

Notranjska



In a country where more than half of the land mass is covered in forest, Notranjska takes the cake. It is for the most part wooded and, as a result, communications have always been poor and development slow in 'Inner Carniola'. Today, much of the province is given over to logging, especially on the Bloke Plateau and in the Lož Valley.

But forests are hardly the most distinguishing physical characteristic of the province. Slovenia counts more than 6000 karst caves and sinkholes created by ponor (or 'disappearing') rivers and 10 of these caverns, most of them in Notranjska, are open to visitors.

If you can imagine much of the land surface as a great Swiss cheese, you'll get the picture. Notranjska's abundant rain and snow vanishes into the holes of this 'cheese', and then resurfaces on the fringes of karst fields called polje. As a result, certain lakes, such as those at Cerknica and Planina, are 'intermittent', meaning they only appear at certain times of the year. Below the surface course a number of important underground rivers, including the Unica, Pivka, Ljubljana and Rak.

Notranjska's isolated setting has spawned some of Slovenia's most cherished myths and legends, notably that of the Turk-slayer Martin Krpan, made famous in Fran Levstik's book of the same name. Today the region is fast becoming a centre of outdoor activity, especially with the opening of Notranjska Regional Park, which encompasses a large portion of the province, and the country parks at the Rakov Škocjan gorge and around Snežnik Castle.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Repeat history and throw cherries from **Erazem's Nook** (p187) in Predjama Castle
- Get forked by Uršula at Cerknica's **Pustni Karneval** (p189)
- Feast on dormice (EEK!) on **Polharska Noč** (Dormouse Night; p191) in late September at Snežnik Castle
- Be inspired by the mimelike **Live Christmas Crib** (p185) at the Concert Hall in Postojna Cave



POSTOJNA

☎ 05 / pop 8665 / elev 555m

The karst cave at Postojna, one of the largest in the world, is among Slovenia's most popular attractions. As a result, it is very commercialised and jammed most of the year with tour groups. It must be said, however, that Postojna's stalagmite and stalactite formations are unequalled.

The Postojna Cave (Postojnska Jama) system, a series of caverns, halls and passages some 20.5km long and two million years old, was hollowed out by the Pivka River, which enters a subterranean tunnel near the cave's entrance. The river continues its deep passage underground, carving out several series of caves, and emerges again as the Unica River.

The Unica meanders through a sunken field of porous limestone – the Planinsko Polje (Planina Polje) – which becomes Lake Planina in the rainy season. But, as is the nature of what is called a ponor river, it is soon lost to the underground. It reappears near Vrhnika as the Ljubljana River and continues its journey northward to the capital.

History

Postojna Cave has been known – and visited – by residents of the area for centuries; you need only look at the graffiti dating back seven centuries in the Gallery of Old Signatures by the entrance. But people in the Middle Ages knew only the entrances; the inner parts were not explored until April 1818, just days



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before the arrival of Habsburg Emperor Franz I (r 1792–1835). The following year the Cave Commission accepted its first organised tour group, including Archduke Ferdinand, and Postojna's future as a tourist destination was sealed. Since then more than 30 million people have visited Postojna.

Orientation

The town of Postojna lies in the Pivka Valley at the foot of Sovič Hill (677m). The Pivka River and the entrance to the cave are about 1.5km northwest of Titov trg in the town centre.

Postojna's bus station is at Titova cesta 36, about 250m southwest of Titov trg. The train station is on Kolodvorska cesta about 1km to the southeast of the square.

Information

Banka Koper (Tržaška cesta 2)

DZS (☎ 720 07 40; Titov trg 3; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–1pm Sat) Bookshop with maps next door to Kompas.

Kompas Postojna (☎ 721 14 80; info@kompas-postojna.si; Titov trg 2a; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat Jun–Aug; 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat May, Sep & Oct; 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm Sat Nov–Apr) This travel

agency is the best source of information in town. Also has private rooms and changes money (3% commission).

