

TRAVEL INTEL

CENTRAL SLOVENIA:
EUROPE IN MICROCOsm

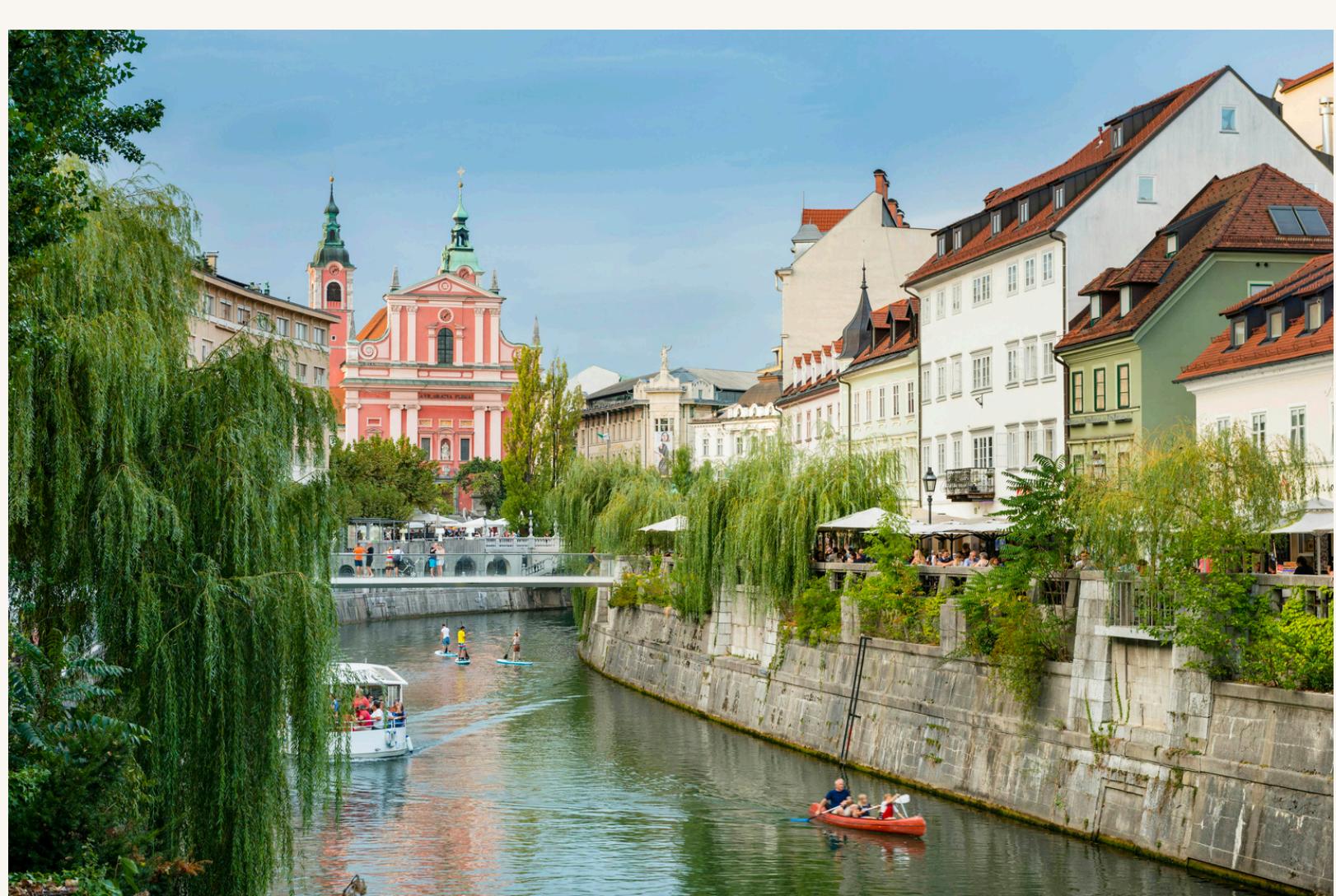
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SLOVENIA

From snow-capped mountains, dazzling Mediterranean beaches, thick evergreen forests, rolling vineyards, and quaint villages, Slovenia is essentially the 'undiscovered' Europe that the well-travelled dream of – a microcosm of the unique experiences for which the continent is renowned, all captured in a country half the size of Switzerland.

Start in the postcard village-capital of Ljubljana--which hosts a surprising number of excellent restaurants along its pedestrianized riverfront--easily seen within a day or two. Head north to the iconic Lake Bled and traverse the mountains and forests of the north, before heading south the explore countryside villages and vineyards.



