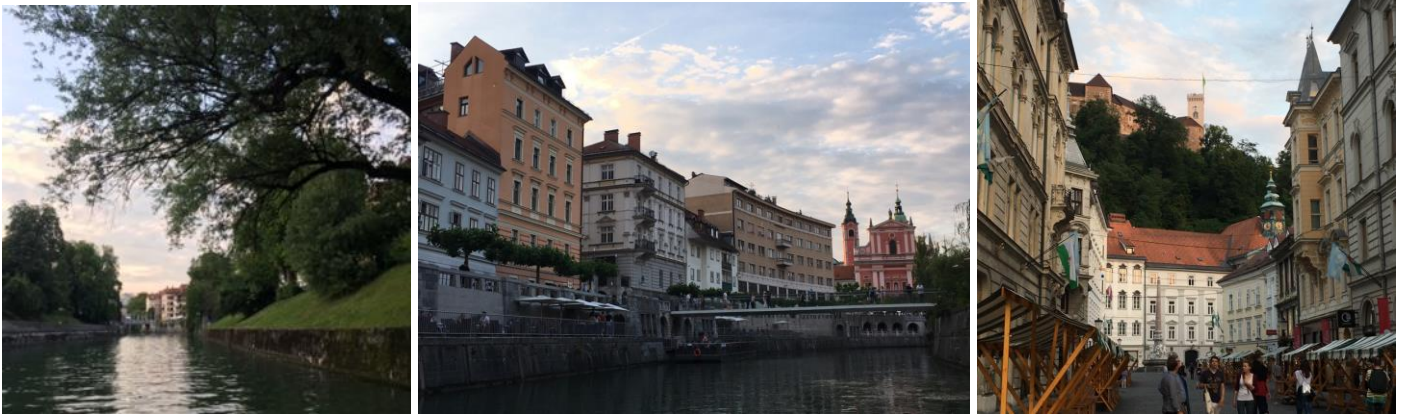
- Breakfast before a walk through town and over numerous bridges to include the dragon bridge the dragons were to protect them.
- One fountain was to denote their multiple crossing rivers and to be in the style of Navaro Plaza in Rome. Rome's was created by Bernini and I don't believe anyone or anything can come close. Our hotel is just under the hill with the castle and with another lovely square close by.
- City planners have done a wonderful job of leaving large open Plazas. This one is near to us called Congress Square and includes a major university, place of protests, and a Presbyterian Church.
- Their cathedral was rather dramatic and oddly planted right next to the outdoor market; the market included a festival which included a competition for cooking this Slovenian stew. You will see a picture of the pots hanging over wood fires with people spooning out samples. Not far away was a shop for sausage sandwiches at three euros each. Get a load of the sign -- a giant sausage.
- The picture of the river, bridge and major architectural building with those lovely clouds? Yes that came from my iPhone and it is not a professional picture.

By early evening we were ready for a boat tour of the river. The weather finally became cool enough to be reasonable. It didn't take long for it to show us another side of Ljubljana. It was calm and weeping willow draped, and with the sun going down maybe one could even say it was romantic.

What did we do for dinner? Are you sitting down? Mr. Burton is going to lose his reputation but we walked so far looking for so many special places that were all full or too noisy or just impossible that he finally found a lovely little pub area by the side of the river with a view of the castle and said I want a hamburger. Done.

And on that, I think I'll say good night.





Sunday - still in Ljubljana

I was out on my own today with Tom resting up for a hilltop visit to the castle later in the day when it cools off. Thus I put on a few miles. (Surprisingly yesterday was over 7 miles.)

The weather was slightly better assisted by my having a loose summer dress and a bit of cloud cover and a nice breeze.

I felt the need to pace out the location, distance and time to get to the hotel meeting location on Monday morning (tomorrow) for the start of my tour. Did you notice that I quit calling it a hike - because we barely do 6 or 7 miles in a day? The joke might be on me this time now that I didn't bring my trekking poles.

So also did I pace out the pathway to the funicular to go up the hill top to the castle later in the day; I even started up the little alleyway for the climb and then thought better of it with all the sweating going on. Oops. I think we are supposed to call that glistening not sweating.

The market sure looked different being empty today but there was a science fair going on and various craft booths along the river side. The restaurants continue to be fully loaded and again I think how strong this economy is. My destination was the wide boulevard where the locals used to have their Sunday stroll and showing off parade on the way to Tivoli Park. The surprises included huge lovely buildings of the national Gallery, the noted skyscraper for a topside view, Museum of modern Art, and a major old style building for the opera house.

I passed a jazz club with a big billboard quoting George Gershwin "***Life is a lot like jazz. It is best when you improvise.***" It reminded me of friend Ellen's message "some of my best adventures were when I was lost." I firmly believe that some of my best tourist times has been when I simply wander and follow my nose. Lost is usually totally acceptable. (Did you know that Google maps can be downloaded and works off-line?).

Pictures include:

- A unique ceiling design in a little café near to Town Hall. One of the many different water fountains throughout town but the only kangaroo I saw. And since sister Beverly's manhole covers collection has gotten some extra attention, here's another one.
- There's a lot of sculpture around town and the giant size Adam and Eve are certainly different. Adam has a big hole at the rib area. The bearded artist who must look like a homeless person is said to hang around them asking tourist their opinion. Along the same bridge that is partly a glass walkway are the famous love locks as well as numerous small sculptures along the railing. I went into the old and famous and allegedly pricey grand hotel but decided the outside was its best feature. It had been excessively modernized. Across the street was some weird red and green building which appeared to be an embassy.
- I am not as impressed with balconies as I used to be since I've learned that some old balconies were just converted toilets that used to empty into the river.



- You wonder why I gave you pictures of garbage cans. They are new, modern and there are always at least six different types of recycling. I guess a small country would have less area and more need to recycle.
- The weird mustard yellow and brown Tudor style building sticks out like a sore thumb. It is just off the main boulevard to Tivoli Park. I am sorry to report that it is the US Embassy. It is near to all those beautiful museums and opera house buildings

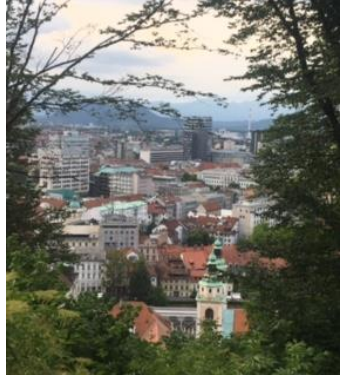
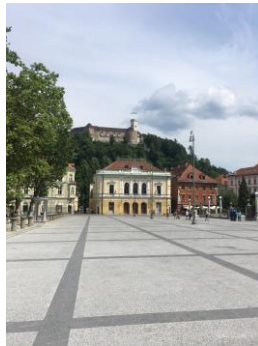
As I wandered I was continually amazed at the wide boulevards and the multitude of green and parks. Also at the young and healthy people but who knows if they are tourists or residents.

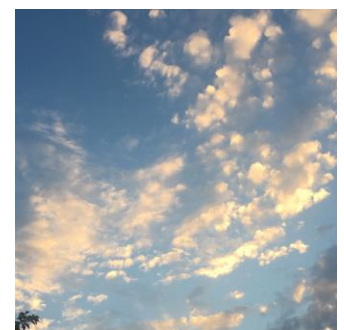
Another surprise is the perfect English. It appears that like Estonia and Finland that they watched a lot of American television. Maybe here like in Estonia American television is not dubbed but sub-titled. Their English is so near perfect that you would find it easier to be a tourist here than in London.

Is it clean? Is it safe? Despite all the many puppies, both small and large dogs, the streets are clean. Despite the festival and crowds the streets immediately become clean. The hotel assures me that it is totally safe at all hours to walk and even alone and I certainly felt that sense of comfort. Despite that, and maybe just as a security blanket, our tour guide reminded us that there could be pickpockets.

We finished our day up high on the hilltop at the 14 century castle since renovated of course. It is said that if you want food from Slovenia that is one of the few places to get it in their capital city. And on that sunset picture up at the castle I now say good night. Happy dessert eating.







Monday from Ljubljana to Lake Bled

Ljubljana folks sure know how to party. Either that or it's a lot of tourists having loud parties out our window until at least 4 AM.

So is it no surprise that I'm already looking to see when is our free afternoon of the tour? I was up at 6 AM and must be up at 6 AM again tomorrow.

Today is Monday, day one of the hike and it was all of sun and rain and clouds and fog and wind. We started by unpacking our suitcases and putting on all the clothes we had and ended up with semi stripping down.

