





## PLACES OF INTEREST

in slow and steady conjunction with the migration of the Slavs who came into the Balkans and Slovenia from southwest Russia. The Slavs would eventually comprise the largest ethnic group in the region.

The Byzantine Empire would rule followed by the Venetian Republic, the Holy Roman Empire and the Austrian Hapsburg Dynasty which would be in power until the end of World War I. After the war the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed. In 1929 it would be renamed Yugoslavia. After World War II, with the victorious Allies drawing a line on the map, Koper was given to Slovenia and thereby came under the rule of communist Yugoslavia. By now Koper, Slovenia and the entire region had been under siege or foreign domination for more than two millennia.

In 1945 Josip Broz Tito became the president of the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that consisted of Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia. By the power of his personality he held these very different cultures, ethnic and religious groups together under one flag. When Tito died in 1980 the ancient social, religious, political and economic resentments, that had for so long been suppressed, started once again to simmer.

On December 23, 1990, fully expecting a violent military reaction

from the central communist government in Belgrade, Slovenia, held a democratic referendum on independence. The referendum was supported by nearly a 90% majority. Slovenia would not be denied its desire for the formation of a democratic republic and on June 25th, 1991, formally declared its independence from communist Yugoslavia's authoritarian rule. The simmering cauldron would now boil over.

This was truly an example of "David rising up to fight Goliath" for there was no way that tiny and poorly equipped Slovenia could withstand the full might of the Yugoslav Army. But, against all odds, within 10 short and relatively bloodless days, Slovenia won its independence.

After nearly 2,000 years of being invaded, conquered, ruled, governed or subjugated by others, today the people of the small yet free and democratic Slovenia are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations and, as of mid-night January 1, 2008, the first of all the new EU member states to ascend to the rotating 6 month term as President of the European Union.

## KOPER PLACES OF INTEREST

Koper's golden age came in the 1400 and 1500s during the ascendance of the Venetian Republic. Many of the buildings of the old city date to this period. The center of old Koper is now called Tito Square. It is fascinating and easy to stroll through the narrow cobblestone streets of the medieval city.

**1** The **Muda Gate** is an interesting way to enter the old city. This was the original city gate and passageway for all who crossed the bridge and entered from the mainland. Tolls on merchants bringing their goods into the city were assessed and collected here. The gate was built in the early 1500s and is now the last remaining of the original twelve gates that once surrounded the city.

**2** The **Praetorian Palace** is the symbol of Koper and was built during the 1400s in a combination of Gothic and Renaissance styles. The palace is located on the main square in the center of the town. Atop the palace is a statue of Cybele whom the Romans worshiped as their goddess of fertility and nature.

**3** The **Cathedral of Saint Nazarius** that you see today was built in the 1700s upon the foundation of earlier churches that date back centuries. The beautifully designed interior of the church is the resting place of the sarcophagus of Saint Nazarius, the patron saint of the city. The bell tower of the cathedral, built in the 1300s and now referred to as the City Tower, was at one time used as a defensive fortification.

**4** The **Carmine Rotunda** was built in the 1100s and is located just behind the Cathedral of Saint Nazarius. The baptistery is one of the oldest surviving church structures in all of Slovenia.

**5** The **Almerigogna Palace** can be found on Gortanov Square. Built in the 1400s, like many of the buildings in Koper, it is a combination of Gothic and Renaissance styles.

**6** The **Municipal Museum** is housed in the Belgramoni-Tacco Palace, built in the 1500s. The museum has on display numerous interesting artifacts, paintings and sculptures that trace the history of Koper and the surrounding region.

**7** The **City Loggia** is a beautiful arched colonnade that was designed and built on the main square in 1462. With a nice café on the ground floor, it is the only surviving gothic style loggia in Slovenia.

### Beyond Koper

**Ljubljana**, the capital, is the cultural and social heart and soul of Slovenia. A visit to this city will reveal its beautiful Renaissance and Baroque architecture and monuments, Franciscan cathedrals, graceful 18th century fountains and masterfully designed and engineered bridges that span the lovely Ljubljanica River. There are peaceful parks and colorful markets throughout this medieval city that invite visitors to explore and enjoy.

**Bled Castle** sits on a precipice that rises over 300 feet above Bled Lake. A fortification has stood on this site for well over 1,000 years. The view of the surrounding mountains and countryside is nothing short of spectacular. The castle is now a museum that is home to an interesting display of armor and weaponry that date back to the 1500s. This is one of the oldest medieval fortresses in Slovenia. Small boats called "plentas" are available to take visitors out on the beautiful alpine lake much the way they have been doing for the past 400 years.

**Dimnice Jama** (The Smoke Cave), though known about for countless centuries, it was not until 1904 that the cave was actually explored. The "smoke" referred to is actually steam that raises from the mouth of the cave as warm air from deep underground meets the cold air of the mountains. Visitors can safely descend almost 350 feet underground and explore the amazing rock formations, giant stalactites, stalagmites, huge open chambers as well as the underground river.

**Pliskovica** is a charming village on the Karst Plateau of the Vipavska Valley not far from the Bay of Trieste. The village itself is delightful to explore and is surrounded by rolling meadows and ancient vineyards. In a country that is full of stunning scenery this area is certainly some of the most beautiful. The word "karst" refers to the amazing rock formations found in the area that have been carved and shaped over thousands of years by moving water.

**SHORE EXCURSIONS** To make the most of your visit to Koper and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For Information concerning tour content and pricing, consult the Tour Information Sheet or contact the onboard Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

**LOCAL CUSTOMS** Bargaining: Prices are usually clearly marked and bargaining is not a custom.

Tipping: We have seen it written that, under the old communist regime of Yugoslavia, taking care of a paying customer was often referred to as "Service with a snarl!". Today you will find that the people of Slovenia are warm and welcoming. Most restaurants will add an automatic service charge but a 10% tip to your waiter and taxi driver is customary and always appreciated.

**LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES** Except for approximately 30 miles of coastline on the Adriatic Sea, Slovenia is completely landlocked. Italy is to the west, Austria to the north, Hungary to the east and Croatia to the south. Some epicureans have stated that Slovenia does not have its own identifiable style of cuisine ... they have borrowed what they liked from their neighbors and made it their own. This has made for many different styles, depending on the region. So, to refer to "traditional Slovenian food" actually means the simple dishes and hardy recipes of the common people. There is no snobbish or fancy haute cuisine here. A few of the local favorites include: Zlinkrofi, much like Italy's ravioli. Krvavice, a pork blood sausage. Bograc, similar to a Hungarian goulash. Prezganka, a hardy soup made from beef and potato. Kranjske Klobase, spicy pork sausage from Slovenia's Carniola region. Kurja Obara, a chicken stew with onions. Ricet, a soup made with dried meat, barley and dried fruit. Ocvirkovka, bread made with the addition of crisply fried pork rinds. Kislo Zelje, smoked sausage with cooked beans. Struklji, bread rolls stuffed with vegetables, meats or cheese

Vineyards have been cultivated in Slovenia for over 2,000 years. The first vines are believed to have been brought to the region by the Celts or perhaps the Illyrian. It was the Romans who, as they did throughout their empire, greatly improved and increased grape cultivation and wine production. The wines of Slovenia have an excellent reputation. Though the country produces just a fraction when compared to countries like France and Italy it exports only 5% of production. A little known fact regarding Slovenian wine is that they do not export their