Ljubljana



Vršič Pass in the Triglav National Park



Piran on the Istrian Peninsula

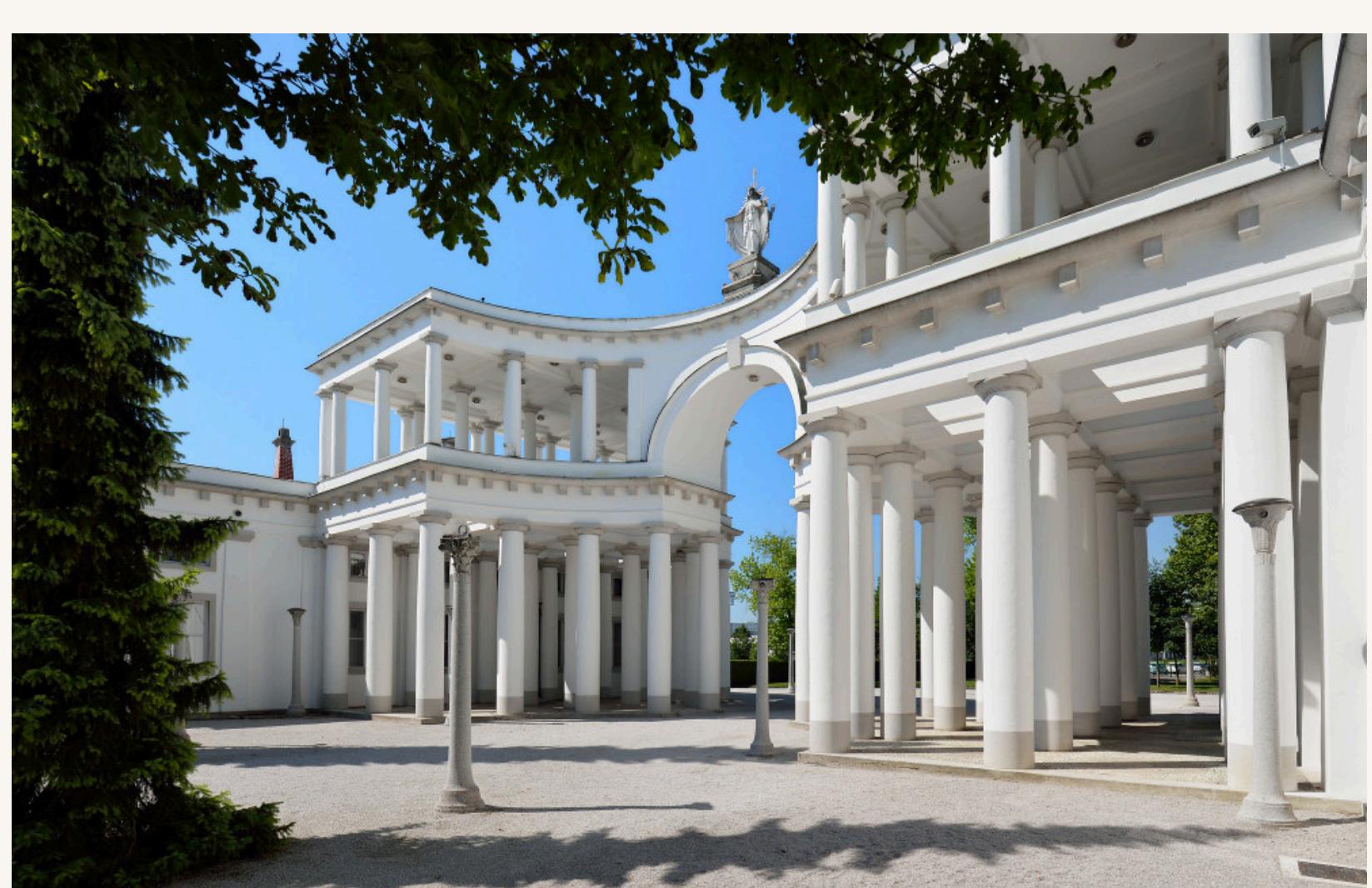


THE CHARMING CAPITAL VILLAGE:
LJUBLJANA

LJUBLJANA

Slovenia's Capital (pronounced "Loo-be-anh-Ah") is centered around a bend in the Ljubljanica River, fronted by its 'old-town' of red tiled roofs, sidewalk cafes, and green spaces. Its small size makes it one of Europe's easiest capitals to navigate, and easily explored within a day or two. Rent a bicycle or simply stroll along the riverfront, savor in the city's surprisingly refined dining scene, and immerse in the modernist architecture that Ljubljana is known for amongst the erudite. It makes a great base from which to take day trips to the mountains, lakes, and wineries that are within an hour's drive, or the ideal launch-point for a roadtrip through the country's diverse regions. Some sights you'll pass by in the old-town include:

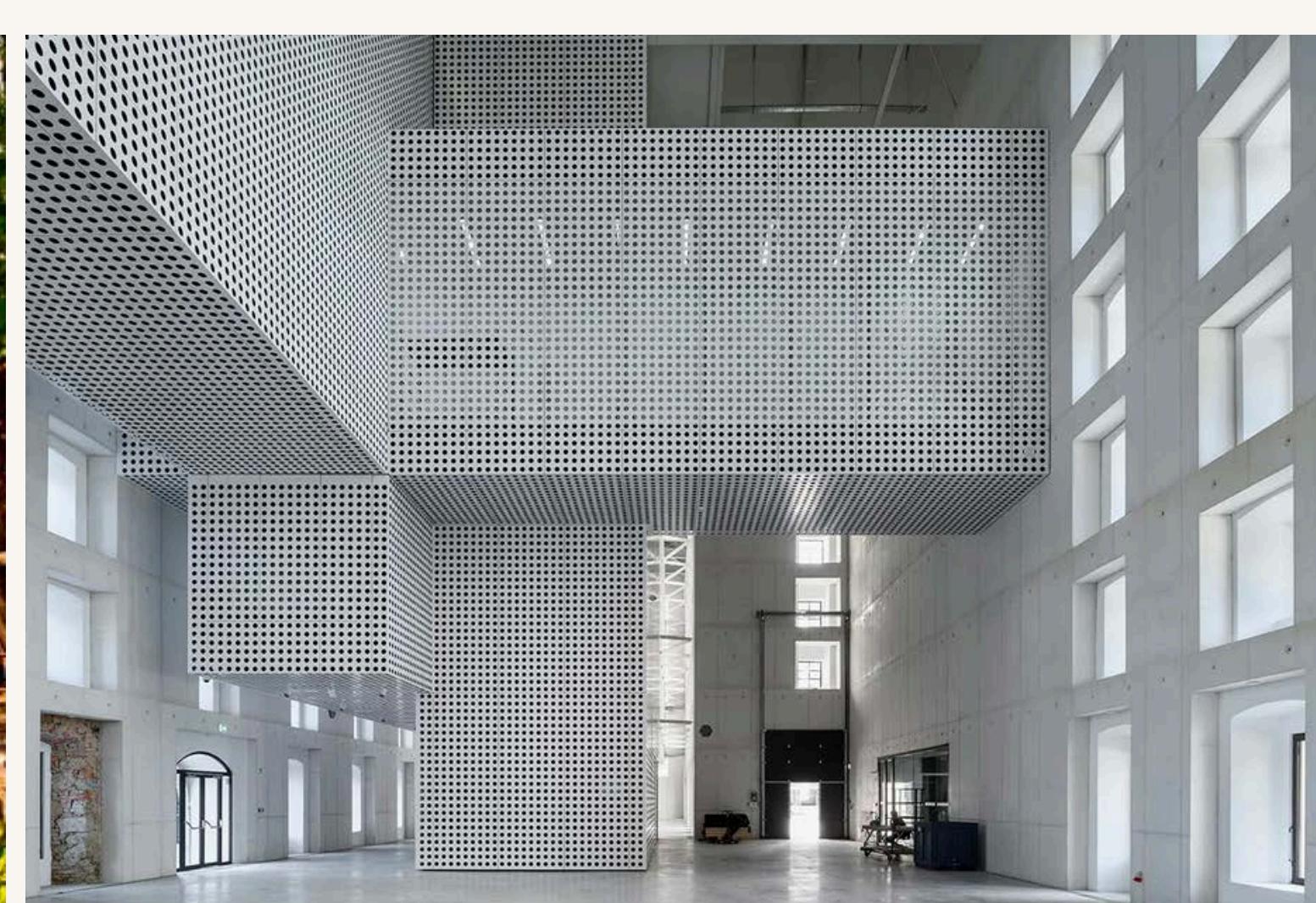
- Prešeren Square & Triple Bridge: Named after Slovenia's most beloved poet, the square is filled with atmospheric cafés, street musicians and fashionable boutiques.
- St. Nicholas Cathedral: Step inside the cathedral to see pink marble interiors and the exquisite frescoes that adorn the walls and ceiling and by Italian Baroque master Giulio Quaglio. Open 10am - noon and 3pm - 6pm.
- Central Market: A vast market open every day but Sunday; you can find anything from fish and meat to flowers and traditional Slovenian wooden products. While walking through the city centre, be sure to keep a eye out for the Cyanometer, a monolithic sculpture that measures the blueness of the sky and changes color to match it.