Post office (Ulica 1 Maja 2a)

SKB Banka (Ljubljanska cesta 5a)

Tourist Information Centre Postojna (☎ 728 25 11; td.tic.postojna@siol.net; Jamska cesta 28; ☎ same as Postojna Cave) In a kiosk just south of the Postojna Cave entrance.

Sights & Activities

POSTOJNA CAVE

Visitors get to see about 5.7km of the **cave** (Postojnska Jama; ☎ 700 01 00; www.postojnska-jama.si; adult/child/student €17.50/11.50/13.30; ☎ tours hourly 9am–6pm May–Sep; 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm Apr & Oct; 10am, noon & 2pm Mon–Fri, 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar) on 1½-hour tours; some 4km of this is covered by an electric train, which runs as far as the **Big Mountain** (Velika Gora) cavern. Here you stand under one of the five signs identifying your language, and a guide escorts you through halls, galleries and caverns.

These are dry galleries, decorated with a vast array of white stalactites shaped like needles, enormous icicles and even fragile spaghetti. The stalagmites take familiar shapes – pears, cauliflower and sand castles – but there are

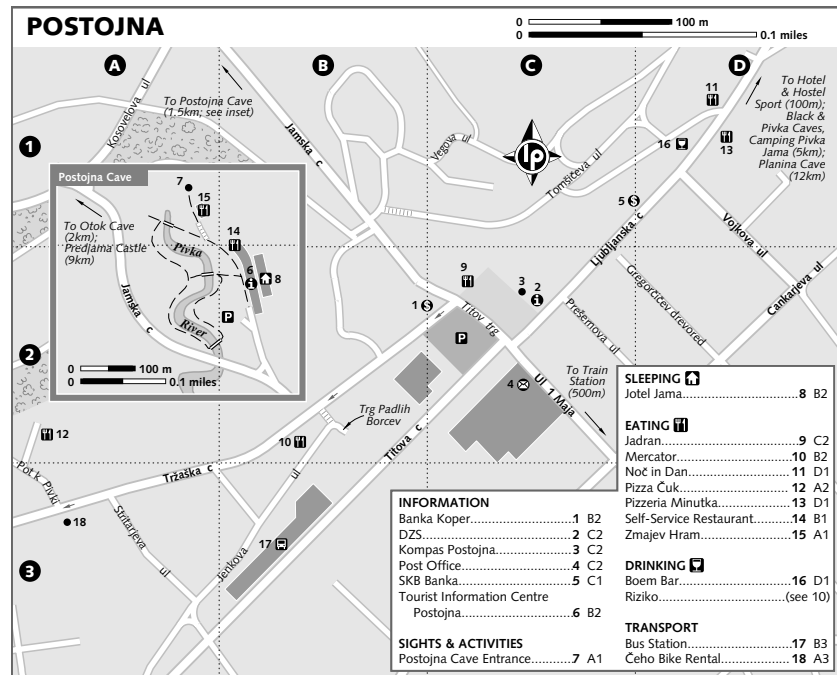
THE HUMAN FISH

Proteus anguinus is one of the most mysterious creatures in the world. A kind of salamander, but related to no other amphibian, it is the largest known permanent cave-dwelling vertebrate. The blind little fellow lives hidden in the pitch black for up to a century and can go for years without food.

The chronicler Valvasor wrote about the fear and astonishment of local people when an immature 'dragon' was found in a karst spring near Vrhnika in the late 17th century, but he judged it to be 'an underground worm'. Several other reports about this four-legged 'human fish' (*človeška ribica* as it's called in Slovene) were made before a doctor in Vienna realised its uniqueness in 1768. In announcing its existence to the scientific world, he called it '*Proteus anguinus*', after the protector of Poseidon's sea creatures in Greek mythology and the Latin word for 'snake'.

