

# **THE EMERALD TRAIL**

The beauteous Soča is one of the most important rivers in Slovenia. It was written into the historical memory of Europeans, particularly Slovenians and Italians, as the scene of major and bloody battles during the First World War, while in the imagination of the modern visitor it is primarily a synonym for pristine beauty and liveliness, as a place for a wealth of active experiences in the embrace of unspoilt nature.

The Soca river basin is an expansive and diverse land. It stretches from the Alpine north to the lowlands in the lower reaches of the river, and also takes in the Idrijca and Vipava valleys and all the other tributaries. The territory is administratively incorporated into the Northern Primorska – Gorica statistical region, which today comprises 13 municipalities: Bovec, Kobarid, Tolmin, Kanal, Nova Gorica, Brda, Šempeter - Vrtojba, Miren - Kostanjevica, Renče -Vogrsko, Ajdovščina, Vipava, Idrija and Cerkno. One of the key developmental orientations of the region is for tourism to be developed across the entire area, services and attractions to be linked together and a common destination established. This destination is named the Emerald Trail, after the Soča River – the biggest natural and symbolic feature of the area.



### NATURE

The Emerald Trail offers an exceptionally diverse natural environment. It takes the visitor below precipitous rock faces and Alpine ridges past the green tops of the sub-Alpine foothills and expansive Dinaric plateaux, through the delightful vineyards of Goriška Brda and the Vipava Valley. Along the way it conceals countless mysterious caves, enchanting waterfalls, picturesque lakes and crystal-clear rivers. The luxuriant natural wealth is safeguarded in protected areas such as Triglav National Park and the Zgornja Idrijca and Trnovski Gozd Regional Park. Visitors can experience these natural wonders as a wayfarer, through active discovery by pursuing sports in the natural environment or simply as a respectful and silent admirer.





### HERITAGE

The Emerald Trail can boast an exceptional historical, cultural and technical heritage. It was undoubtedly the Soča or Isonzo Front that left the greatest mark on the area's turbulent past, although we should not forget the Neanderthal whistle from Divje Babe cave, the Iron Age Santa Lucia culture, the Roman battles in the Vipava Valley, the great Tolmin revolt, the resting place of French rulers at Kostanjevica, the fortress system of the Rapallo border, the Partisan hospital of Franja and more. The rich cultural tradition is reflected in the arts and crafts, outstanding among which is Idrija lace, and in the folk traditions, customs, songs, dances, habits and practices. This region has been marked by a multitude of artists in all fields: poets, writers, musicians, painters and architects. High on the list of the Emerald Trail's technical heritage is the Idrija mercury mine, which for 500 years ranked Idrija among the technologically most advanced places in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the century-old Bohinj railway, an extraordinary monument to engineering complete with stone bridges, tunnels and galleries.





slightly more modest, but for that reason more attuned to the individual guest.





## SITES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

**1** Source of the Soča River is one of the finest karstic springs in Slovenia's mountains. The blue-green water wells up from a cavern with an underground lake, then falls 15 m. (info: TIC Bovec)



**5** Veliki Kozjak Waterfall is a staggeringly beautiful 15-metre column of water that falls at the source of the lower channels of the Kozjak stream. Caught between the walls of a kind of underground chamber, it pours out into the wide blue-green pool. A trail leads to the waterfall past remnants of the front line from the First World War. (info: TIC Kobarid)



**Tolmin Gorges** is the lowest and southernmost access point to Triglav National Park and an extraordinary natural feature. The protected interpretive trail leads through the sunken channel to Zadlaška (Dante) Cave and back across Hudičev Most (Devil's Bridge), which stretches 60 m above the surface of the Tolminka. (info: TIC





Big Soča Gorges, a channel proximately 750 metres long and up to 5 metres deep with precipitous walls, is <mark>he most</mark> imposing sculpture carved out by the Soča along its course.