Plečnik's Architecture



Old Town Riverfront



Cukrarna Gallery

STAY

Zlata Ladjica Boutique Hotelzlataladjica.com/

15 rooms, from 535 eur

On the riverfront, this is likely the nicest boutique in the capital. Extensively renovated in 2020, the hotel is atop a well-rated Slovenian restaurant. Tasteful, warm rooms tell “stories” in their designs of history and culture. Near flawless reviews commend the location, welcoming staff, excellent food. The hotel will arrange transfers to and from the airport. Note: you cannot drive to the hotel (in the Old Town), but staff will greet you upon arrival at a designated parking spot nearby.

AS Boutique Hotelashotel.si/en/home-page/

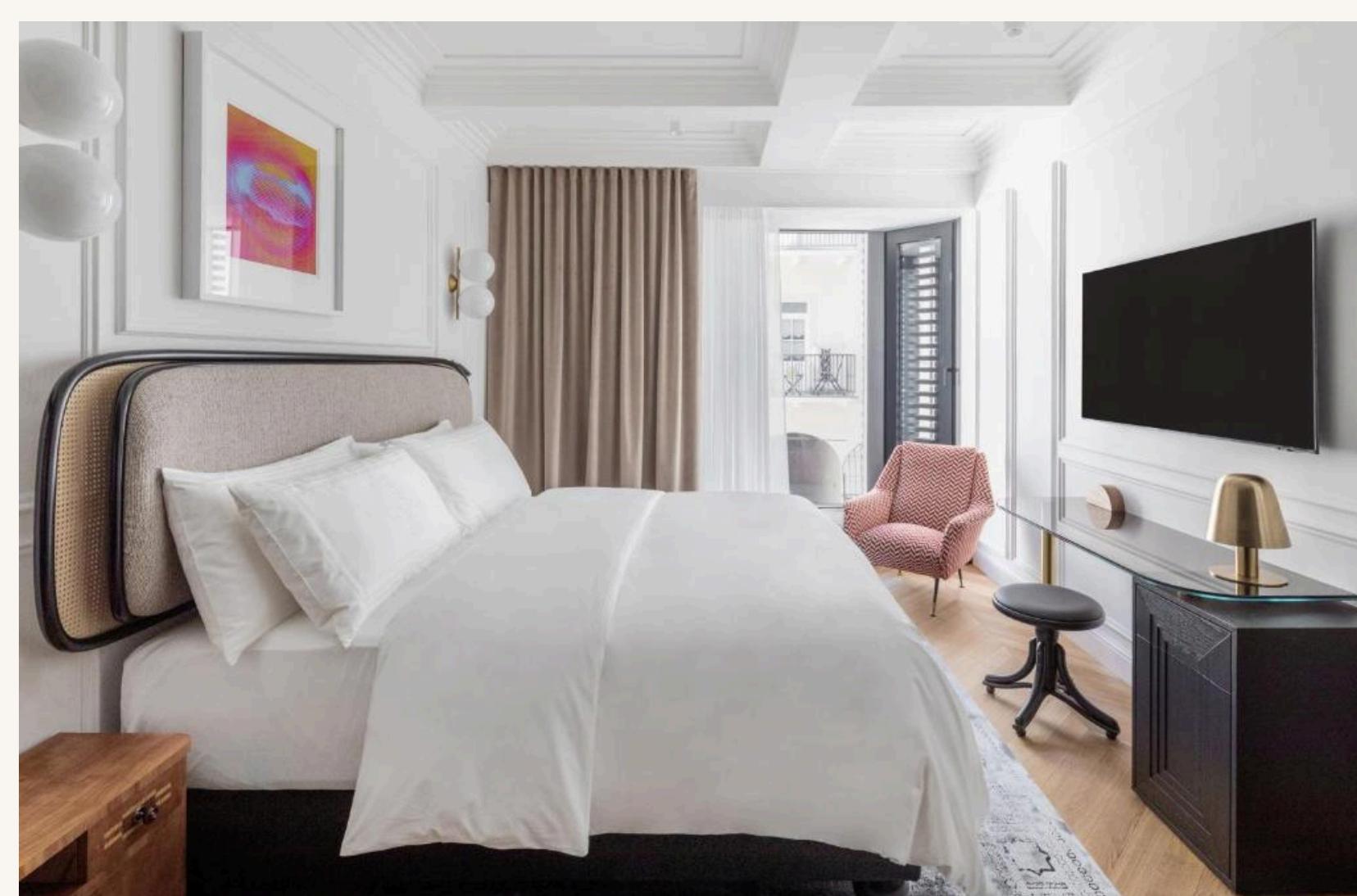
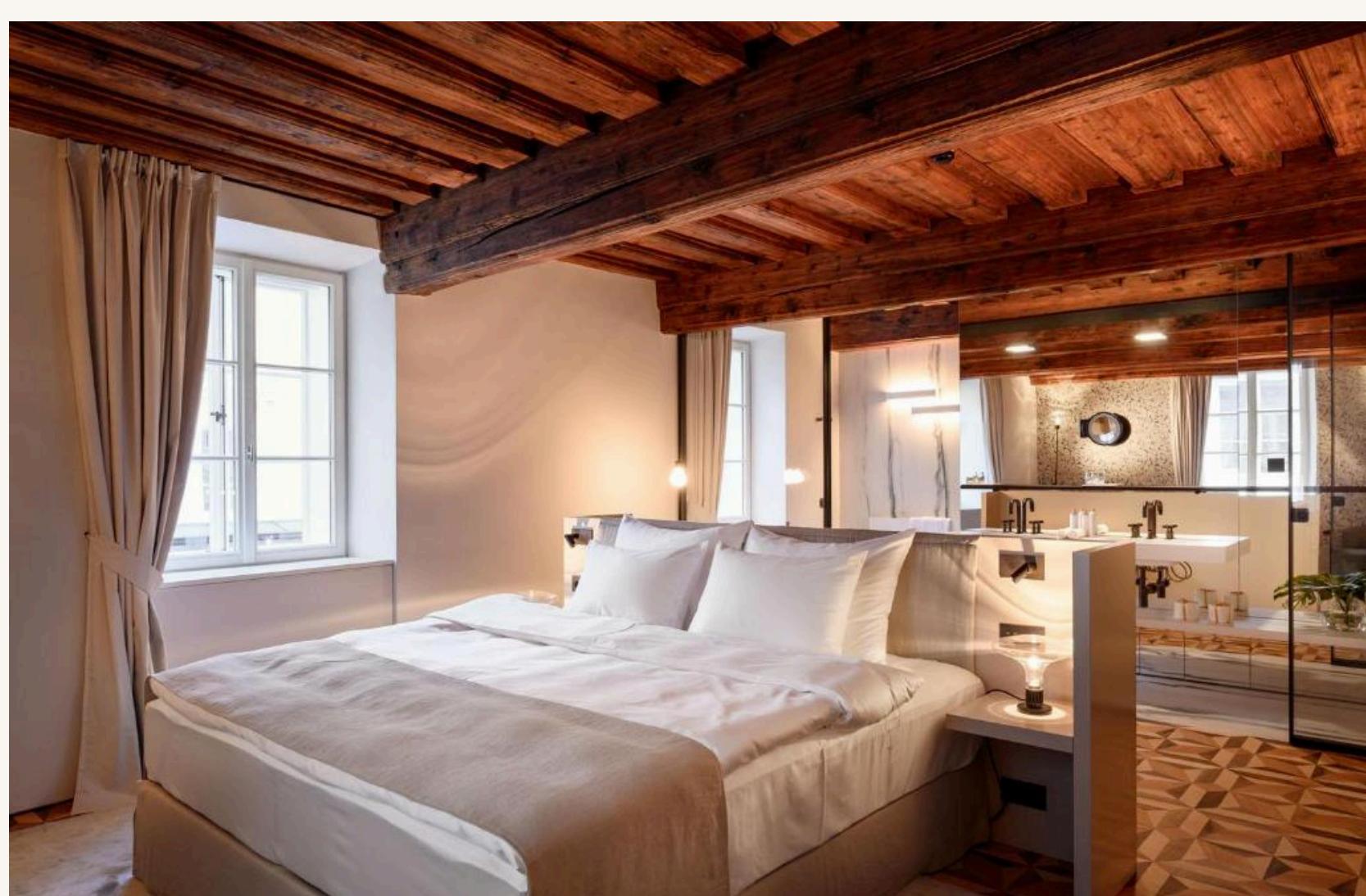
30 rooms, from 283 eur