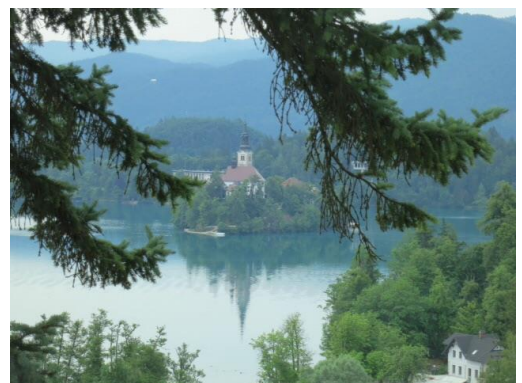
From the itinerary: You meet your guide(s) and fellow travelers in the lobby of the Vander Urbani Resort in Ljubljana, the country's charming capital situated between the Alps and the Adriatic (voted European Green Capital for 2016). After a brief welcome and introductions, you set off for an hour-long drive to the Kamnik Alps and Velika Planina (literally "Big Pasture" in Slovenian). Upon arrival in Kamniska Bistrica, a short gondola ride takes you to the highlands (at an elevation of 5,286 feet). This area is one of very few shepherds' settlements of this scale preserved in Europe, and during the summer months, herdsmen bring their flocks to these highland pastures to graze. As you walk, the picturesque limestone peaks and the sound of cowbells tinkling in the air will transport you to another era, reminiscent of the "Sound of Music." Wind your way past traditional wooden huts, with their unique conical, pine-shingled roofs that extend so low it looks from afar like they touch the ground. Meet our friend Francka, and enjoy a tour of her hut and a well-deserved picnic featuring some of her cheeses, fresh yogurts, buckwheat dumplings, herbal teas, and even a nip of the local brandies. For those guests embarking on today's full walking circuit, the trail continues up to the chapel of Snow Mary, a beautiful structure built before World War II. (Masses are still held every Sunday in summer as well as a midnight mass on Christmas Eve.) Afterward, you descend back to the settlement, reuniting with guests who may have remained to chat with Francka or visit the local museum.

The gondola whisks you back down to the valley, and you continue (approximately one hour via minivan) to Lake Bled, and your home for the next three nights. With its fairytale castle, Lake Bled is undeniably the most stunning lake in the Alps. After settling into your hotel, you reunite for a welcome drink followed by a dinner of local specialties beef carpaccio from nearby Bohinj, green pea soup with scallops, fillet of lake trout with parsley root cream, and lamb cutlet crusted with almond and wild herbs may be among the offerings, topped off with a pear tart with tepka pear ice cream—served in the panoramic restaurant or (weather permitting) on the outdoor terrace.

The Hotel Hotel Triglav on Lake Bled is for 3 nights and that is always and appreciated long stay for any tour. Tom had rented a car in Ljubljana and was already in the room rested up when I arrived. Of course he arranged for us a lovely corner suite with a long wide balcony overlooking the famous lake.

www.hoteltriglavbled.si from their website: There are myriad vantage points of the beautiful lake from the Hotel Triglav. Cheerful fabrics complement the antique furniture, bringing charm and life to this 110-year old hotel. An indoor pool and sauna offer a sanctuary to relax after your day's adventures. End.

It is said that dignitaries visiting Ljubljana generally visit Lake Bled,



only one hour drive away. Bled is famous for the picturesque chapel on the island of the lake and also the big castle. Tito from ex-Yugoslavia had a home on the lake as do other wealthy people.

Pictures include:

- Up high in the hills we encountered little huts for overnight stays and simple meals. Further on we found a world renowned and historical correct Shepard's Village. The shepherds reside during the season, they make cheese in the Swiss method, then rent out their simple no-electricity and no-water huts to skiers during the winter. Thank you skiers for the need for a cable car built to the top.
- It was tough enough for the 800 or so feet climb up through the pastures. Up higher yet on the hill was a little chapel made of local woods and the architect was the famous one from Ljubljana. There are yearly candlelit pilgrimages to this chapel.
- Lunch of barley vegetables and sausage soup was finished with a unique strudel that can be eaten breakfast, lunch or dinner. It is a soft dough having been steamed instead of baked and is filled with ricotta cheese.
- Tom got to the hotel long before I did with the hiker's, and had already arranged a lovely corner suite with a big balcony overlooking the lake to one side and the village and Alps on the other side.
- Dinner at the hotel was mixed. It had been preceded by Country Walkers mandating that Tom could not join the group and certainly I didn't want him eating alone so we all separated but for a lovely dinner.

Dinner: There was a salmon amousette. Stuffed fig and goat cheese. A choice of a beef dish or a fish. It finished with a unique apple strudel which I thought a little cutsie in a canning jar and simply layered.

I'm still hoping for more pictures from Tom who's camera does a better job but the picture from our balcony of the lake with its famous island closes off my list of pictures.

Dinner was until well after 10:30 PM, and getting up at 6 AM makes for a very short night. The daylight and birds coming up at 4 AM makes for even shorter.



Tuesday - still hanging in there despite being rain-drenched full time.

The weather caused a change of the itinerary to a portion of Wednesday's plans. The weather wasn't cooperating at all but when you think about Slovenia having so many rivers and being Europe's green capital, then is it no wonder it rains a lot?

From the itinerary: This morning, after another bountiful breakfast, you head north to explore the Vintgar Gorge. The gorge takes its name from the German term for "wine garden" as there used to be vineyards in the region, and it has been a popular tourist destination for more than a hundred years. The walking path runs along the rock wall of the mile-long gorge, hovering just above the flowing Radovna River, whose emerald waters rush through cascades and rapids, and form mesmerizing crystalline pools. The gorge ends at the

delightful Šum waterfall, the highest river fall in Slovenia at 82 feet. After taking in the falls and the old stone railway bridge, you may choose to retrace your steps to the entrance of the gorge or, for a longer walk, you can continue up to Hom hill, through green meadows, and past St. Catherine Church, looping back to the starting point.

By midday, you return to Bled for lunch on your own at one of the many lakeside cafes, with recommendations from your guides, of course. Be sure to try the famous local desserts like kremšnita (cream cake) or grmada (akin to rum-raisin pudding and literally translated as “bonfire”). Afterward, you may wish to climb up to Bled Castle. Built on a cliff top in 1004, the castle was the seat of the Austrian bishops of Brixen. Even if you opt not to visit the castle itself, the views of the lake and mountains are worth the climb. End.

Pictures include:

- The view from our balcony to the famous Island which is in fact Slovenia's only island with the church at top of which we would go to the next day via boat.
- Then to the gorge where we would walk on and on with one beautiful waterfall after another. Additionally there were little birds called dippers that we watched disappear into the water for their fishing.
- With a little semblance to Switzerland, there are cows all over. In this case there was also a little burro that are hikers wanted to feed. Tom says we have at least one cow within hearing distance of our balcony. You know that because of the cowbells.

From the itinerary of which must have expected no rain: The old town of Radovljica is one of the best-preserved in Slovenia, with houses dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The town sits atop a natural promontory, overlooking the Dežela plain to the east and the Sava river valley to the west, the Julian Alps dominating the background. Noteworthy attractions include the Museum of Apiculture, which offers a fascinating insight into Slovene beekeeping traditions. After a brief stroll through town and opportunity for independent exploration, you continue to Lectar Restaurant for a dinner of Slovene fare served up by staff in traditional dress. The menu features hearty soups, home-baked bread, seasonal salads, štruklji (rolled dough dumplings with a range of fillings), and local beer or wine from some of the country's renowned cellars. Save room for dessert—likely to be a potica (a sweet yeasted dough rolled with nuts or other fillings) or apple strudel. After dinner, take a peek into the cellar workshop where gingerbread hearts continue to be made in the timehonored tradition. End.

The weather has been pretty miserable. Something akin to my Netherlands hike just before the last one. Moss might start growing on my legs. It was not to get any better for a while.

Later in the day pictures include:

- The beekeeping in Slovenia is famous worldwide. Though Bees might work in hollow tree trunks, beekeepers have been rather creative to include a lovely little house and or statuary of people or even a lion.
- This is a pile of the old money that became worthless right after communist days. It would take something like 470 of these 50 Cent pieces to make one euro. I thought they were rather pretty but such a sad story. As we entered the gingerbread also known as honey bread museum, we had accordion entertainment.
- Little did I know that gingerbread wasn't always for eating. Little hearts are created and often times Retained as treasures for a lifetime. And amazingly they are still edible. They are made from the local honey. This facility had been in business since the 1400s.
- Dinner started with either mushroom soup in a bread bowl with a topper or pumpkin soup. I forgot to take a picture of our meat and sauerkraut dish until there was nothing but leftovers. Surely the leftovers would be enough to feed a family. We did our best. Most of us found room for the green apple sorbet for dessert. Accordion, guitar and harmonica polka type music was not exactly conducive to conversation but reminded us that polka came from here.
- There are not many street scenes of this well preserved historical town because it was still pouring rain and pretty cold.