(info: TIC Bovec)

3 Kluže Fortress is one of the most picturesque fortifications in Slovenia. At an exceptional location above the Koritnica gorge, it once served as a defence against the Turks and later played an important part in the French wars. In 1797 it was burned down and destroyed, then from 1881 to 1882 the ruins were demolished and a new fortress built in its place. Today it serves as a museum and cultural centre, and in summer it is the main venue for the Kluže Festival. (info: TIC Bovec)







9 Kanal ob Soči is a little medieval town with a rich cultural heritage. It straddles both banks of the Soča River, and is linked by a twin-arch bridge. The old town centre comprises the Riko Debenjak Gallery, a Gothic house, the 15<sup>th</sup> century Church of the Assumption, Neptune Fountain and the picturesque square of Kontrada with remains of the defensive walls. (info: TIC Kanal)

**10 Šmartno** is a picturesque medieval village enclosed by walls and fortified with defensive towers. It stands on a panoramic slope offering fantastic views of Goriška Brda. Its treasures include the Brda house from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The village is a favourite of painters, who have a small hall here to use for events and a gallery. (info: TIC Brda)

**Dobrovo Castle** is a Renaissance manor house with Baroque accents from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is enhanced by a gallery of prints by the acclaimed artist Zoran Mušič and by part of the collection of the last owner of the castle, Count Baguer. Other special features include the hunters' room and knights' hall, where there are numerous musical and other events. (info: TIC Brda)





**Zemono Manor** is a late Renaissance hunting manor, built in the style of ontemporary villas near Venice. It stands on a low hill in the middle of the Vipava Valley. The building is surrounded by an arcade, while the interior is adorned with rich frescoes of secular content. (info: TIC Vipava)







Boka Waterfall has its source in the

Kanin mountain range and is the biggest

and most imposing Slovenian waterfall.

The most awe-inspiring view of it is late in

the spring, when the snowmelt high in the

mountains sends up to a hundred cubic

metres of water down each second.

(info: TIC Bovec)

**6** Memorial Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca is the finest monument to the First World War in the Soča region. Soldiers of the Third Austro-Hungarian Mountain Brigade built it in 1916 in memory of their allen comrades. A total of 2,564 names are corched into oak panels set like the pages of a book on the walls of the nave. In 2007 the church acquired the European Cultural Heritage sign. (info: TIC Tolmin)



**B** solkan Bridge is the famous railway bridge along the Bohinj line running across the Soča at Solkan. It was built in 1906 and ranks as one of the greatest technological attractions of Slovenia. Its stone arch, rising in a span of 85 m, stands as the biggest in the world. (info: TIC Nova Gorica)



**W** Kostanjevica is an ancient pilgrimage centre with a rich history and a wealth of treasures from the past. The crypt of the church houses the tomb of the last of the Bourbons, the French royal line, while the library of the Franciscan monastery houses precious printed items dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (info: TIC Nova Gorica)

**Trg Evrope** (Europe Square, or in Italian Piazza Transalpina) is the common square joining Nova Gorica and Gorizia, which the two cities built in 2004 at the site of the former national border to mark Slovenia's entry into the European Union. It is a feature that links the two cities and a symbol of European integration. The nearby museum tells of the times of the national border between Slovenia and Italy in the Gorica region. (info: TIC Nova Gorica)

Military Watchtower at Vrtojba was erected right on the former Italian-Yugoslav border in 1948 by the Yugoslav army, and was used to watch the border right up until 1991. Today it has been arranged as a small memorial museum, showcasing the events in the border zone from the end of the Second World War up until Slovenia's accession to the EU. (info: Hotel Lipa)



23 Divje jezero or Wild Lake is a tiny and mysterious karstic lake that is one of the jewels of Slovenia's natural wealth. The emerald green surface, caught in the dark surroundings of a rocky basin, is usually a calm idyll, but after heavy rain h<mark>uge</mark> quantities of water spill out of it. Since 1967 it has been protected as a natural monument. (info: TIC Idrija)