Centrally located in Old Town, this brand-new (2023), quaint property features contemporary architecture, and tasteful rooms with balconies. Few amenities. With only a handful of reviews available, all are 5-star and call it a “gem” with “unparalleled attention to detail,” and “one of the best places we have stayed at in the world,” noting welcoming staff, and delicious breakfast. No parking on site. Its Gostlina AS restaurant is noted for good, alfresco fish and pasta.

InterContinental Ljubljanawww.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/us/en/ljubljana/ljuha/hoteldetail

165 rooms, from 212 eur

On the edge of the center, surrounded by busy highways and businesses and the train station, this is one of the only big-branded, business hotels in Ljubljana. 10-minute walk to the river / Old Town. Rooms are contemporary, tasteful, and spacious. Hotel amenities include full-service concierge, rooftop restaurant (20th floor), bar with DJ, and club floor. Reviewers comment about the helpful staff by name, and note cleanliness and variety of amenities available.



Zlata Ladjica Hotel

AS Boutique Hotel

Intercontinental Hotel

LJUBLJANA

SEE

Cukrarna Gallery

A former sugar refinery transformed into a large gallery space.

Tivoli Park

Home to the Tivoli Mansion and the Botanical Garden; boasts an impressive collection of exotic plants, flowers, and trees from all over the world, as well as a beautiful Japanese garden.

Jože Plečnik House ♦

Former home of Slovenia's most famous architect of the mid 20th century. He built a Slovenian version of the Rialto Bridge (Triple Bridge), market halls, fountains, and buildings. The house is now a museum. His heroic status amongst locals was so great, he was even nominated for sainthood after his death (but it wasn't granted).

Sunday Antique and Flea Market

Weekly market featuring glassware, ceramics, and vintage artwork.

Metelkova

Sprawled across 12,500 sq meters of an abandoned army base, the self-proclaimed city has become the leading centre of underground music and art in the region. It's quiet and worth exploring during the day but best to avoid at night, unless you're looking for a party scene.

National Gallery

This wonderful gallery is housed in a Neo-Renaissance palace, and features Slovene and European art from the 13th century up to the first half of the 20th century. Closed on Mondays.

Barka Ljubljana

50-minute boat tour on a handmade wooden boat. Offered on the hour, every hour starting at 11am. The tour offers views of Old Town's major sights. Private trips can also be arranged.

Ljubljana Castle

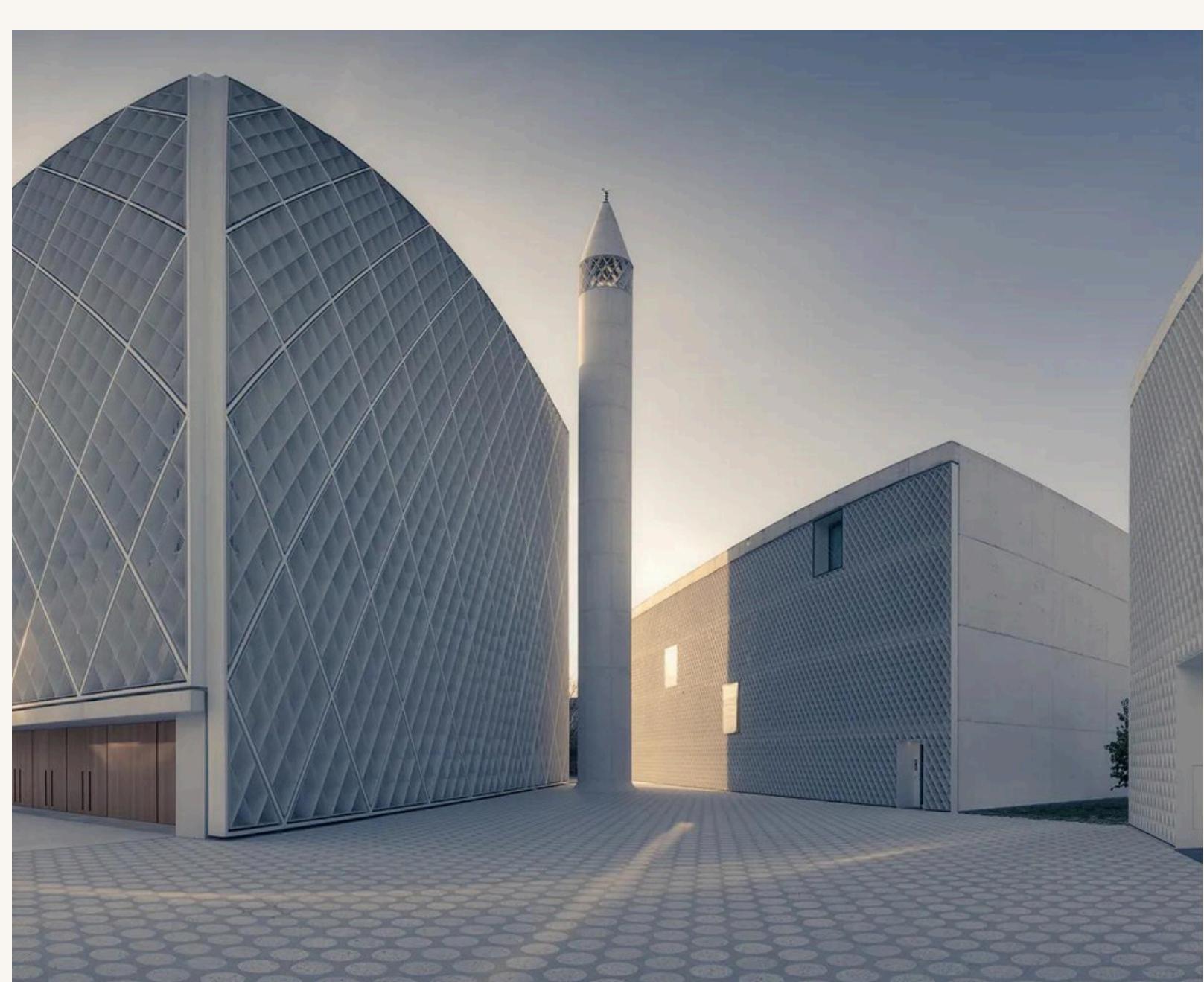
This hilltop fortress offers beautiful views of the city below and even the Alps in the distance. It can be visited via a short hike or from the funicular that leaves near the Central Market. Inside the grounds lies the unique Museum of Puppetry.