Proteus anguinus is 25cm to 30cm long and a bundle of contradictions. It has a long tail fin that it uses for swimming, but can also propel itself with its four legs (the front pair have three small 'fingers' and the back have two 'toes'). Although blind, with atrophied, almost invisible eyes, *Proteus anguinus* has an excellent sense of smell and is sensitive to weak electric fields in the water. It uses these to move around in the dark, locate prey and communicate. It breathes through frilly, bright-red gills at the base of its head when submerged, but also has rudimentary lungs for breathing when outside the water. The humanlike skin has no pigmentation whatsoever, but looks pink in the light due to blood circulation.

The question that scientists have asked themselves for three centuries is: how do the beasties reproduce? The creatures' reproduction has never been witnessed in a natural state, and they haven't been very cooperative in captivity. It is almost certain that they hatch their young from eggs and don't reach sexual maturity until the (almost human) age of 16 or 18.



also bizarre columns, pillars and translucent curtains that look like rashers of bacon.

From the Velika Gora cavern you continue across the **Russian Bridge**, built by prisoners of war in 1916, through the 500m-long **Beautiful Caves** (Lepe Jame) that are filled with wonderful ribbon-shaped stalactites and stalagmites two million years old (it takes 30 years to produce 1mm of stalactite). The halls of the Beautiful Caves are the furthest point you'll reach; from here a tunnel stretches to the Black Cave (Črna Jama) and Pivka Cave (p186).

The tour continues south through the Winter Hall (Zimska Dvorana), past the Diamond Stalagmite and the Pillar Column, which have become symbols of the cave. You then enter the Concert Hall (Koncertna Dvorana), which is the largest in the cave system and can accommodate 10,000 people for musical performances. In the week between Christmas and New Year, the Live Christmas Crib (Jaslice) – the Nativity performed by actors – also takes place in the cave.

The bizarre pink creatures you'll see in a tank at the end of the tour are *Proteus anguinus*, unique 'human fish' first described by Janez Vajkard Valvasor (see above).

Postojna Cave has a constant temperature of between 8°C and 10°C with a humidity of

95%, so a waterproof jacket is essential. Green felt cloaks can be hired at the entrance for €2. Check the website for package deals including combination tickets.

Two hundred species of fauna (including cave beetles, bats, hedgehogs, and the 'human fish') found in the cave are studied at **Proteus Vivarium** (adult/child/student €7/4.30/5, incl Postojna Cave €21/12.70/15.85; ☎ 8.30am–6.30pm May–Sep; 9.30am–4.30pm Apr & Oct; 9.30am–2.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–4pm Sat & Sun Nov–Mar), part of a speleobiological research station located in the cave. It is open to visitors and has a video introduction to underground zoology. A 45-minute tour then leads you into a small, darkened cave to peep at some of the shy creatures you've just learned about.

OTHER CAVES

For more information about other caves north of Postojna ask at the Tourist Information Centre Postojna at Postojna Cave, or at Kompas Postojna (opposite) in town.

Otok Cave (Otoška Jama; admission €7.10; ☎ by appointment), some 1.5km northwest of Postojna Cave, is very small (632m in length) and the tour only takes about an hour, but its stalagmites and stalactites are very impressive. There's no electric lighting, so you'll need a torch, and the temperature is 8°C.

Pivka Cave (Pivka Jama) and **Black Cave** (Črna Jama; admission €7.10; ☎ by appointment) – the most popular caves after Postojna – are about 5km to the north. The entrance is in the Pivka Jama camping ground. You reach the 4km-long system by descending more than 300 steps. A walkway has been cut into the wall of a canyon in Pivka Cave, with its two siphon lakes and a tunnel, and a bridge leads to Black Cave. This is a dry cavern and, as the name implies, its dripstones are not white. A tour of both caves takes about two hours.