Wednesday - it hasn't dried up or seen one single ray of sunshine since the first hot day in Ljubljana. But did we go out anyway? Every darn one of us. And we came in soaked and some despite having just purchased new waterproof clothing at the ski store.

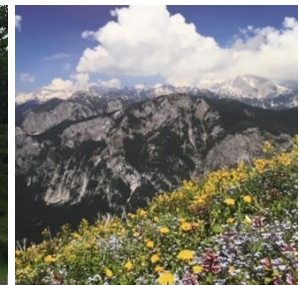
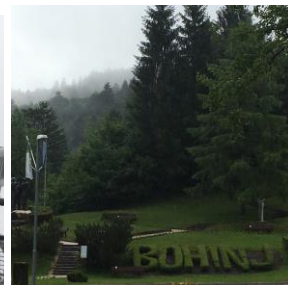
Slovenia is big on mountaineering. That's what families do for entertainment so it's no wonder so many sports records.

From the itinerary: After a hearty buffet breakfast of fresh bread, homemade jams, cured meats and cheeses, you depart via minivan to walk Lake Bled's untamed brother, Lake Bohinj, in the heart of Triglav National Park. The day begins with a cable car up to Mt. Vogel, a popular ski resort in the wintertime. Sitting 3,000 feet above the lake, you have an amazing vantage point from which to admire the picture perfect Julian Alps. Afterward, descend back to the valley, and embark on an easy walking circuit skirting the shores of the lake—Slovenia's largest glacial lake. Surrounded by majestic mountains and dramatic cliffs, this region also offers diverse flora, from orchids to the Carniola and Turk's cap lilies to many Alpine flowers, including the Triglav (literally "three-headed") gentian—named after the highest mountain in the heart of the park. A scenic lakeside spot is selected for a picnic lunch of fresh bread, local cold cuts and cheeses, seasonal fruit, and cookies. (Fortunately we ate in a nice warm and dry local tavern). Mid-afternoon, you may join your guides to return along the lakeside footpath to the hotel, passing great villas, most from the beginning of the 19th century—including Tito's former residence, now a hotel. Enjoy a swim, or relax with a book on the terrace before reconvening for a special early-evening aperitif and visit to the romantic island on the lake. You'll board traditional Pletna boats and savor a glass of wine while sailing to the 10th-century church on the small island of Otok. End.

Pictures include:

- Bohinj is part of their ski resort and one of the highest mountains. Our guides must have assumed that it would be clear on top or surely they wouldn't have taken us. We had a coffee, looked at the solid fog, and came right back down. Down to solid rain which put some other hikers into the store to buy rain gear. It didn't work.
- We did get a little warmth on the way up in the form of a local grappa.
- I'm sure you're guessing and you are right that the sunny pictures with the puffy white clouds was a poster. No matter, we continued on with our planned hike around the lake. It was up and down roots and rocks and it might have been very pleasant were it not for the heavy rain. The rain let up some when we were done.
- I hadn't brought my trekking poles having not needed them on many of the country walkers hikes, but thank heavens the guide offered the use of his as they were seriously needed.
- The park is huge and is their only national Park. Housing is not allowed but a few exist because they were grandfathered. Someone with statuary is a private residence. That one with the window-boxes looks like a Swiss chalet was the site of our restaurant.
- Later in the day was a boat trip out to the famous island of Lake Bled by way of famous castles and villas. Largest had belonged to the king then later to Tito. We were treated to a local wine on the way.
- On the island the Asians were out in large numbers. Our guide offered that they typically are only interested in taking pictures with no interest in history. And they want to go a lot of places in what I refer to as flyovers. They came in these little boats that made me think of a flotilla yet they were rowed by a Gondolier.
- There are 99 steps to get to the church and it is said that a groom must carry his bride up the 99 stairs and she must remain quiet.

We ate in the hotel, my having given up the group dinner in the town.



the highest road in Slovenia), you enter the Soča Valley, the mountainous World War I battleground vividly described in the Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*. (In fact, it's rumored that your hotel tonight is where Hemingway penned the piece!)

The stunning turquoise waters of the Soča are especially popular with kayakers. You walk along the Soča Trail, beginning in the quaint village of Trenta (one of two in the horseshoe-shaped valley) and continue along the banks of the river to the Jelinčič family farm, where you stop for a visit and lunch. Fresh fish from the river, award-winning organic sheep cheese, fresh bread, and čompe (boiled potatoes) refuel you for the optional hour-long walk through picturesque forests and meadows (or you may wish to visit the small falls just past the farm).

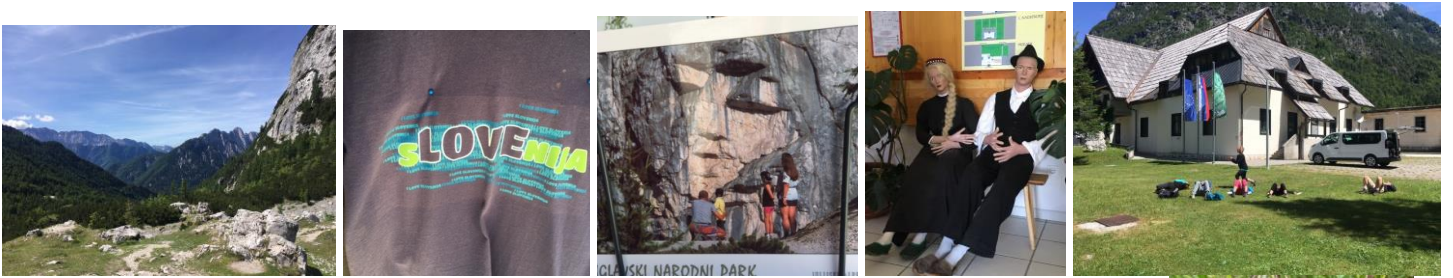
By late afternoon, you reach Kobarid and the Hiša Franko, a charming countryside villa and your home for the night. Hiša Franko is also home to one of Slovenia's best chefs— Ana Roš. Ana is considered one of the most progressive chefs in Southern Europe, and she is completely self-taught. Together with her husband, Valter, she creates an unforgettable foray into Slovene food and wine.

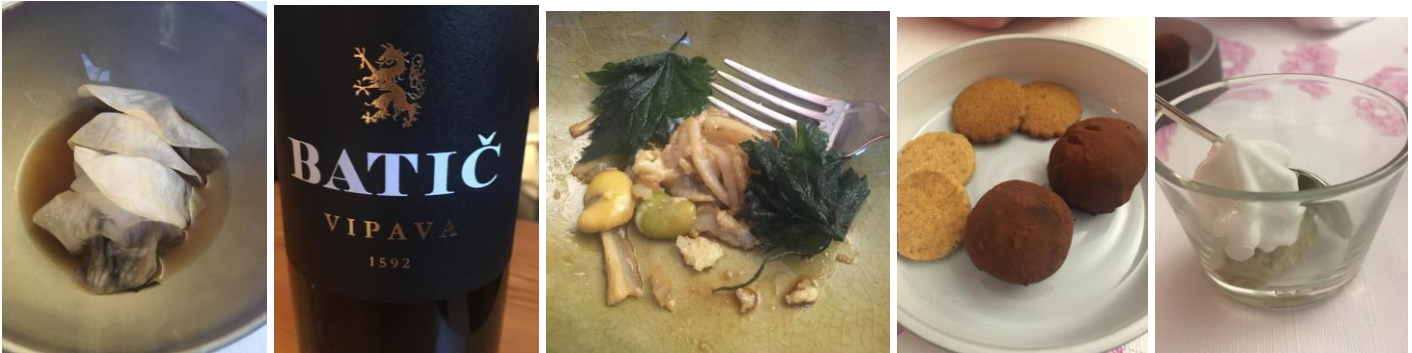
After checking into your rooms, your evening begins with an invitation into their cellar for a tour of Valter's extensive (mostly Slovenian) wine selections and a tasting of local cheeses before proceeding upstairs for a memorable dinner—menus change seasonally but feature local products from the surrounding area, and may include items as innovative as black cod in ash tempura with asparagus and truffles, followed by an apple strudel dessert. End

Pictures include:

- Our two guides.
- The little car is a model of the smart car that I had not seen before.
- If you look up into the mountains there is a "window." A close-up from the poster makes it easier to find. When Vladimir Putin visited for the hundredth anniversary of the Russian deaths (The Russian prisoners built the road with 50 hairpin turns) it had been agreed that all roads leading to the area (which nearly included in the entire country) would be closed off and all windows would be blacked. When his security team saw the "window" up in the mountains they blew a gasket. The country had a big he ha over that.
- There is also a woman's face in the rocks. It was very hard to see so I guess the Russian security team allowed that spy be left alone.
- The site of a folk museum was a picnic prepared by our guides. Since it was almost noon we all presumed it to be lunch. But no, come 3 o'clock we arrived at a lovely riverside family run farm where we were served a typical Slovenian soup of sauerkraut, potatoes, beans and a "rib" which I called a thick slab bacon. We shouldn't have been hungry but I think we all ate it all.
- This was one of many swinging bridges we would cross. Later we would see a small school of rock climbers to include a young child.
- The pink flowers are protected due to their rarity.
- During communist days, Coca-Cola was unavailable so they created a local product. It is really sweet. Cleveland has a large population of Slovenians and apparently some have it imported.
- At various places of the Soca River, we watched white water rafting, kayaks, canoes, and two girls and jumping into the river.
- The famous restaurant was the hit of the day. Some of us thought it was a big far out and might have preferred simpler fare but it was certainly interesting. Actually I think the menu is a bit of a hoot.

And on that I think I'll call it quits for the day as much because I am a couple days behind. Getting up before 6 AM and turning the light off at midnight isn't enough for us lazies.





Friday - from our little farmhouse with the famous gourmet restaurant, off to the Tuscany of Slovenia, followed by a drive-through Italy and the town of Trieste and finally to the UNESCO site of Piran.

In the van our guide amused us with tourist info, lots of history, and a background of selected Slovenian music. I especially liked the female singer called Severina Virijen. I was reminded that the melodious meditative songs were her older classics whereas her current music was quite different.

If you want to learn more about this area of Koribid, read the Ernest Hemingway book "a farewell to arms" as it has to do with this town and his time as an ambulance driver in the vicinity. It was here he fell in love with the older nurse.

From the itinerary: It's an early start today, with breakfast served outdoors in the shaded garden by the brook, with views of the dramatic Kobariski Stol mountain. After fueling up with freshly baked bread, pastries, homemade marmalade, Alpine butter, cheese, cottage cheese, and local fruit, you bid your hosts farewell and depart for a guided tour of the World War I museum in town. Walk through history, taking in battlefield maps, country flags, and portraits of soldiers and gravestones. Alternatively, you may opt to stretch your legs on an easy, hour-long walk along the Kobarid historical trail to the "hidden" waterfall of Kozjak, with a cascade of water that falls from approximately 45 feet. A dirt road leads you across a meadow, and then you follow a path by the riverbed of the emerald Soča River. The Kozjak Brook springs from Mt. Krnčica (7,028 feet), making six waterfalls in its journey to feed the Soča River. The beautiful Kozjak Waterfall flows into a natural amphitheater carved into rock.

Your next destination is the wine-growing region of Goriška Brda (one-hour drive) and the picturesque Gorizia Hills bordering Italy's Collio region. Goriska Brda is increasingly gaining attention because of its innovative winemakers and its ancient method of aging wine in qvevri, large earthenware vessels lined with beeswax and buried below ground. The region is also well known for its fruit (cherries, peaches, apricots) and olive oil. On arrival, you'll enjoy lunch and a wine tasting at Klinec—a family winery and restaurant in the pretty hilltop town of Medana, overlooking vineyards and olive and fruit orchards. The restaurant serves local, seasonal specialties, such as wild asparagus and white polenta and pršutov toč (fried prosciutto and wine).

Feeling sated and better acquainted with Slovenian wines, you continue to the Adriatic Coast (2-hour transfer) and the stunning seaside town of Piran. Time and interest permitting, you may arrive at your seafront hotel via a coastal footpath. Ideally situated on the tip of a narrow peninsula, Piran is the bestpreserved cultural monument of Slovenia's Istria region. Upon arriving at your hotel, your guides provide a brief orientation as well as recommendations for dinner on your own. End.

Hotel Piran, in Piran, might have been the only time I saw Tom as unhappy with any hotel. We had agreed to an upgrade suite but apparently it was awful looking and he ended up accepting a two room accommodation with two small bathrooms. But he was soon to learn that many things didn't work and in particular the air conditioning. He called it a two star hotel masquerading as a four star. I would guess it got four stars because it was the best in town and it was location-location-location. I have to admit that many in our group thought it was fabulous. We are getting jaded.

See his separate and interesting story of meeting a fellow car buff then learning it was the hotel owner.

I arrived to the hotel well after 6pm and he had yet to nap, a requirement. So other than hearing about the hotel mess I hardly talked to Tom the entire day.

From the website: The Hotel Piran is a modern hotel that commands a majestic location overlooking the Adriatic on one side and the medieval town on the other. Your sea-facing room offers a balcony to take in the breathtaking view, and the room itself is comfortable and well appointed. End.

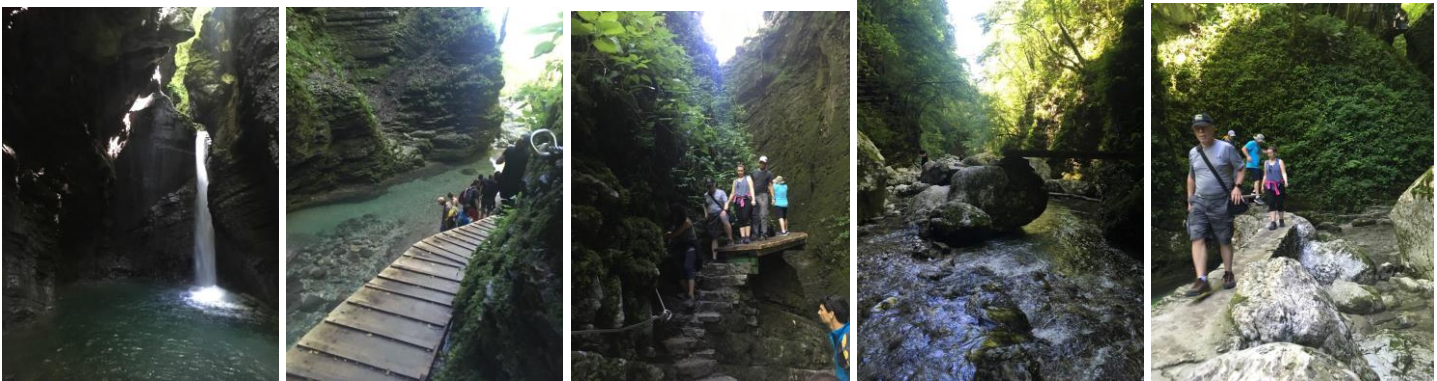
Pictures include:

- The gardens and surrounding mountain side of our one night hotel before driving to Piran.
- The little local town was exceptional in that it had no damage from the famous and devastating World War I battles that took place in its area. It has a famous war museum of significance and awards. If you want to shed a few tears like in holocaust museums, go here.
- A drive took us to a unique waterfall, unique as much because of the challenge to get to it. Hiking over a swinging bridge, narrow rock bridges, tiny slippery steps, handrails, cables and single file wooden walkways took us to a dark hole with a loud huge tall waterfall. Only five or six people could be in there at a time.
- A long drive took us into an all different type of landscape. It could have been the rolling hills and vineyards of Tuscany or Piedmont. After an overview by the fourth generation family-run vineyard and their cellars, we sat for a delicious local meal and felt a wee bit sorry for this little puppy who was begging.
- The family run business also included cheeses and curing meats. You might know that these big hunks of meat cost according to the amount of aging. The wines were quite interesting with a good flavor but little to no nose, very little after flavor, and oddly without much of any "legs". While in the cellars we got to taste a series of older wines to include a 2000.

The owner was one of those sexy looking Italian men with more than a Don Johnson beard, loads of hair, weather-beaten and healthy, yet that you would not take home to mama.

We drove about an hour and a half to get to the winemaking region on the edge of Italy. Then we drove two hours through Italy, via Trieste along the coast, which looked entirely different. Our final destination for the next two nights was in the UNESCO town of Piran, and it was again quite different a different terrain. It was on their 25 miles of limited coastline. For such a small country it seems to have some of everything.

It had been a very long day with lots of different terrain. It was no wonder they gave us an evening off to find either our peanut butter sandwich or one of the many special restaurants along the water's edge.



Saturday - our last day of the hike and still in the coastal town of Piran.