Ljubljana Mosque

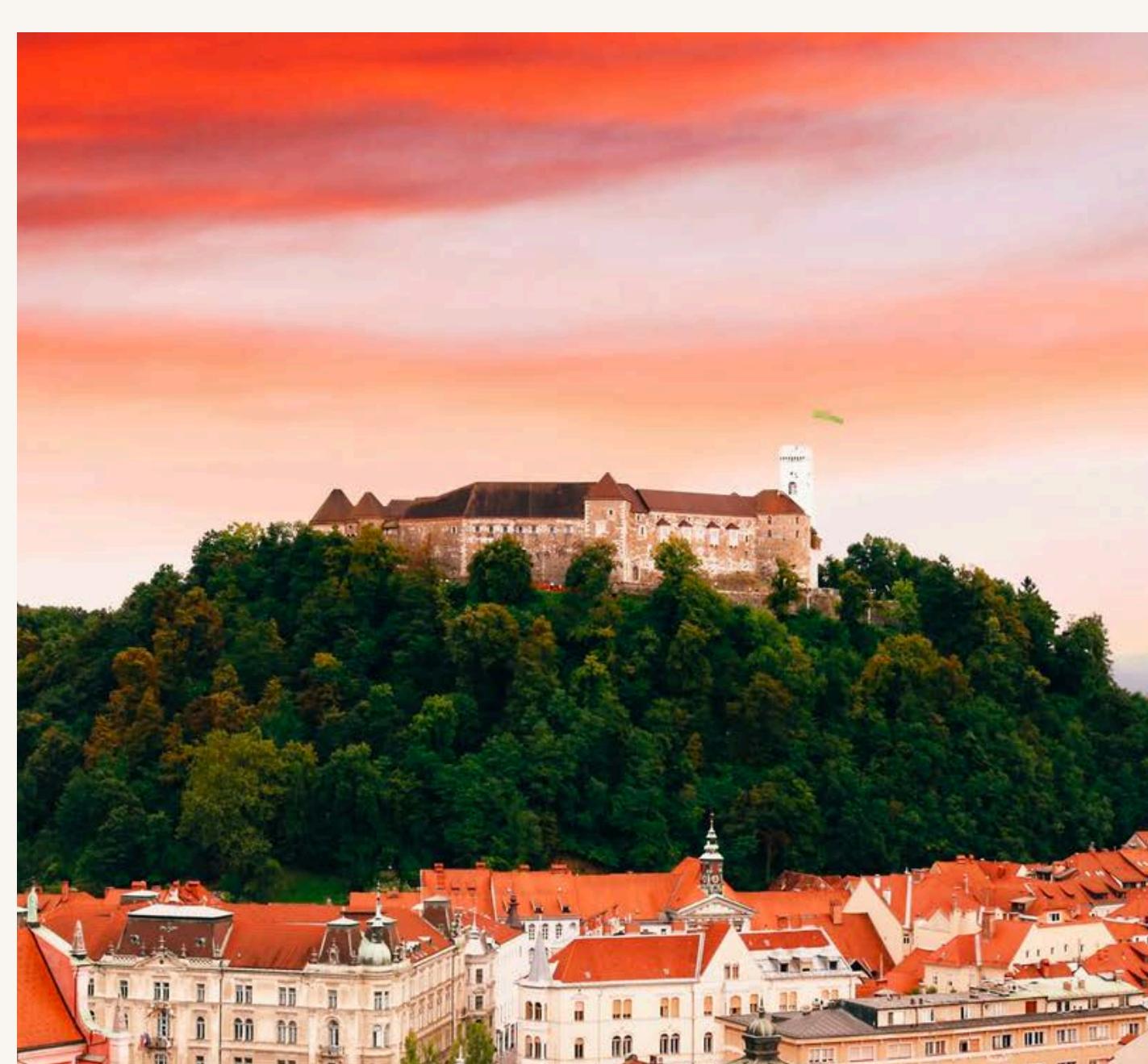
Slovenia's first mosque is a striking mix of Islamic and modern design by Slovenian architect Bevk Perović.

Juha Ceramics and Art Studio

A shop featuring tableware and other fun pieces from a local artist.



Ljubljana Mosque



Ljubljana Castle



Metelkova

LJUBLJANA

EAT



Strellec



Georgie Bistro



Wine Bar Suklje

RESTAURANTS

Strellec

A most unique dining experience inside the castle tower, with stunning food and wine. Michelin starred.

Georgie Bistro

Relaxed, warm, and modern, with contemporary dishes.

Julija

Casual but classic café.

Supernatural

Café with filling dishes and an extensive wine list.

TaBar

Imaginative tapas in a fun atmosphere.

Gostlina Breg

On the riverfront; Italian and Middle Eastern.

Shambala

Vietnamese and Thai in a lovely setting.

LITE BITES AND SIPS

Wine Bar Suklje

Underground wine cellar from 1619 with an interactive and extensive menu.

My Dumplings of Slovenia

Casual, al fresco lunch with Balkan sweet + savory dumplings.

Cankarjevo Nabrezje by Lolita

Modern dessert cafe in city centre.