Planina Cave (Planinska Jama; ☎ 041-338 696; admission €7.10; ☎ tours 5pm Mon-Fri Jul & Aug; 3pm & 5pm Sat, 11am, 3pm & 5pm Sun Apr-Sep), 12km to the northeast near the unpredictable Lake Planina, is the largest water cave in Slovenia and a treasure-trove of fauna (which includes *Proteus anguinus*). The cave's entrance is at the foot of a 100m rock wall. It's 6.5km long, and you are able to visit about 900m of it in an hour. There are no lights so take a torch. Many parts of the cave are accessible only in low water or by rubber raft.

MOUNTAIN BIKING & CAVING

True to its name, the Hotel & Hostel Sport (right) can arrange all sorts of activities, including weekend packages with mountain-biking trips in nearby Notranjska Regional Park, and caving under Predjama Castle starting at €140 per person with room and half-board. They rent mountain bikes for €8.40/14.60 per half/full day.

Sleeping

Kompas (p184) can organise private rooms (per person €13.90 to 15.80) in town and farmhouse stays (per person €21) further afield in Narin (15km southwest) and Razdrto (11km west). The most central rooms are at Jamska cesta 21 and Vilharjeva ulica 17.

Camping Pivka Jama (☎ 720 39 93; www.venus-trade.si; Veliki Otok 50; camping adult €9.40-10.30, child €7.30-8.10, 4-bed bungalow €66.80-77.20, 4-bed bungalow with kitchen €83.50-91.80; ☎ Mar-Oct; ☎ ☎ ☎) This 7-hectare site is in a pine forest near the entrance to Pivka and Black Caves. Some of the little stone-and-wood bungalows have kitchens and there's a swimming pool.

Hotel Jama (☎ 728 24 00; www.postojna-cave.com; Jamska cesta 28; s €40-50, d €60-80; ☎ ☎ ☎) This 267-bed property 200m southeast of the entrance to Postojna Cave has had something of a facelift in recent years, but there is little

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel & Hostel Sport (☎ 720 622 44, 041-268 428; www.sport-hotel.si; Kolodvorska cesta 1; dm €13-15, s €34-39, d €46-56; ☎ ☎ ☎) This recent arrival, with 37 basic but spotless and very comfortable rooms (including five with eight dorm beds each), is just 300m north of the centre of Postojna. There's a kitchen and a small eating area too. The reception is particularly warm at this affordable place, and the enthusiasm of the young staff particularly fetching.

reason to stay out here unless you want to be the first person in the cave in the morning.

Eating & Drinking

Pizza Čuk (☎ 720 13 00; Pot k Pivki 4; pizza €3.90-5.45; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10am-11pm Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-10pm Sun) More central but not as good as Pizzeria Minutka, Čuk is southwest of Titov trg just off Tržaška cesta.

Pizzeria Minutka (☎ 720 36 25; Ljubljanska cesta 14; pizza €4.20-5.85, mains €5.85-8.35) A pizzeria with a terrace, Minutka is a favourite with locals and also does more ambitious main courses.

Jadran (☎ 720 39 00; Titov trg 1; starters €3.35-5.45, mains €5.85-10; ☎ 9am-10pm) This central, old-style restaurant has a good selection of reasonably priced fish dishes and friendly – if not silver – service.

Zmajev Hram (☎ 700 01 81; set menus €8-28; ☎ 9am-6pm May-Dec, 9am-3pm Jan-Apr) Housed in a stunning (and totally revamped) 1920s-style building next to the cave entrance, the 'Cave Restaurant' has a dozen set menus from which to choose. There's also a much cheaper self-service restaurant (dishes €4) nearby, open from 8am to 6pm.

There are a couple of central places for self-catering in Postojna town, including **Mercator** (Tržaška cesta 9; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) and the almost round-the-clock **Noč in Dan** (Ljubljanska cesta 13; ☎ 5am-midnight Mon-Fri, 24hr Sat & Sun).

Two places worth heading for if the whistle is dry include central **Boem Bar** (☎ 726 13 11; Ljubljanska cesta 11; ☎ 6am-midnight), a comfortable place near the Hotel & Hostel Sport, and **Riziko** (Tržaška cesta 9; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7am-midnight Fri, 8am-3am Sat, 8am-11pm Sun) above Mercator, which attracts a very young (think skateboarders) crowd.