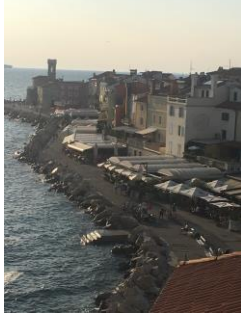
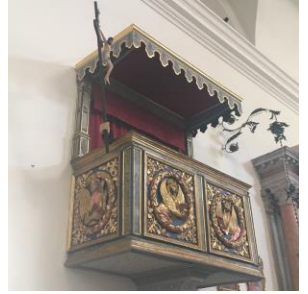
From the itinerary: After a leisurely breakfast of cappuccino (the Italian influence is strong in this former part of the Venetian empire), you take a short drive to the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park. The park is home to still-functioning traditional salt flats, as well as a truly unique mix of flora and fauna (including white herons) that thrive in this unique environment. Precious salt and trading routes dating back to ancient Greece were of vital

economic importance to Piran and the region. After an easy walk through the area, and perhaps a glimpse at the folks harvesting salt using traditional methods, you return to Piran for lunch. Mid-afternoon, your guides provide an overview of the town's importance and history on a walking tour, after which you enjoy some time on your own for strolling and exploring, or return to the hotel to relax (or indulge in a massage). You gather in the evening for a special farewell feast featuring delicious locally caught seafood, squid with risotto, or grilled fish of the day, served with perhaps a Rebula or Cabernet—a wine from the vineyards you passed yesterday.

Pictures include:

- From our little minuscule balcony out toward the seaside.
- My view from the breakfast table next to an olive tree. All the trees are all protected in Slovenia and might be hundreds of years old.
- The salt flats are huge and a big part of their history and have been around since 1400s. If you didn't read the book called salt, you might want to learn how salt was as important as gold at one stage in our history. It is referred to as the white gold. Even now there is some salt that is treasured and it is called the flower salt because it can only be harvested in the very still weather and at certain times of the day and really isn't salty at all.
- Lunch was in PonteRosa at a Pizza place seaside. Tom and I would return on Sunday to this seaside town with the casinos that seemed a little bit like a mini Monte Carlo.
- The little town of Plean is UNESCO protected which may be why it is a little rundown looking as it is difficult to make repairs. How to hide air conditioning units is a problem and thus many places cannot be air-conditioned. Paris has the same problem.
- The balcony is interesting in that only homes of means and with a daughter ready for marriage might have such a balcony. It is flared at the bottom to accommodate the old Victorian looking big skirts.
- The square is huge in part because it used to be a harbor now filled in and huge oval-shaped.
- Check out the church. There is a balcony box that looks like it has a hand sticking out and holding a staff. Funny.
- All the streets are cobblestones and some are so narrow that I expect there are plenty of people who couldn't fit through them.





Amuse bouche

Homemade gnocchi with wild asparagus and shrimps

Soft salad with tomato
Dressing olive oil and vinegar / herb dressing

Sea bass fillet, potatoes from the oven or sautéed vegetables

Tris fruit salad, panna cotta, mini crepes

Meat tasting menu

Amuse bouche

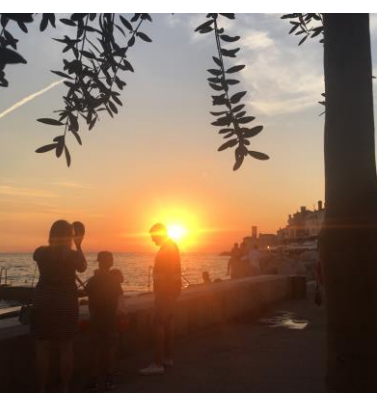
Soft salad with tomato
Dressing olive oil and vinegar / herb dressing

Homemade fuži with truffles

Beef tenderloin and homemade pommes

Tris fruit salad, panna cotta, mini crepes

Hood Piran

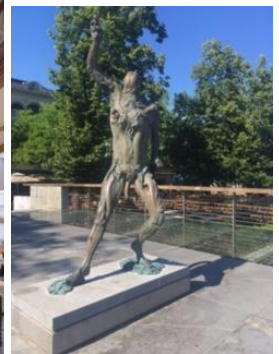
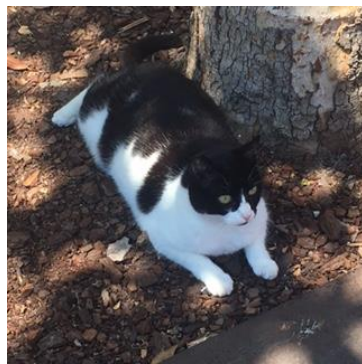
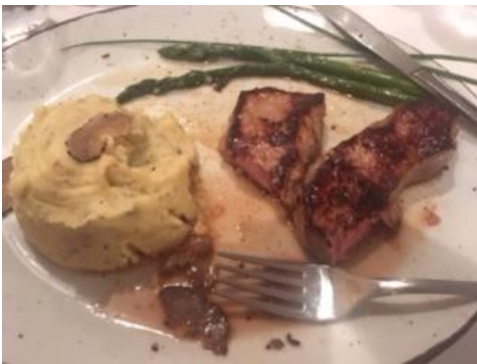




The last two days following the tour

The group were going via van from Piran back to Ljubljana and I chose to sleep in, have a long leisurely breakfast, drive with Tom, and stop at Ponterosa where there are casinos and seaside luxury. Thus we didn't get into Ljubljana until late afternoon (with a very inconvenient and confusing rental car drop off at the train station.) We'd switched suites at the Antiq Palace Hotel from #X to #VII and were very pleased. I don't know why I didn't take any pictures and I've yet to see what is on Tom's camera.

Of all the supposed gourmet meals of the trip, what we found near to the base of the castle cable car was his best meal of the trip. I didn't even get a picture. It was at a fish market where you choose your fish and they prepare as you wish. It was in one of the few air conditioned dining rooms.



Our super dinner, a walk through town again, on both sides of the river, and into their 6-story high end department store with its famous stairway, lead us back to one of the bridges and home again for an Au Revoir to Slovenia. It's well worth a trip.

Pictures from Tom:



How do you spell Joy? I love the "joy" one. Some have asked me how I got such a perfect shot. Well, I just kept buying her ice cream. How else? (Joking, just joking.)

Courtyard of our hotel. Moon on the pinnacle.



Tom: Three days in a hotel with this view. Tough. With an odd picture on the wall.



Tom's "A Story to Tell" - After Diana left with the group for today's hike, I had breakfast then went out for a walk to have a look at this very quaint (but very touristy) town at the tip of Slovenia, Piran. I was having a look at a place for dinner and asking shop keepers in the neighborhood where I thought I wanted to eat. I decided on one then walked back to the hotel and spoke to the front desk and asked them to make a reservation for me. Then I walked outside where the hotel has tables, etc. looking out at the sea. Just my kind of place (my hobby is watching water and my favorite is Cap d'ail on the French Riviera). Next to me was a 40ish couple and he asked if I was from America, and the usual stuff, and somehow cars came up. I said I was also a car guy so that started a conversation in earnest. As I walked up to the hotel a few minutes before I saw an early 90s Mercedes 190SL sitting out from (and took a picture - turned out to be a '92). The one I had for so many years (which was bought by a major Mercedes dealer near us) was a 1963, black with red and perfect and the one sitting here was silver with red and pristine. So I went in, and took a table outside in the shade.

Anyway, the fellow showed me his collection of maybe 50+ cars (here in Slovenia) and we had a real good time talking cars. When I had first sat down he asked if I was staying in the hotel and how did I like it (I thought he was thinking trying to get a room. I told him the truth that the A/C had been a problem but otherwise, fine).

Then they got up to leave and we shook hands all 'round and they left. But not before he leaned in and said, "I'm the owner." !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Well imagine my surprise (and relief) I only told him of my MAJOR complaint. Anyway, five minutes later a platter of their special ham and cheese and a few veggies arrived from Mr. Alexander - the boss. He owns a place in Miami and his now 17 year old son will attend the U of Miami. Really nice people and a real treat to visit with. A regular guy and gal and not hint of wealth.

Lends new meaning to the phrase - "Ya never know."



Miscellaneous/additional:

Piran flower salt: http://www.soline.si/en/article/salt-panning_2/salt-flower

Piran's famous salt flats:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2328533/Worth-salt-The-Slovenian-town-sodium-chloride-condiment.html>

The linden tree - a tree of friendship, love and loyalty | slovenia.si

<http://www.slovenia.si/slovenia/history/the-independent-state/the-linden-tree-a-tree-of-friendship-love-and-loyalty/>

Itinerary

Thu Jun 1 – Day 1

5:35pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#30

Fri Jun 2 – Day 2

7:40am Arrive Munich MUC for plane change with 3 hour connect time

10:45am Depart Munich MUC via Adria Airways JP#103

11:35pm Arrive Ljubljana SI LJU

Hotel sends a car for pick up and will bill to the room. Hotel will assist in tours.

