



## Ljubljana: The secret revealed

by Ziga Arh

The legend says that God when he was distributing land to all nations forgot about the Slovenians because they were so few in number. He was so embarrassed that he offered them a piece of land he had saved for himself. And that is why Slovenia is so a small but naturally diverse country ([http://www.slovenia.info/?naravne\\_znamenitosti\\_jame=0&lng=2](http://www.slovenia.info/?naravne_znamenitosti_jame=0&lng=2)). Slovenia is also said to be a country of churches on hills. When travelling through the countryside observe the hills passing by and you will soon notice the repeating pattern—a hill with a little (catholic) church on its top.

Slovenia was the most economically developed out of the six republics of the former Yugoslavia. At the first free and democratic elections in 1990 the overwhelming majority of Slovenian citizens voted for independence, which was declared on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1991. In 2004 Slovenia entered the European Union and NATO as well as the Schengen zone and Euro zone a few years later. For more information about Slovenia visit the official Tourist Board website at <http://www.slovenia.info>.

### Accommodation

Everyone will tell you, being a tourist, that Ljubljana is a charming small capital city. And actually it is—but more or less only in the old town centre. That is why to fully enjoy your first short stay in the city it is important to choose a good location to stay.

The EMWA Conference, which is split between the Grand Hotel Union Executive and the Grand Hotel Union Business ([www.gh-union.si](http://www.gh-union.si)), and the Grand Hotel Union Garni where EMWA have secured special rates are ideally located only a 5-minute walk away from the symbolic centre of Ljubljana—the square of the famous Slovenian (romantic) poet, France Preseren (1800-1849). From here you enter the old town by crossing the small Ljubljanica river via one of the three bridges designed by Ljubljana's most famous architect, Jože Plečnik, (1872-1957). Other recommended hotels close to the conference venue are City Hotel and Hotel Slon.

### Special rates for apartments and rooms

What is less commonly known is that you can rent an apartment or room within a 5-minute walking distance from the conference venue and the old town. Such an arrangement not only saves you some Euros but also offers space and flexibility, a better insight into the heartbeat of the locals and an opportunity to become more familiar with the environment. For further information on such alternative accommodation check [www.apartmaji.si](http://www.apartmaji.si). If you find some-

thing interesting ask the agency for an EMWA discount of up to 10%! Even if staying in an apartment or room you can still benefit from breakfast at the nearby hotels or some other facilities and services (parking, cleaning etc.)

### Transport

A few years ago Ljubljana airport was officially renamed Ljubljana Jože Pučnik airport. The closest village to the airport is called Brnik, so locals might call it Brnik airport. Do not become confused by the different airport names—Ljubljana airport, Brnik airport, Jože Pučnik airport—all these are only different names for the only active international airport in Slovenia.

There is no train service between Ljubljana airport and the city. The usual price for a taxi for the 35-minute drive from the airport to the city is around 40 Euro per taxi. Alternatively you can contact Avantour transfer service at [info@avantour.si](mailto:info@avantour.si) in advance and claim a discounted EMWA rate of 30 Euro (payment can be made by credit card). They will also be happy to offer you discounted rates for transport from airports in neighbouring countries: the Italian airports in Trieste, Treviso near Venice and Venice airport, the Austrian airports in Klagenfurt and Graz, or the Croatian airport in Zagreb—all only 1 to 2 ½ hours' drive away.

Two companies run 8-seater minibus airport transfers from Ljubljana Jože Pučnik airport at a cost of 5 Euros to the main bus station, which is only 500 m away from the Conference venue, or you can pay 8-9 Euros (depending on the company) to be delivered directly to your accommodation anywhere in Ljubljana. However, you have to book it in advance and may have to wait up to 30 minutes for the minibus to become at least half full. For bookings see [www.prevozi-markun.com](http://www.prevozi-markun.com) or [www.airport-transfer.si](http://www.airport-transfer.si).

Note that for those coming to Ljubljana by car a motorway tax is payable. The cheapest one is the half-year vignette costing 35 Euro. A digital zoomable map of Slovenia can be found at:

[http://zemljevid.najdi.si/index\\_maps.jsp?&tab=maps](http://zemljevid.najdi.si/index_maps.jsp?&tab=maps)

### Ljubljana

Ljubljana has been named by foreign media as one of the most safe and idyllic places in the world ([http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/journalists\\_and\\_travel\\_professionals/news-resources/news/80046/detail.html](http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/journalists_and_travel_professionals/news-resources/news/80046/detail.html)).

The city is walking friendly due to its compact size and many green spaces. First-time visitors are often stunned because it is such a young and vibrant capital. No wonder,

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as out of a population of less than 300,000 one fifth are university students. One of the best ways to relax and enjoy Ljubljana is to take refreshment at one of the numerous cafes along the riverbanks or in the Old Town. Ljubljana also has close to 10,000 annual cultural events, an opera house and one of the world's oldest philharmonic orchestras.