Ala Prsuterija

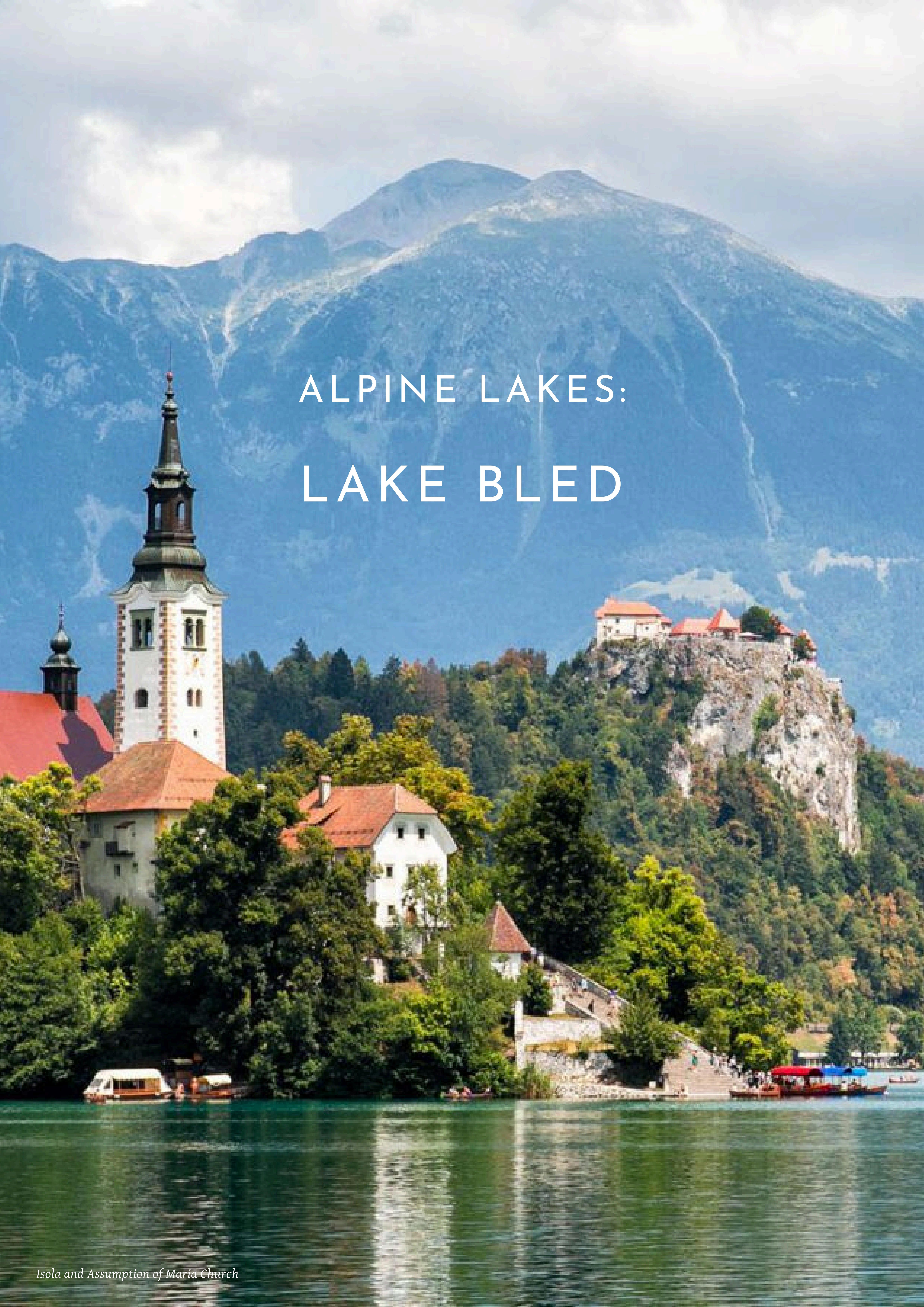
Streetside charcuterie and wine bar.

Slovenska Hiša

Riverside bar with tapas.

Veganika

Al fresco, veg-forward.



ALPINE LAKES: LAKE BLED

LAKE BLED

30 minutes from Ljubljana, this alpine retreat is famous for luring the rich and famous, including King Charles and Paul McCartney. Gardens, swans, pine forests hug this small village. It is most known for the island and church that sits in the center of the lake, which you can take a casual row upon.

STAY

Grand Hotel Toplice

<https://slh.com/hotels/grand-hotel-toplice>

87 rooms, from 275 eur

A proper, full-service 19th century luxury property on the shores of Lake Bled, once used by the King as a summer residence. A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. The design is a bit traditional and dated. Spa with indoor pool and saunas, fine dining restaurant (Julijana--Michelin rated), terrace bar, and even provides row boats to have a romantic sail on the lake. Free parking – which is otherwise difficult to find in the small village. Reviewers like the service and views, but often comment that the hotel could use a renovation.