Hotel Antiq Palace Hotel and Spa – 3 nights
Bosposka ulica 10, 1000 Ljubljana Tele 386 (0)838 96700
www.antiqpalace.com reception@antiqpalace.com
Residential suite, mini bar, robe/slippers, free WiFi, Breakfast
Coffee and supplies provided in fully equipped kitchen

Overview from www.CountryWalkers.com - Enjoy sweeping Alpine vistas and sun-dazzled Adriatic coastline as you explore Slovenia, an undiscovered pearl of central Europe. Walking here, you'll experience the magnificent natural beauty and warm, friendly culture of this captivating country. Our creative itinerary features highlights such as soaring gondola rides up to views of snow-mantled peaks, the otherworldly salt flats of Sečovlje Nature Park, and the Venetian-Gothic alleyways of seaside Piran. In Triglav National Park, marvel at the majestic Julian Alps as you stroll beside the glacial, blue-green Lake Bohinj, passing through pine forest and fields of Alpine flowers like Turk's cap lilies and gentian. Follow the emerald waters of a rushing river on your walk through the Soča Valley, passing limestone outcrops and traditional farms along the way. Near the hilltop town of Medana, terraced vineyards hint at the region's Italian influences; you enjoy its finest vintages during a tasting at a family-run winery. Throughout your journey, delight in lavish accommodations and savor the refreshing outlook of a country that greatly values conservation, farm-to-table cuisine, and outdoor adventure.

Sat Jun 3 – Day 3

Eat at "As" Restaurant per Breen

Sun Jun 4 – Day 4

Tours need booked

Mon Jun 5 – Day 5 and DAY 1 of hike

8:30am Meet in Ljubljana at Host Hotel – Diana (note change of time)

Host Hotel Vander Urbani Resort
Krojaska Ulica 6–8 Ljubljana, Slovenia Tele: 011 386 1 200 9000
Email reception@vanderhotel.com vanderhotel.com

11:30am Tom to pick up rental car
Sixt Rental Car, pick up in Terminal – 6 days until Sunday June 11 at 11:30am

Kamnik Alps and Velika Planina; 4 miles, easy to moderate; 600-ft. elevation gain (shorter option: 2 miles; easy to moderate). Transfer to Bled

You meet your guide(s) and fellow travelers in the lobby of the Vander Urbani Resort in Ljubljana, the country's charming capital situated between the Alps and the Adriatic (voted European Green Capital for 2016). After a brief welcome and introductions, you set off for an hour-long drive to the Kamnik Alps and Velika Planina (literally "Big Pasture" in Slovenian). Upon arrival in Kamniska Bistrica, a short gondola ride takes you to the highlands (at an elevation of 5,286 feet). This area is one of very few shepherds' settlements of this scale preserved in Europe, and during the summer months, herdsmen bring their flocks to these highland pastures to graze. As you walk, the picturesque limestone peaks and the sound of cowbells tinkling in the air will transport you to another era, reminiscent of the "Sound of Music." Wind your way past traditional wooden huts, with their unique conical, pine-shingled roofs that extend so low it looks from afar like they touch the ground. Meet our friend Francka, and enjoy a tour of her hut and a well-deserved picnic featuring some of her cheeses, fresh yogurts, buckwheat dumplings, herbal teas, and even a nip of the local brandies. For those guests embarking on today's full walking circuit, the trail continues up to the chapel of Snow Mary, a beautiful structure built before World War II. (Masses are still held every Sunday in summer as well as a midnight mass on Christmas Eve.) Afterward, you descend back to the settlement, reuniting with guests who may have remained to chat with Francka or visit the local museum.

The gondola whisks you back down to the valley, and you continue (approximately one hour via minivan) to Lake Bled, and your home for the next three nights. With its fairytale castle, Lake Bled is undeniably the most stunning lake in the Alps. After settling into your hotel, you reunite for a welcome drink followed by a dinner of local specialties beef carpaccio from nearby Bohinj, green pea soup with scallops, fillet of lake trout with parsley root cream, and lamb cutlet crusted with almond and wild herbs may be among the offerings, topped off with a pear tart with tepka pear ice cream—served in the panoramic restaurant or (weather permitting) on the outdoor terrace.

Hotel Hotel Triglav, Bled – 1st of 3 nights – upgrade and 2nd person requested
Kolodvorska Cesta, 33 Bled, Slovenia Tele: 011 386 4 575 2610
Email info@hoteltriglavbled.si hoteltriglavbled.si
Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available. No coffee.

There are myriad vantage points of the beautiful lake from the Hotel Triglav. Cheerful fabrics complement the antique furniture, bringing charm and life to this 110-year old hotel. An indoor pool and sauna offer a sanctuary to relax after your day's adventures.

Tue Jun 6 – Day 6 and DAY 2 of hike

Lake Bohinj and Mt. Vogel; 5-6 miles, easy (option of 2-3 miles additional, easy to moderate)

After a hearty buffet breakfast of fresh bread, homemade jams, cured meats and cheeses, you depart via minivan to walk Lake Bled's untamed brother, Lake Bohinj, in the heart of Triglav National Park. The day begins with a cable car up to Mt. Vogel, a popular ski resort in the wintertime. Sitting 3,000 feet above the lake, you have an amazing vantage point from which to admire the pictureperfect Julian Alps. Afterward, descend back to the valley, and embark on an easy walking circuit skirting the shores of the lake—Slovenia's largest glacial lake. Surrounded by majestic mountains and dramatic cliffs, this region also offers diverse flora, from orchids to the Carniola and Turk's cap lilies to many Alpine flowers, including the Triglav (literally "three-headed") gentian—named after the highest mountain in the heart of the park. A scenic lakeside spot is selected for a picnic lunch of fresh bread, local cold cuts and cheeses, seasonal fruit, and cookies.

You return to Bled by late afternoon (via a 30-minute transfer), and there is time to relax or take a quick swim before transferring to nearby Radovljica. The old town of Radovljica is one of the best-preserved in Slovenia, with houses dating from the 15th and 16th centuries. The town sits atop a natural promontory, overlooking the Dezela plain to the east and the Sava river valley to the west, the

Julian Alps dominating the background. Noteworthy attractions include the Museum of Apiculture, which offers a fascinating insight into Slovene beekeeping traditions. After a brief stroll through town and opportunity for independent exploration, you continue to Lectar Restaurant for a dinner of Slovene fare served up by staff in traditional dress. The menu features hearty soups, home-baked bread, seasonal salads, štruklji (rolled dough dumplings with a range of fillings), and local beer or wine from some of the country's renowned cellars. Save room for dessert—likely to be a potica (a sweet yeasted dough rolled with nuts or other fillings) or apple strudel. After dinner, take a peek into the cellar workshop where gingerbread hearts continue to be made in the timehonored tradition.

Hotel Hotel Triglav, Bled – 2nd of 3 nights

Wed Jun 7 – Day 7 and DAY 3 of hike

Vintgar Gorge; 2 miles, easy or 4-5 miles, easy to moderate.

Afternoon option: Lake Bled, 1-2 miles, easy

This morning, after another bountiful breakfast, you head north to explore the Vintgar Gorge. The gorge takes its name from the German term for “wine garden” as there used to be vineyards in the region, and it has been a popular tourist destination for more than a hundred years. The walking path runs along the rock wall of the mile-long gorge, hovering just above the flowing Radovna River, whose emerald waters rush through cascades and rapids, and form mesmerizing crystalline pools. The gorge ends at the delightful Šum waterfall, the highest river fall in Slovenia at 82 feet. After taking in the falls and the old stone railway bridge, you may choose to retrace your steps to the entrance of the gorge or, for a longer walk, you can continue up to Hom hill, through green meadows, and past St. Catherine Church, looping back to the starting point.

By midday, you return to Bled for lunch on your own at one of the many lakeside cafes, with recommendations from your guides, of course. Be sure to try the famous local desserts like kremšnita (cream cake) or grmada (akin to rumraisin pudding and literally translated as “bonfire”). Afterward, you may wish to climb up to Bled Castle. Built on a cliff top in 1004, the castle was the seat of the Austrian bishops of Brixen. Even if you opt not to visit the castle itself, the views of the lake and mountains are worth the climb.

