



## BEST OF THE BALKANS: SLOVENIA TO CROATIA

A rich and turbulent history, the medieval castles, sparkling turquoise sea, snow-capped peaks and ancient walled cities of Croatia will enthrall.

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Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Europe, Croatia, Slovenia



12 days from AU\$14,315 pp



Private

## Journey Overview

Beautiful cities, dramatic mountain scenery, pristine lakes and golden beaches, this journey covers it all. You'll discover Baroque architecture in abundance, flavoursome cuisine and robust wines plus ancient walled cities and emerald green forests. From Slovenia to Croatia and the sparkling Dalmatian coast, with a two-night relaxing stay on the island of Hvar.

### Journey Highlights

- Stroll across the famous bridges of Ljubljana
- Float across the glacial waters of Lake Bled on a traditional Slovenian gondola
- Hike the scenic trails of Plitvice Lakes National Park, a UNESCO site
- Visit the famous lavender villages on the Island of Hvar
- Discover Split's ancient Roman history with a visit to the Diocletian Palace



## Itinerary

### **Day 1: Arrive Zagreb, Croatia - Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Enjoy a warm welcome into the Croatian capital and transfer directly across the border into Slovenia and its petite capital Ljubljana.

#### ***Grand Union Hotel***

### **Day 2: Ljubljana**

Explore the architectural and culinary highlights of the capital on foot today. Characterised by its beautiful Baroque architecture, you'll also discover cobbled streets, dainty bridges, old churches and plenty of green spaces. Pause at the Triple Bridge, a group of three bridges crossing the Ljubljanica River connecting the historical, medieval, town on one bank, and the modern metropolis on the other. Time to admire the Cathedral, stop by the Plesnik open market and stroll through the Prešeren and Congress Squares. The 900-year-old Ljubljana Castle is a highlight, towering above the city, accessible by funicular railway for panoramic views. As you meander through the streets, discover the many gastronomic delights of the city. Stop at neighbourhood restaurants, the central market, coffee houses and food stalls where you have the chance to chat with locals and try the local fare.

#### ***Grand Union Hotel | Meals: B***

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**Day 3: Ljubljana - Design Your Day Lake Bled - Zagreb, Croatia**

Discover one of Slovenia's most scenic locations today on a visit to Lake Bled, whose emerald green waters with looming peaks of the Alps combine to create an idyllic natural setting. Hop aboard an old-fashioned hand-propelled gondola, known as a "pletna", for a private cruise across the lake to the picture-postcard island in the centre where the charming Church of the Assumption's 15th century belfry looms above the trees.

Returning to shore, recharge with a cup of tea and a slice of the famous Bled cream cake before a stroll around the lake and on to Bled Castle which perches above the glacial waters and offers breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and countryside. While you're there, take part in wine tasting and lunch (lunch payable locally) or continue to the town of Radovljica for lunch (payable locally) and visit a famous gingerbread museum which also specialises in beekeeping and honey. Arrive in Zagreb later today.

***Esplanade Zagreb Hotel / Meals: B***

**Day 4: Zagreb**

Admire the city from a panoramic viewpoint this morning before strolling around the Upper Town taking in St Mark's Church, City Hall, Parliament, St Stephen's Cathedral and Ban Jelačić Square. Enjoy the afternoon at leisure.

***Esplanade Zagreb Hotel / Meals: B***

**Day 5: Zagreb - Plitvice Lakes - Split**

Journey south to Split stopping on the way in the beautiful Plitvice Lakes National Park where you'll be dazzled by some of Croatia's most stunning scenery. Often described as one of the greatest natural wonders of Eastern Europe, this spectacular scenic region is made up of miles of shimmering turquoise lakes and cascading waterfalls that are linked by emerald forests and meadows of wildflowers. Explore on foot and get an understanding of why this magnificent area has been included in the UNESCO Register of World Natural Heritage.

***Hotel Park / Meals: B***

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**Day 6: Split**

Awake to the sound of church bells and Klapa singers and take to the streets on a walking tour of this lively seaport where you'll discover amidst a maze of medieval streets the imposing Palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian built in the 3rd century AD. Admire the richly decorated octagonal St Dominus Cathedral, originally the Emperor's mausoleum, before taking a stroll around the lively "Green Market". Smell the fresh seasonal produce, taste "soparnik", the traditional local pastry treat, and meet a family of olive oil producers.

***Hotel Park / Meals: B***

**Day 7: Split - Hvar**

A treat in store today when you take to the sparkling waters of the Adriatic by ferry along the stunning Dalmatian coast to the beautiful island of Hvar. Soak up the atmosphere of picturesque Hvar Town, built by the Venetian Doges, with its combination of Renaissance palaces, ancient monasteries and elegant marina, and understand why it has become one of the most glamorous resorts on the Adriatic Sea. Don't miss the old theatre, built in 1612, the arsenal, and the 15th century patrician palaces and soak up the breathtaking views from the gleaming limestone walls of the Spanjol Fortress which perches high above the town.