**24** Antonijev rov is a section of the Idrija mine, the second oldest and biggest mercury mine in the world. It was already being excavated in 1500. Today it is arranged for visitors and offers an unforgettable experience of the mysterious underground world of the miners. (info: TIC Idrija)





Kolovrat – open-air museum: between







- Cerje is a slope above Mirno, from which a wonderful view opens up of the Karst and the Bay of Trieste, the Friuli plains, Vipava Valley and across Gorica and Brda to the highest peaks of the Julian Alps. At the summit stands a massive, 15-storey monument to the defenders of Slovenian territory. (info: TIC Temnica)
- B Hubelj Torrent wells up through numerous rocky holes in the karstic underground right above the town of Ajdovščina. The spring is especially picturesque after heavy rain. Lower down the stream, the remains of huge ironmaking furnaces have been restored. (info: TIC Ajdovščina)
- 19 Castra is a Roman walled structure with 14 towers, and today it is still almost entirely preserved. At one time it was a fortified military camp incorporated into the defensive system of the Roman Empire's eastern frontier (info: TIC Ajdovščina)

23 Partisan Hospital of Franja, named after the physician Dr. Franja Bojc Bidovec functioned during the Second World War in the Pasica gorge near Cerkno. It is a unique monument to people's nobility and humanity. In 2007 it acquired the European Heritage sign. (info: TIC Cerkno)





**26** Divje Babe Archaeology Park lies close to the village of Šebrelje, in the middle of the Idrijsko-Cerkljansko hills. In the karstic cave archaeologists have found the remains of a cave bear, stone and bone tools and the remains of fireplaces made by Ice Age man. The most famous find is a 55,000-year-old bone whistle, thought to be the oldest musical instrument in the world. (info: TIC Cerkno)





↑ Source of the Soča River











↓ Soča River



feature, since the river rises in the form of a delta and has as many as nine main springs. The most powerful of these is called Pod <mark>Skalc</mark>o, just behind the Renaissance Lanthieri Manor in the middle of the town of Vipava. On display nearby are two ancient Egyptian sarcophagi made of red granite and approximately 4,500 years old.

**Goče** is a fascinatingly huddled village with narrow streets and stone houses. The tiny village lies on a ridge with fine views above the Vipava Valley, and is a precious monument of Slovenia's cultural heritage. In the centre of the village stands the Church of St. Andrew from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the two main streets cross in the form of St. Andrew's Cross. Goče is known primarily for its stone altars, vaulted basements and numerous original wells. (info: TIC Vipava)

(info: TIC Vipava)





**MUSEUMS** 

- Dom Trenta is the information centre of Triglav National Park, and has a presentation of the natural features of the park and the rich ethnological heritage of the Trenta Valley. It is an important centre of cultural and other social life in the valley, and is the venue for various concerts, theatrical performances, exhibitions and other events. (www.tnp.si)
- Kobarid Museum outlines to visitors the two and a half years of fighting on the Soča Front during the First World War. The exhibits, the large relief of the surrounding mountains, the rich photographic material and multivision projection sensitively tell the story of the hard and bloody days by the Soča. The Council of Europe declared this the best Eu museum of 1993. (www.kobariski-muzej.si)
- Tolmin Museum, housed in the former Coronini Mansion in the middle of Tolmin, preserves the rich cultural heritage of the Soča region. The permanent exhibition Naplavine obsoške zgodovine (Flotsam of Soča History) is outstanding for the extraordinary finds from the ancient Santa Lucia culture at Most na Soči and the presentation of the Tolmin peasant uprising in 1713. Throughout the year interesting presentations and exhibitions are staged in the ground floor rooms. (www.tol-muzej.si)
- Goriško Regional Museum, with its archaeological, ethnological, historical and cultural history departments, is based at the castle of Kromberk. It houses a permanent exhibition of precious artworks from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, period furniture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there is also a permanent historical exhibition on the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The castle also offers a wedding hall and restaurant. (www.goriskimuzej.si)
- Museum at Ajdovščina keeps an extensive collection of fossils collected by Stane Bačar, including some very rare specimens. Part of the rich archaeological story of Ajdovščina is showcased in the exhibition Fluvio Frigido – Castra – Flovius – Ajdovščina, which tells of the settlement of Ajdovščina from prehistoric times to the early Middle Ages. (info: TIC Ajdovščina)
- Idrija Municipal Museum is housed in the renovated 16<sup>th</sup> century Gewerkenegg Castle. It offers an intricate exhibition of the 500-year history of the mine and town and also a new lace exhibition entitled *Idrija lace, history written in thread*. The picturesque arcaded courtyard is a venue for summer cultural events. The museum boasts the title of the best European museum of industrial and technical heritage of 1997. (www.muzej-idrija-cerkno.si)
- Cerkno Museum works to preserve and showcase the local heritage. In addition to occasional exhibitions, there are two permanent exhibitions: Cerkno region through the centuries and It's the Pust Carnival's fault! – The story of the Cerkno waggoners. (www.muzej-idrija-cerkno.si)