Mid-afternoon, you may join your guides to return along the lakeside footpath to the hotel, passing great villas, most from the beginning of the 19th century— including Tito's former residence, now a hotel. Enjoy a swim, or relax with a book on the terrace before reconvening for a special early-evening aperitif and visit to the romantic island on the lake. You'll board traditional Pletna boats and savor a glass of wine while sailing to the 10th-century church on the small island of Otok. You continue on to a favorite lakeside restaurant where local specialties are served in a cozy, convivial atmosphere, either on the lakeside patio or in the dining room.

Hotel Hotel Triglav, Bled – 3rd of 3 nights

Thu Jun 8 – Day 8 and DAY 4 of hike

Lake Bled to Soča Valley (via Vršič Pass); 2-4 miles, easy. Transfer to Kobarid

This morning you bid farewell to Lake Bled and drive to Kranjska Gora, a cosmopolitan village that's a 10-minute drive from both Italy and Austria, and the site of many World Cup ski races. As you wind your way over the Vršič Pass (5,316 feet) along one of the most scenic mountain roads in Europe (and the highest road in Slovenia), you enter the Soča Valley, the mountainous World War I battleground vividly described in the Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*. (In fact, it's rumored that your hotel tonight is where Hemingway penned the piece!)

The stunning turquoise waters of the Soča are especially popular with kayakers. You walk along the Soča Trail, beginning in the quaint village of Trenta (one of two in the horseshoe-shaped valley) and continue along the banks of the river to the Jelinčič family farm, where you stop for a visit and lunch. Fresh fish from the river, award-winning organic sheep cheese, fresh bread, and čompe (boiled potatoes) refuel you for the optional hour-long walk through picturesque forests and meadows (or you may wish to visit the small falls just past the farm).

By late afternoon, you reach Kobarid and the Hiša Franko, a charming countryside villa and your home for the night. Hiša Franko is also home to one of Slovenia's best chefs— Ana Roš. Ana is considered one of the most progressive chefs in Southern Europe, and she is completely self-taught. Together with her husband, Valter, she creates an unforgettable foray into Slovene food and wine.

After checking into your rooms, your evening begins with an invitation into their cellar for a tour of Valter's extensive (mostly Slovenian) wine selections and a tasting of local cheeses before proceeding upstairs for a memorable dinner—menus change seasonally but feature local products from the surrounding area, and may include items as innovative as black cod in ash tempura with asparagus and truffles, followed by an apple strudel dessert.

Hotel Hiša Franko, Kobarid – 1 night only – upgrade and 2nd person confirmed
Staro Selo 1 Kobarid SI-5222, Slovenia Tele: 011 386 5 389 4120
Email info@hisafranko.com www.Hisafranko.com
Wireless Internet and hair dryers available.

Hiša Franko has had a long and storied history over the past century, transforming from roadside inn to village mill to World War I hospital. It is also rumored to be the place of Ernest Hemingway's convalescence when he was injured on the Isonzo Front. In its current incarnation, the property is a warm and welcoming home away from home for travelers. You'll find a gracious estate with a large flower, herb, and vegetable garden and a lively creek. Rooms are modern and comfortable, and massages are available to ease your tired muscles.

Fri Jun 9 – Day 9 and DAY 5 of hike

Guided tour of Kobarid Museum or Kozjak Waterfall; 2 miles, easy. Goriška Brda wine region and transfer to Piran

It's an early start today, with breakfast served outdoors in the shaded garden by the brook, with views of the dramatic Kobariski Stol mountain. After fueling up with freshly baked bread, pastries, homemade marmalade, Alpine butter, cheese, cottage cheese, and local fruit, you bid your hosts farewell and depart for a guided tour of the World War I museum in town. Walk through history, taking in battlefield maps, country flags, and portraits of soldiers and gravestones. Alternatively, you may opt to stretch your legs on an easy, hour-long walk along the Kobarid historical trail to the "hidden" waterfall of Kozjak, with a cascade of water that falls from approximately 45 feet. A dirt road leads you across a meadow, and then you follow a path by the riverbed of the emerald Soča River. The Kozjak Brook springs from Mt. Krnčica (7,028 feet), making six waterfalls in its journey to feed the Soča River. The beautiful Kozjak Waterfall flows into a natural amphitheater carved into rock.

Your next destination is the wine-growing region of Goriška Brda (one-hour drive) and the picturesque Gorizia Hills bordering Italy's Collio region. Goriška Brda is increasingly gaining attention because of its innovative winemakers and its ancient method of aging wine in qvevri, large earthenware vessels lined with beeswax and buried below ground. The region is also well known for its fruit (cherries, peaches, apricots) and olive oil. On arrival, you'll enjoy lunch and a wine tasting at Klinec—a family winery and restaurant in the pretty hilltop town of Medana, overlooking vineyards and olive and fruit

orchards. The restaurant serves local, seasonal specialties, such as wild asparagus and white polenta and pršutov toč (fried prosciutto and wine).

Feeling sated and better acquainted with Slovenian wines, you continue to the Adriatic Coast (2-hour transfer) and the stunning seaside town of Piran. Time and interest permitting, you may arrive at your seafront hotel via a coastal footpath. Ideally situated on the tip of a narrow peninsula, Piran is the bestpreserved cultural monument of Slovenia's Istria region. Upon arriving at your hotel, your guides provide a brief orientation as well as recommendations for **dinner on your own**.

Hotel Hotel Piran, Piran – 1st of 2 nights agreed to upgrade – in file
Stjenkova ulica 1 Piran SI-5222, Slovenia Tele: 011 386 5 666 7100
Email hinfo@hotel-piran.si www.Hotel-piran.si
Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

The Hotel Piran is a modern hotel that commands a majestic location overlooking the Adriatic on one side and the medieval town on the other. Your sea-facing room offers a balcony to take in the breathtaking view, and the room itself is comfortable and well appointed.

Sat Jun 10 – Day 10 and DAY 6 of hike

Sečovlje Salina Nature Park; 2-4 miles, easy. Guided walking tour of Piran

After a leisurely breakfast of cappuccino (the Italian influence is strong in this former part of the Venetian empire), you take a short drive to the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park. The park is home to still-functioning traditional salt flats, as well as a truly unique mix of flora and fauna (including white herons) that thrive in this unique environment. Precious salt and trading routes dating back to ancient Greece were of vital economic importance to Piran and the region. After an easy walk through the area, and perhaps a glimpse at the folks harvesting salt using traditional methods, you return to Piran for lunch. Mid-afternoon, your guides provide an overview of the town's importance and history on a walking tour, after which you enjoy some time on your own for strolling and exploring, or return to the hotel to relax (or indulge in a massage). You gather in the evening for a special farewell feast featuring delicious locally caught seafood, squid with risotto, or grilled fish of the day, served with perhaps a Rebula or Cabernet—a wine from the vineyards you passed yesterday.

Hotel Hotel Piran, Piran – 2nd of 2 nights

Sun Jun 11 – Day 11 and DAY 7 of hike

Departure to Ljubljana. After a leisurely breakfast and perhaps a stroll along the seaside promenade, you say “nasvidenje” to Piran and the enchanting coast as you return to Ljubljana for continued explorations or departures.

11:30am Turn in Rental car
Noon End of tour in Ljubljana

Hotel Antiq Palace Hotel and Spa – 2 nights in Suite VII
Bosposka ulica 10, 1000 Ljubljana Tele 386 (0)838 96700
www.antiqpalace.com reception@antiqpalace.com

Mon Jun 12 – Day 12

Tours or on own?

Tue Jun 13 – Day 13

? Transport to airport – can arrange with hotel later

7:05am Depart Ljubljana, SI LJU via Adria Airways JP#0102
8:00am Arrive Munich MUC for plane change – probably requires re-check in
Note layover is 5:15 hours.

11:45am Depart Munich MUC via UA#31
2:35pm Arrive Newark EWR

Participants:

Fiona Leatt Hayter, Australia
Bonnie Duman, Deerfield IL
Stewart Schechter, Deerfield IL
Ann Cavanaugh, Johns Island SC
James Cavanaugh, Kiawah Island SC
Bridget & David Simmons, Little River SC
Madelyn & Mark Fiebert, Metuchen NJ
Diana Burton, Middletown NJ
Ashley Lesage, St George VT

Miha Klanjscek, guide, is a seasoned guide with over 15 years of experience traveling and guiding in the Balkan countries of the former Yugoslavia, one of the most culturally, architecturally, and geographically-diverse regions of the world. With an immense love of the landscape, the people, and the cuisine of his native region, Miha is involved in several outdoor sports, including road cycling, mountain biking, trail running, and trekking in the Slovenian Alps. An adventurer by heart, he is also highly-skilled ski instructor and he looks forward to showing our guests the charming medieval towns, lush alpine walking trails, and secret wine cellars of Slovenia.