Getting There & Around

Buses from Ljubljana to the coast as well as Nova Gorica stop in Postojna (€5.75, one hour, 53km, half-hourly). Other destinations include Cerknica (€3, 30 minutes, 24km, four on schooldays), Koper (€6.15, one hour, 56km, four to six a day), Nova Gorica (€6.15, one hour, 58km, five to eight a day), Piran (€6.65, 1½ hours, 69km, three or four a day), and Snežnik and Stari Trg pri Ložu (€8, two hours, 88km, one on schooldays at 2.10pm).

International destinations include Zagreb (€16.50, three hours, 195km, one daily at 6.07am) in Croatia, and Trieste (€5.75, 1½ hours, 51km, one at 6.50am Monday to Saturday) in northern Italy.

Postojna is on the main train line linking Ljubljana (€5.90, one hour, 67km) with Sežana and Trieste via Divača (€2.65 to €4.30, 40 minutes, 37km), and is an easy day trip from the capital. As many as 20 trains a day make the run from Ljubljana to Postojna and back. You can also reach here from Koper (€5.35 to €6.75, 1½ hours, 86km) on one of up to seven trains a day.

Čeho Bike Rental (☎ 040-169 401; Tržaška cesta 23; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has bicycles for rent; they cost €5 for three hours or €10 per day.

If you need a taxi in Postojna, call ☎ 031-777 974.

PREDJAMA CASTLE

☎ 05 / elev 490m

Situated in the gaping mouth of a cavern half-way up a 123m cliff just 9km northwest of Postojna, **Predjama Castle** (Predjamski Grad; ☎ 751 60 15; www.postojna-cave.com; adult/child/student €7/4.30/5;

☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, 10am-6pm Apr & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Mar) has a dramatic setting. Although a castle has stood on the site since 1202, the one you see today dates from the 16th century. Then – as now – the four-storey fortress looked unconquerable.

The castle's eight rooms contain little of interest – oil paintings, weapons, a 15th-century pieta – but the castle does have a drawbridge over a raging river, holes in the ceiling of the entrance tower for pouring boiling oil on intruders, a very dank dungeon, a 16th-century chest full of treasure (unearthed in the cellar in 1991), and an eyrie-like hiding place at the top called Erazem's Nook.

The **cave** (Jama pod Predjamskim Gradom; adult/child/student €5/3.30/4; ☎ tours 11am, 1pm, 3pm & 5pm May-Sep) below Predjama Castle is a 6km network of galleries spread over four levels. Much of it is open only to speleologists, however casual visitors can see about 900m of it. Longer tours that go to the end of the cave's **Eastern Passage** (€42, six hours) or **Erazem's Gallery** (Erazmov Rov, €16, one hour) are available by prior arrangement only.

Gostilna Požar (☎ 751 52 52; Predjama 2; meals from €14.50; ☎ 10am-10pm Thu-Tue) is a simple restaurant conveniently located next to the ticket kiosk and in full heart-stopping view of the castle.

The closest you'll get by local bus to Predjama from Postojna is Bukovje (€1.70, 15 minutes, 9km, five a day weekdays), and buses run during the school year only. Bukovje is a village about 2km northeast of Predjama. A taxi from Postojna, including an hour's wait at the castle, will cost €25, which staff at Kompas Postojna (p184) can arrange.

DEATH ON THE THRONE

Erazem Lueger was a 15th-century robber baron who, like Robin Hood, waylaid wagons in the deep forest, stole the loot and handed it over to the poor. During the wars between the Hungarians (under 'good' King Matthias Corvinus) and the Austrians (behind 'wicked' Frederick III), Lueger (naturally) supported the former. He holed up Predjama Castle and continued his daring deeds with the help of a secret passage that led out from behind the rock wall.