Hotel Triglav

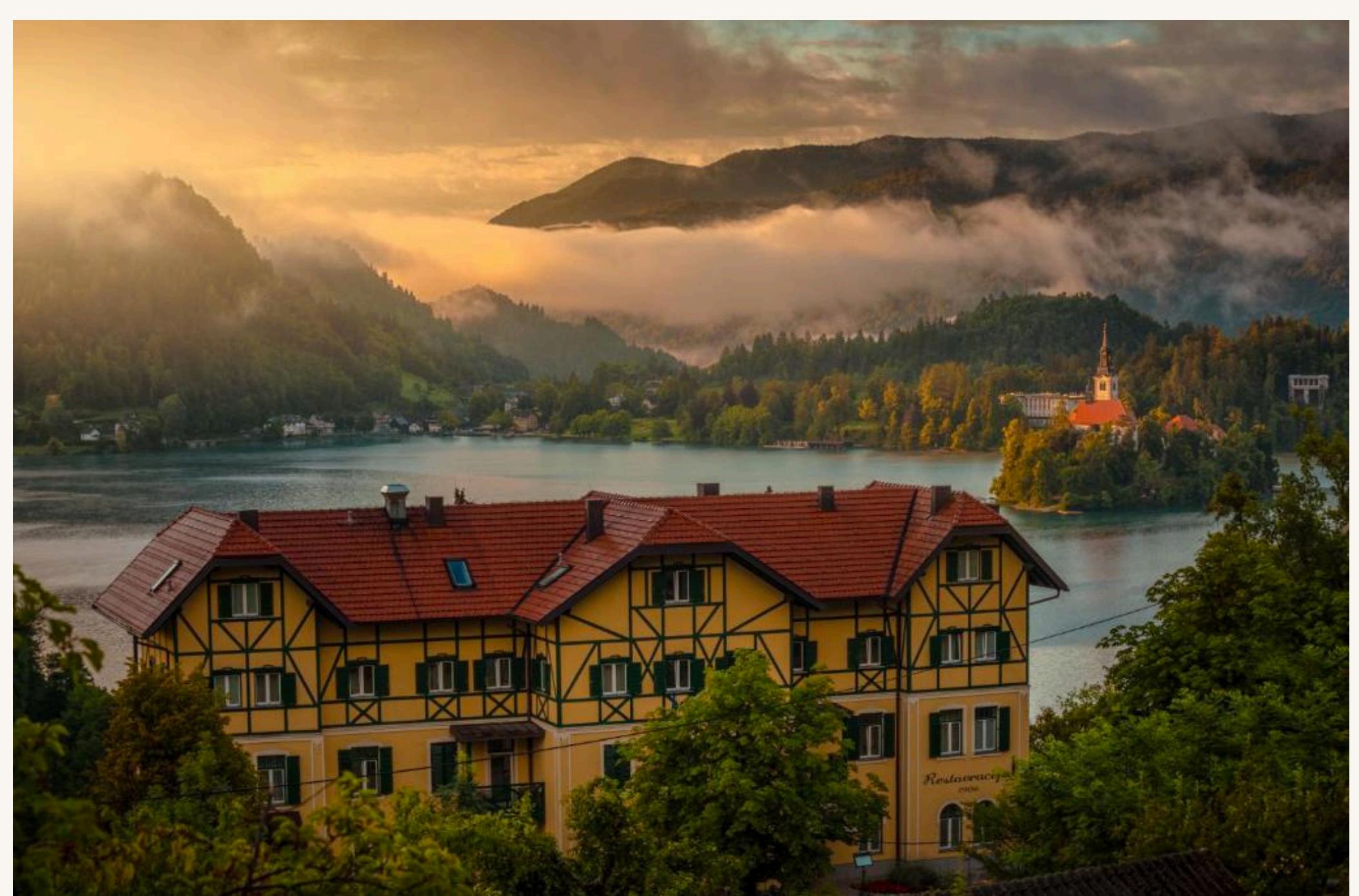
www.hoteltriglavbled.si/en/

21 rooms, from 270 eur

Set on the north side of Bled, somewhat away from the village, is this 1906 property offers terraces and balconies with views of the lake. Amenities include an upscale restaurant and wine cellar; spa with sauna and indoor pool; and parking garage. The interiors are somewhat traditional and dated, although it was fully renovated in 2009. Reviewers love the friendly and professional staff, and the views. Note there is some limited availability in early May.



Grand Hotel Toplice



Hotel Triglav

LAKE BLED

SEE

Assumption of Maria Church and Island

This picturesque island has a church with a bell tower – and is said to bring luck to those who climb the 99 steps to ring the bell. Note: hiring a boat or renting a row boat can be a tourist trap but there are several options available for accessing the island (self-guided or guided).

Bled Castle

11th century fortress, cliffside overlooking the lake.

Vintgar Gorge

A short hike along a lush river canyon 10 minutes outside of town; note tickets are purchased at the parking area.

RESTAURANTS

Restavracija 1906

In the Hotel Triglav, inventive Slovenian cuisine.

Ostarija Peglez'n

Cluttered with décor yet homey, known for service.

Arroi

For Asian-inspired food in a modern setting.

Restaurant Arbor

For lakeside views and fresh, produce-forward plates

Garden Restaurant

Al fresco tree house dining in a garden; noted as a hidden gem.

Hotel Park or Zima for Cream Cake

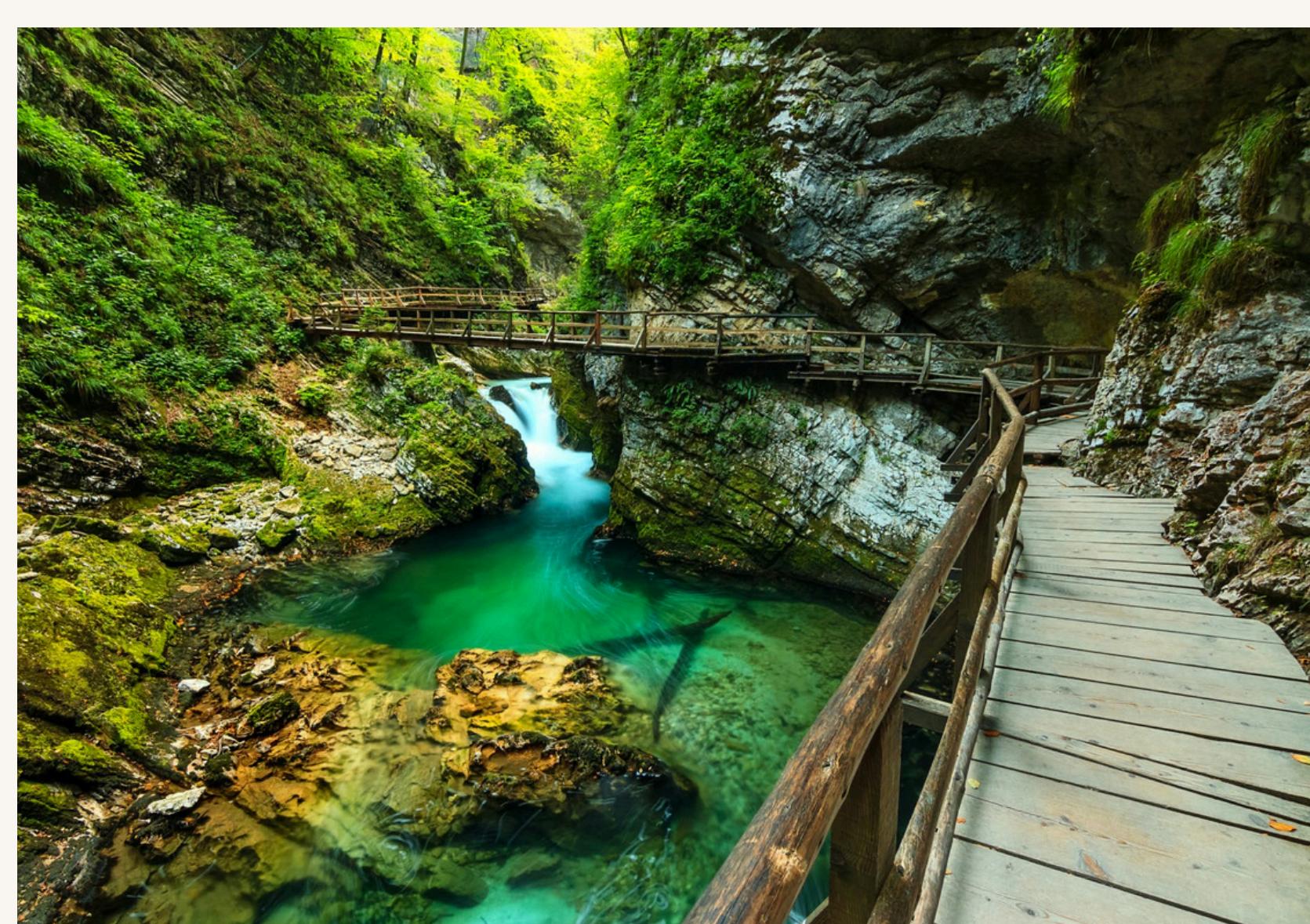
Bled is famous for their Cream Cake (kremšnita), a deliciously fluffy dessert made from custard, cream and pastry. The best (and also original one) is at the Hotel Park, but if you're not interested in long lines, try Zima.



Bled Castle



Arroi Restaurant



Vintgar Gorge

An aerial photograph of a hilltop town, likely Goriška Brda, surrounded by vineyards. The town features white buildings with red roofs, and the vineyards are arranged in terraced rows. The landscape extends to a vast, green valley in the background.

MOUNTAINS, VILLAGES AND WINE:
GORIŠKA BRDA +
THE SOČA RIVER VALLEY

GORIŠKA BRDA + THE SOČA RIVER VALLEY

The mountainous parks of Northwest Slovenia embody the landscapes of a fairy tale: Coniferous forests so thick that they fold over the land like a warm blanket; Yellow houses and red churches popping through the cover; Pistachio-green rivers so magical they were fit for a movie set ('The Chronicles of Narnia' was filmed here). You'll drive across serpentine roads, catching amazing vistas, and dot in-between postcard villages along the way.