Primoz Kadunc, veteran guide, filling in for earlier guide. Primoz holds a degree in organizational management which he has put into practice both while guiding and on his journeys worldwide. Thanks to a legendary road trip to India, his extensive travels throughout South and Central America, and the time he spent completing his education in Portugal and Spain, he's fluent in multiple languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, English, German, and Serbo-Croatian. When not guiding, Primoz enjoys sailing (in fact, he has sailed across the Atlantic!), scuba diving, climbing, and exploring new Alpine trails.

Emergency:

Registered with www.travel.state.gov

Embassy of the United States
Prešernova 31, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Telephone: +386 1 200 55 00
E-mail: USEmbassyLjubljana@state.gov

ITINERARY CHANGES - Please bear in mind that this is a typical itinerary, and the actual activities, sites, and accommodations may vary due to season, special events, weather, or transportation schedules. We reserve the right to alter the itinerary, since tour arrangements are made up to a year in advance and unforeseen circumstances may arise that mandate change. Itinerary changes are made to improve the tour and your experience.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL- Country Walkers is a leader in active travel with responsible tourism an integral part of our core values. Our tours reflect our dedication to best travel practices—and to the preservation of indigenous cultures and the environment. Country Walkers has made a donation on behalf of every traveler to the CW Travelers Fund, which supports designated projects in the communities and habitats in which we travel. We invite you to learn more about our efforts and initiatives for giving back.

Tour Itinerary Overview

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME

Vander Urbani Resort (lobby), Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9:00 a.m. Krojaska Ulica 6–8 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Tel 011 386 1 200 9000 Email reception@vanderhotel.com vanderhotel.com

NIGHTS 1, 2, & 3

Hotel Triglav Kolodvorska Cesta, 33 Bled, Slovenia Tel 011 386 4 575 2610 Email info@hoteltriglavbled.si hoteltriglavbled.si Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

NIGHT 4

Hiša Franko Staro Selo 1 Kobarid, Slovenia Tel 011 386 5 389 4120 Email info@hisafranko.com [Hisafranko.com](http://hisafranko.com) Wireless Internet and hair dryers available.

NIGHTS 5 & 6

Hotel Piran Stjenkova ulica 1 Piran, Slovenia Tel 011 386 5 666 7100 Email hinfo@hotel-piran.si [Hotel-piran.si](http://hotel-piran.si) Wireless Internet, hair dryers, and laundry service available.

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME

Vander Urbani Resort, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 12:00 p.m.

EMERGENCY CONTACT - One Call International Email mail@oncallinternational.com If communicating from within the US If communicating from within the US If communicating from within the US If communicating from within the US Text 603.945.0103 Tel 800.555.9095 If calling from outside the US If calling from outside the US If calling from outside the US If calling from outside the US Tel 603.894.4710

When calling from outside the USA, you will need to dial the access code for the country you are calling from (a complete list of access codes, provided by AT&T, can be found on the Country Walkers website under Travel Tips and Travel Resources).

In the unlikely event you are unable to connect by phone with One Call, or the region you are calling from does not have an access code, you should speak with a live international operator and ask them to place a collect call to 800.555.9095 or 603.894.4710.

TRAVEL INSURANCE - We offer guests the opportunity to purchase a Travel Protection Plan. Please contact us for details.

Tour Facts at a Glance

TOUR LENGTH (WITHOUT FLIGHT PACKAGE) 7 days, 6 nights

DEPARTURE DATES AND PRICE - Please refer to our website for the most current list of departure dates, scheduled group tour and private tour prices.

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME - Vander Urbani Resort (lobby), Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9:00 a.m.

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME - Vander Urbani Resort, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 12:00 p.m.

ACTIVITY LEVEL - This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures. It is rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 6 miles per day, with options on many days. There are few ascents and descents, with climbing time on the ascents ranging from about 15 to 30 minutes. The terrain varies

from paved and cobblestone streets (during organized city tours and other easy village exploration) to uneven, single-track trails with loose stones or gravel, rocks, and roots. Some trails are exposed to the sun. Days are quite full on this tour due to the inclusion of many regions—from the capital to the Kamnik and Julian Alps, the Soča River Valley, wine country, and the Adriatic Coast.

INCLUSIONS » Two expert, local guides (for groups of 8 or more), with you 24/7 » All meals except one lunch and one dinner; local wine or beer included with dinners » All accommodations while on tour » Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point » Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary » Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International » The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN - Prior to your adventure you will be asked to sign a Passenger Participation Agreement and you will receive: » Luggage tags » List of travel companions and guide biographies

GRATUITIES - Gratuities for all hotels, meals, and services that are included in your tour price will be paid by Country Walkers. Should you wish to tip your Country Walkers guide(s), the standard in the industry ranges from \$10 to \$15 per person, per guide, per day (or \$20 to \$30 per couple, per guide, per day), and can be paid in USD or local currency.

Traveling To and From Your Tour - If you are interested in reserving the optional Flight + Tour Combo optional Flight + Tour Combo optional Flight + Tour Combo and pre- or post-tour extensions, please refer to the attached itinerary for more details.

TOUR MEETING POINT AND TIME - Vander Urbani Resort (lobby), Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9:00 a.m. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

MOST CONVENIENT ARRIVAL AIRPORT

Ljubljana's Jože Pučnik Airport (LJU) lju-airport.si

GETTING TO THE MEETING POINT A taxi from the airport to the Vander Urbani Resort costs approximately 35-40 euros. Travel time is 25-30 minutes. You may also arrange a private transfer directly through the Vander Urbani Resort. Please contact the hotel directly for assistance. Another option is to book a transfer through MNJ Shuttle. The cost is approximately 9 euros. For further information and reservations, visit: mnj.si/en/mnj-transfer-shuttle-airport/

PRE-TOUR ACCOMMODATIONS - If you are not reserving our optional Flight + Tour Combo, you may wish to stay at the Vander Urbani Resort in Ljubljana, the meeting-point hotel, for the night prior to the tour. To make a reservation, please contact the hotel directly.

Vander Urbani Resort Krojaska Ulica 6–8 Ljubljana, Slovenia Tel 011 386 1 200 9000 Email reception@vanderhotel.com vanderhotel.com Room rates vary according to season and room type.

DELAYS AND LATE ARRIVALS - If you are delayed or miss the scheduled group meeting for any reason, we kindly request that you contact our emergency assistance provider, One Call International. This service is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week to assist you with any type of travel delay. Please refer to the Emergency Contact details on your Tour Itinerary Overview page for One Call International contact details.

TOUR DEPARTURE POINT AND TIME - Vander Urbani Resort, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 12:00 p.m.

MOST CONVENIENT DEPARTURE AIRPORT

Ljubljana's Jože Pučnik Airport (LJU) is the most convenient airport for your departure (requires connection if traveling to the U.S.). lju-airport.si

Depending on your destination, it may not be possible to depart Slovenia on the last day of the tour. Please check airline schedules carefully. If you plan to schedule return flights immediately following the tour's conclusion, please call your airline directly for specific check-in requirements.

Information & Policies

GUARANTEED DEPARTURES Country Walkers guarantees the departure of every tour*—no exceptions and no disappointments! From the moment you make your deposit, you can start preparing for your adventure. We take care of all the details to ensure a seamless, small-group experience (with an average of 6 or 7 guests per guide). For best availability, reserve your trip today!
*except in cases of force majeure

RESERVATIONS - Reservations for this tour may be made by calling Country Walkers at 800.464.9255. We can confirm your reservation with a deposit of \$350 per person. Final tour cost is due 90 days prior to tour departure date. As arrangements are confirmed at least a year in advance, the price is subject to change.

GUEST RESPONSIBILITIES - Each guest has the responsibility to select a trip appropriate to his/her abilities and interests and to prepare for the trip by carefully reading the confirmation materials. To join this trip, you must be in good health and capable of completing activities as described in the day-to-day itinerary. Our in-house experts welcome the opportunity to discuss the tour in more detail. In order to meet your needs, we ask that you please share any relevant physical limitations or health conditions when you make your reservation.

CANCELLATION POLICY - Cancellations received 91 days prior to the tour start date will incur a loss of \$150 per person; cancellations received between 90 and 61 days prior to the tour start date incur a loss of 25 percent of the tour price; there are no refunds within 60 days of the tour start date. Up to 91 days prior to departure, you may transfer your reservation, depending on availability, from one departure to another in the same calendar year at no cost*. Please notify us in writing.

*One transfer per year; afterwards a modest per person transfer fee will apply. Please note that tours with seasonal prices may involve a higher price.