The official and most comprehensive website on Ljubljana is <http://www.visitljubljana.si/>. Apart from a regular walking and boating tour of Ljubljana, already included in the conference's social programme, you may want to explore the city by bike or to escape the city centre by cycling along the greenery route around the city ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Path\\_of\\_Remembrance\\_and\\_Comradeship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Path_of_Remembrance_and_Comradeship)).

For those staying for 3 days or longer a Ljubljana Card ([http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/ljubljana\\_and\\_more/ljubljana\\_card/](http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/ljubljana_and_more/ljubljana_card/)) is available which offers a free city guidebook, free travel on all city buses and free entrance to museums and galleries, not to mention other special offers around the city, including savings on accommodation, taxi, car rentals, restaurants, bars and shops.

### Shopping

Specialty shopping activities in Slovenia should be oriented towards homemade honey and honey products (honey biscuits), Piran salt, Idrija lace, Rogaska glass art, Slovenian designer jewellery and porcelain. All the consumable specialities can be easily reviewed in the shop called Krasevka at Ciril Metodov square 10, just across the street from the cathedral.

What may be of special interest is that in Slovenia it is quite common to bring a present, bought in any shop, to the florists for gift-wrapping and arrangement, with or without flowers.

### Sightseeing

Ljubljana has one of the best-preserved Baroque quarters in Europe that blends harmoniously with the younger Art Nouveau buildings. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the architect Jože Plečnik [not to be confused with Jože Pučnik (1932-2003), a politician who gave the name to the airport] enriched the city with his buildings.

A Ljubljana city centre map is available at <http://www.ljubljana.info/map/>

Leaving aside visiting the castle and The National Gallery, already included in the conference's social programme, some other interesting sights are:

#### *Prešeren Square and the three bridges*

[http://www.slovenia.info/en/arhitekturne-znamenitosti/Ljubljana,-Pre%C5%A1eren-Square.htm?arhitekturne\\_znamenitosti=834&lng=2](http://www.slovenia.info/en/arhitekturne-znamenitosti/Ljubljana,-Pre%C5%A1eren-Square.htm?arhitekturne_znamenitosti=834&lng=2)

#### *The Dragon Bridge*

[http://www.slovenia.info/en/arhitekturne-znamenitosti/Ljubljana,-Dragon-Bridge.htm?arhitekturne\\_znamenitosti=770&lng=2](http://www.slovenia.info/en/arhitekturne-znamenitosti/Ljubljana,-Dragon-Bridge.htm?arhitekturne_znamenitosti=770&lng=2)

#### *The Slovenian Ethnographic Museum*

<http://www.etno-muzej.si/en>

#### *The Tivoli Park and nearby Ljubljana Zoo*

[http://www.slovenia.info/?kul\\_zgod\\_znamenitosti=6296&lng=2](http://www.slovenia.info/?kul_zgod_znamenitosti=6296&lng=2)

#### *Ljubljana Central Market*

<http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/experiences/shopping/75760/detail.html>

#### *Golovec*

For the more energetic Golovec hill is a 20-minute walk from the city centre [http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/tours\\_and\\_excursions/surrounding\\_areas/green\\_outskirts/76463/detail.html](http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/tours_and_excursions/surrounding_areas/green_outskirts/76463/detail.html)

### Day trips

Only a 1-hour drive from the capital you can either climb the Alpine mountains or swim in the Adriatic sea. More than half of the country is covered by forests. You can also admire thousands of underground and above the ground karstic phenomena of limestone (not to mention that the name of karst topography itself originates from the Slovenian region named Kras).

Apart from visiting the Postojna cave (already included in the social programme of the conference) the most typical day trips are either to the lakes Bled and Bohinj or to the coastal city of Piran and other coastal towns, Koper, Portoroz and Secovlje salt pans. The Lipica horses' stud farm is another highlight.

The Skocjan cave is on the Unesco World Heritage List but the largest and most visited cave in Europe is the Postojna cave where one can also see a small amphibian animal called the 'human fish' or olm.

An interesting alternative programme would be to visit the city of Gorica, which was divided between Slovenia and Italy after World War II (like Berlin), with its surroundings the Franciscan monastery at Kostanjevica with the Tombs of Bourbon, experiencing the culinary delights of Zemono mansion and wine tasting in Brda.

### Eating and drinking

Slovenian cuisine is very varied, influenced by its neighbours Austria, Italy, Croatia and Hungary. The typical traditional lunch is a beef soup with noodles followed by beef (taken out from the soup in which it had been boiled) with roast potatoes and green salad, finishing with an apple strudel for dessert. Traditional Slovenians also eat a lot of bread. The most frequently offered specialities are kraski prsut, struklji, potica and Prekmurska gibanica.