At the foothills of the Alps, there are a few culinary gems: country hotels with acclaimed restaurants sitting amongst tiny villages, and at their feet are the famous wineries of Goriška Brda.

STAY + EAT

Hiša Franko - in Kobarid

www.hisafranko.com/en/

10 rooms, from 230 eur + dinner

This restaurant + inn is a 3-star Michelin experience from celebrated Chef Ana Roš (of Chef's Table fame). Reservation recommended. Also a possibility to overnight here, if anything to have their equally delicious breakfast. Rooms are simple as to highlight the focus on cuisine.

Hotel Kendov Dvorec - in Spodnja Idrija

www.kendov-dvorec.com/en/

11 rooms, from 226 eur

A country house dating from 1377 set amidst picturesque gardens and an apple orchard, now a classic luxury hotel filled with antiques and unique art. A member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux hotel group. The elegant fine dining restaurant is Michelin-rated. The Master Suite is large with an expansive outdoor terrace.

WINERIES

Winery BJANA

Highly-rated modern winery topping stone caves underneath.

Benedetic Winery

Modern space and wine shop.

Movia

Tastings right on the Italian border in a cozy space.

* Advanced reservations are advised for most wineries.



Hiša Franko

Hotel Kendov Dvorec

Movia Winery

TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK + THE SOČA RIVER VALLEY

SEE

Vršič Pass

Beautiful drive through the mountains from Bled onward to the Istrian Peninsula or the Goriška Brda Wine Region, but it is more of an adventure vs. a leisurely drive. There are 50 hair-pin turns, each numbered, and often contain a view or interesting information on placards.

- The Russian Chapel at hair-pin #4 is notable. Descending the mountain towards the West runs along the beautiful Soča River Valley down to the town of Kobarid. Go early, as the parking areas can get crowded by midday. There is a scarcity of street signs. Have a pre-loaded Google Map in your phone. As alternative, take the car-train:
- The car-train departs Bohinj to Most na Soči, saving about 30 minutes of driving time. Timetables and fares found here: <https://potniski.sz.si/motorail/>

Bled to Kobarid is about a 3-hour drive across the mountain pass.

*Note that snow may block the high roadways until May, in which case use the car-train instead.

Kobarid to Tolmin

- Stop in the lovely, small village of Kobarid with great restaurants. Home to the Kobarid War Museum dedicated to the WWI battles fought here. Interesting note: Ernest Hemmingway's "A Farewell to Arms" was written about the Soča River Valley, where he was an ambulance driver during the Italian-Austro-Hungarian conflicts that took place here.
- Tolminska Korita Nature Preserve: a valley along the Soča River with stunning canyons amidst lush scenery, just outside the village of Tolmin.
- Kayaking on the Soča River from the town of Bovec: Passing scenes from 'The Chronicles of Narnia' film location include the Boka waterfall and looking for endemic species of Soča trout. Beginner-friendly.

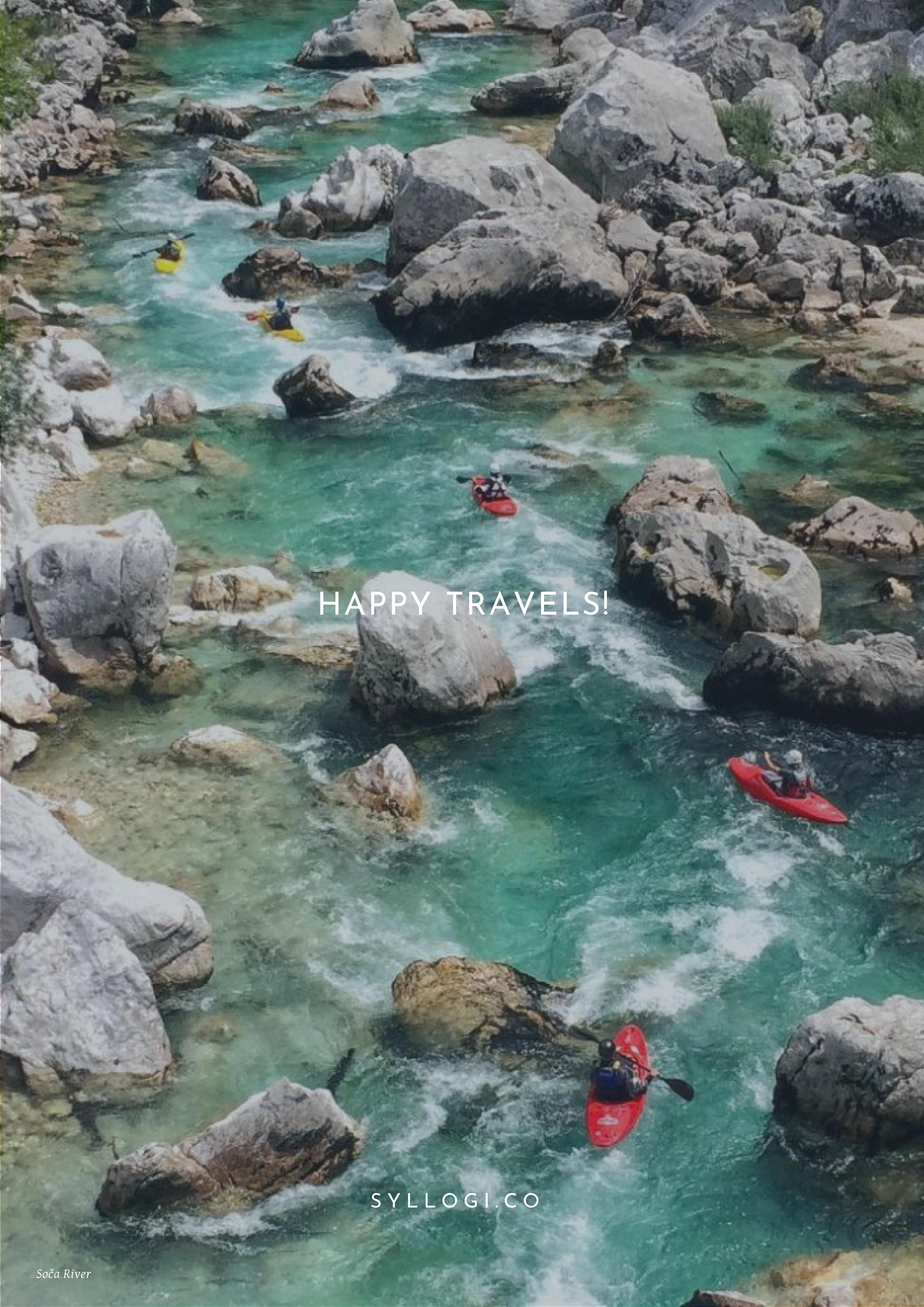
Predjama Castle

A unique edifice built into the side of a mountain. Note: you may be prohibited entry if the bats are sleeping, which are regarded as sacred.

Šmartno Village

This picturesque village has lovely views, and the restaurant Hiša Marica is a good spot for a bite.





HAPPY TRAVELS!

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