Afterwards, you are invited to a lovely olive grove near the village of Vrisnik for a traditional picnic lunch at the estate of the island's best olive oil producer, Borivoj Bojanic and his wife Zeljka. Continue to the centre of the island and drive along the old road of lavender, which passes the villages of Brusje, Velo Grablje and Selca, where can find what remains of Hvar's proud lavender tradition - Velo Grablje was once the capital of lavender production for all Dalmatia. Next stop is Dola village where you visit a dairy farm with a very small herd of goats. Learn about Croatia's traditional cheese making and sample some of its goat's cheese in crepes or marinated in aromatic herbs and olive oil.

***Hotel Palace Elisabeth / Meals: BL***

**Day 8: Hvar**

Enjoy a day at leisure or on an optional private boat tour of Hvar and and Pakleni Islands. Venture out onto the sparkling waters of the Hvar basin with your local guide and private boat to discover more of this fascinating island by water. The Pakleni islands nearby Hvar are known also as Paklinski and are a stunning chain of wooden isles offering sandy beaches, beautiful bays even restaurants and a bustling marina.

***Hotel Palace Elisabeth / Meals: B***

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**Day 9: Hvar - Ston - Dubrovnik**

Depart the island of Hvar this morning by ferry to the mainland. Continue to the Peljesac Peninsula and the small fishing town of Ston for a Croatian gourmet immersion. Taste the oysters, which are a local delicacy, at lunch in a typical Dalmatian restaurant (payable locally) and sample some of the regional wines at a famous winery for a tasting.

***Hotel Bellevue / Meals: B***

**Day 10: Dubrovnik**

Discover why Dubrovnik is one of the most enticing destinations in Europe on a walking tour of the pedestrian-only old town. With its intact medieval walls, sublime location and World Heritage status, Dubrovnik is a true jewel of the Adriatic. Stop by the Franciscan and Dominican Monasteries, the Rector's Palace and Dubrovnik Cathedral with time at leisure to further explore. This evening why not take the cable car up Mt Srd for jaw-dropping views and a sunset aperitif.

***Hotel Bellevue / Meals: B***

**Day 11: Dubrovnik - Elaphite Islands - Dubrovnik**

Pack your togs for a day on the water. Cruise by private boat to the Elaphite Islands, a picturesque archipelago comprising 13 islands, islets and rocky outcrops. The fragrance of thyme and rosemary mixed with laurel, cypress and pine fills the air and you'll stop at three of the largest islands: Kolocep, with its dense pine forest and charming fishing village; Lopud, famous for its Franciscan Monastery, the beautiful Gjorgic-Mayneri Park and stunning Sunj beach; and finally, Sipan, the largest, whose hillsides are dotted with summer villas, Renaissance churches and Baroque chapels.

***Hotel Bellevue / Meals: B***

**Day 12: Depart Dubrovnik**

Transfer to the airport for your onward flight.

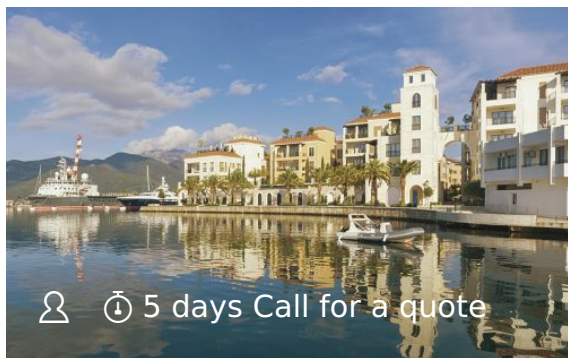
***Meals: B***



## Map



## Extensions



### Montenegro Extension

**See Details**



## Accommodation

### Esplanade Zagreb Hotel



Built in 1925 as a glamorous stopover for passengers on the Orient-Express, the elegant Esplanade is unquestionably Zagreb's most upmarket hotel and offers an opulent stay in a beautiful Art Nouveau landmark. The hotel's 209 spacious rooms and suites are individually designed and luxuriously furnished in rich tones with marble en suite bathrooms and l'Occitane amenities. Dining ranges from the elegant Zinfandel's restaurant to the street-side Le Bistro. There is also a cocktail bar and health club.

## The Grand Union Hotel, Ljubljana



The Grand Union Hotel boasts lavish Art Nouveau architecture and a prime location in the heart of the Slovenian capital. A landmark building, the 173 rooms feature wooden furnishings, calm pastel colours with curved mirrors and large windows, some with a castle view. Dining options include the Restaurant Union with its garden terrace and a street front café. The hotel also has a swimming pool, fitness centre and sauna.

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