For eating out check the Ljubljana Quality Selection list at: [http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/experiences/eating\\_out/ljubljana-quality/](http://www.visitljubljana.si/en/experiences/eating_out/ljubljana-quality/)). Additionally I can offer the following tips:

- take care to book in advance, especially for the Cubo and Smrekarjev hram restaurants
- avoid the Sokol restaurant near the city hall which is mainly focused on tourist groups promising to offer traditional food but of a relatively low value for money

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- you may want to try the 'home-made alike' cakes at the Zvezda cake shop on Wolfova street for other cuisines
- try the Thai restaurant Da Buda on Subiceva street 1a or Japanese restaurant Sushimama.

## Language

Slovenian is a Slavic language with some Italian and German influences in the colloquial vocabulary. Almost everybody in Ljubljana understands basic English, but if

you would like to know at least some Slovenian words see <http://www.ff.uni-lj.si/publikacije/sft/> or [http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european\\_languages/languages/slovene.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/languages/slovene.shtml)

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## Wines of Slovenia

Having lived in Slovenia for 9 years, it never ceases to amaze me how such a small country can produce such a large variety of high-quality wines. I am privileged to have tried so many different Slovenian wines in beautiful settings and on numerous unforgettable occasions. Granted, some occasions I may have forgotten, I guess that's just part of wine tasting. But in any case I've become very passionate about Slovenian wines. So when visiting Ljubljana in May, I full-heartedly recommend you venture through at least the main varieties. You may even want to consider extending your stay and taking the opportunity to thoroughly explore Slovenia's wine regions taking advantage of the marked wine routes.

Winemaking and viticulture have been around in Slovenia since before Roman times. Today, more than 40,000 registered wineries, covering 24,600 hectares of vineyards, annually produce approximately 1 million hectoliters of wine. Amazingly, only 50,000 hectoliters a year are exported; mainly to the United States, Italy and Germany. This puts Slovenia on the number 8 spot in the world in terms of per capita consumption; a staggering 43.77 liters/capita/year. Interestingly, the Vatican City is the biggest wine consumer with 62.02 liters/capita/year.

Slovenia mainly produces white wines, some 75% of the annual production. Most of the wines are classified as premium (*vrhunsko*) and less than 30% are basic table wines (*namizno*). There are three main wine regions: Posavje, Podravje and Primorje. The grape varieties and wines from each region have their own unique qualities based on the terrain. Jancis Robinson, the *grande dame* of wines and author of *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, commented that Slovenian wines are special, unique and express individuality. Their individuality comes from the winemakers themselves, who still take a traditional, artisanal approach to winemaking, yet are not afraid of exploring different technologies and techniques. Slovenian winemaking's strong heritage and the sheer variety of grape sorts generate a natural interest from connoisseurs and wine lovers. Slovenian whites are especially delicious, full of distinct flavour and terroir. They are easy-going and suitable for accompanying the modern, lighter culinary style, which gives the wine a chance to make its mark on your dining experience.

The most popularized wine region is the Primorje region, which borders Italy and the Adriatic coast. The soil is mineral rich and summers are usually hot, while late autumn is rainy. Primorje also specialises in reds, setting it apart from the other regions. Winemakers here tend to be the most adventurous with their techniques and marketing, which has provided some very interesting wine brands. A not-to-be-missed wine is Teran, made from Refosk grapes, which are grown in the red, mineral-rich soil of Kras. It has an extremely rich velvety taste, with earthy undertones and a raspberry fragrance; an ideal complement to freshly carved prosciutto.

In the south east of Slovenia lies Posavje which produces some excellent sparkling and blended wines, like Metliska Crnina. The region has many micro-climates and terroirs, which probably contributes to the region's popularity for blends. Cvček is definitely not the best wine from this region, but it's the region's most distinct wine. It's a blend of 14 different wines and is light, fresh and pretty tart, with a low alcohol content. Many Slovenians favour a glass or two of refreshing Cvček to wash down their hot summer barbeques.

Podravje, in the east of Slovenia, is the largest wine region. Its climate and soil make it perfect for white wine cultivation. Many of the most prestigious wine houses originate from here. The Alps shield the region from harsh winters and its rich, aromatic whites are compared to German Mosel and Rhine wines. It is definitely worth trying the region's Sauvignons, Pinots, Laski Rizlings and Rumeni Muskat. I have also enjoyed some incredible desert wines from the Podravje region.

My favourite places to try Slovenian wines are Vinoteka Movia next to the town hall, Dvorni Bar between Ljubljana University's administrative headquarters and the Ljubljana river, or Vinski Klet Slovenija, on the national trade fair grounds. All are just minutes' walk away from the EMWA conference location. And for anyone who might be interested, my favourites are Kristancic, Modri Pinot, 2002 (red) and Valdhuber, Sauvignon, 2006 (white), but I'm not fussy when somebody else is paying the round!

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