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is.tid.ww E-mail: contact@hit.si, booking@hit.si **דפו.:** +386 (0) 533 13 41 Delpinova 7a, 5I - 5000 Nova Gorica .b.b TIH

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:lisyT blevem3 edt to zventysed nisM

is.tid.wwv is.jid@sqil.l9jod :lism-3 **Tel.:** +386 (0)5 336 60 00 Trg Ivana Roba 7, SI - 5290 Šempeter pri Gorici edi letol

> moɔ.mszinut-eɔiropevon.wwv ter.lois@pnoitst **:lism-3 Tel.:** +386 (0)5 330 46 00 Bevkov trg 4, SI - 5000 Nova Gorica **STIC Nova Gorica**

is.sbrd.wwv is.ebrd-enicdo@cina-brda.si **7el ::** +386 (0) 595 95 94 Grajska cesta 10, SI - 5212 Dobrovo v Brdih TIC Brda

> is.lensA-**oi**t.www ten.lois@leneA.cit :liem-**Tel.:** +386 (0)5 398 12 13 Pionirska ulica 2, SI - 5213 Kanal leneX Ol

iz.sjootoz-otl.www Is.9[20fo-sofo@lto-sofocje.si **Tel.:** +386 (0)5 380 04 80 Petra Skalarja 4, SI - 5220 Tolmin nimloT **DIT** 

is.9[วofo2-ofl.www is.9toto2o2010 lisedo3rid@lto-sotocje.si **Tel.:** +386 (0)5 380 04 90 [rg svobode 16, 5] - 5222 Kobarid **TIC Kobarid** 

is.ว9vod.wwv iz.29vod@otni :lism-3 **Tel.:** +386 (0)5 389 64 44 ry golobarskih žrtev 22, 23, 51 - 5230 Bovec TIC Bovec



is.ninskosveckanin.si

tən.loiz@rətnəɔ.iAzninsA **:lism-**Tel.: +386 (0)5 389 60 03 Dvor 43, SI - 5230 Bovec ATC Kanin Bovec d.o.o. **WINAX OTA** 

moɔ.lisıt-blsıəmə.www moo.listj-blst9m9@ofni :lism-**Tel.:** +386 (0)5 380 04 86 Petra Skalarja 4, SI - 5220 Tolmin RDO Smaragdna pot

**THE EMERALD TRAIL INFO:** THE EMERALD TRAIL

> www.cerkno.si/turizem ten.lois@onאtec.cetkno@siol.net **Tel.:** +386 (0)5 373 46 45 Močnikova 2, SI - 5282 Cerkno TIC Cerkno

is.məzinut-alinbi.www Is.eroi@e(inbioif :liem-91 95 475 2(0) 985+ **:: 19** odnikova 3, 51 - 5280 ldrija FIC Idrija

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## ΝΟΙΤΑΜΆΟΗΝΙ



↑ Kobarid Ravine

↑ Kluže Fortress

Tolmin Castle



 $\downarrow$  Gewerkenegg Castle

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