In the autumn of 1484 the Austrian army under Gašpar Ravbar, the governor of Trieste, attacked the castle, but it proved impregnable for months. All the while Erazem mocked Ravbar and his soldiers, even showering them with fresh cherries to prove that he came and went as he pleased.

But Erazem proved to be too big for his breeches and met an ignoble fate. Having gone 'to where even the sultan must go on foot' (as Valvasor described it), Erazem was hit by a cannon ball as he sat on the toilet. It seems a turncoat servant had betrayed him, by marking the location of the water closet with a little flag, for Ravbar and his men.

CERKNICA

☎ 01 / pop 3540 / elev 559m

Cerknica is the largest town on a lake that isn't always a lake – one of Slovenia's most unusual natural phenomena. It's close to Notranjska Regional Park and the gorge at Rakov Škočjan.

The area around Lake Cerknica has been settled since prehistoric times, and a trade route once ran over the Bloke Plateau to the east, linking Slovenia and Croatia. During the Roman period, Cerknica was a stopover on the road leading from Emona (Ljubljana) to the coast. Cerknica was given town status in the 11th century.

But Cerknica is a good example of how important communication lines are for the development of a town. The railway linking Trieste and Ljubljana opened in 1857, but it dodged Cerknica in favour of Rakek, 5km to the northwest. The highway from Ljubljana towards the coast follows the same route, and Cerknica remains something of a backwater.

Orientation

Cerknica lies about 3km north of Lake Cerknica. Cesta 4 Maja is the main street in the centre of town. The bus station is on Čabranska ulica about 100m to the southwest and behind the post office.

Information

Notranjska Regional Park (Notranjski Regijski Park; ☎ 031-655 993; www.notranjski-park.si in Slovene; Tabor 42; ☎ by appointment) Headquarters of the new 22,810-hectare park 100m north of the tourist office.

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Cesta 4 Maja 64) In the Imam shopping centre.

Post office (Cesta 4 Maja 52; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Next door to the tourist office.

SKB Banka (Partizanska cesta 1) Next door to Valvasor Hram.

Tourist Information Centre Cerknica (☎ 709 36 36, 041-510 047; tdrustvo@volja.net; Cesta 4 Maja 51; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

PARISH CHURCH OF OUR LADY

Sitting atop a gentle slope 200m north of Cesta 4 Maja, the Parish Church of Our Lady (Zupnjska Cerkev Sv Marije) is the only real attraction right in Cerknica. To reach it, walk up the street called simply Tabor, which runs to the east of the shopping centre.

The church sat in the middle of a fortified settlement; the ramparts and two towers, built to withstand Turkish raids in the late 15th century, remain intact. On the Latin plaque in the wall, the number four of the year 1472 is written with a loop – the top half of an eight – because four was considered unlucky in the Middle Ages.

Completed in the early 16th century, this is a hall church – with nave and aisles of equal height – and not unlike the church (p102) in Kranj in Gorenjska. In the 18th century two side chapels were added, and the bell tower was given its baroque dome.

LAKE CERKNICA

Since ancient times periodic Lake Cerknica (Cerniško Jezero) has baffled and perplexed people, including the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (63 BC–AD 24), who called the mysterious body of water Lacus Lugeus (Mourning Lake). It wasn't until Valvasor explained how the water system worked at the end of the 17th century that it was fully understood.

Cerknica is a polje, a field above a collapsed karst cavern full of sinkholes, potholes, siphons and underground tunnels, which can stay dry for much of the year but then floods. From the south, the polje is fed by a disappearing river, the Stržen, and to the east and west it collects water underground from the Bloke Plateau and the Javornik Mountains. During rainy periods in the autumn and spring, all this water comes rushing into the polje. Springs emerge and the water begins to percolate between the rocks. The sinkholes and siphons cannot handle the outflow underground, and the polje becomes Lake Cerknica – sometimes in less than a day.

The surface area of Lake Cerknica can reach 24 sq km, but it is never more than a few metres deep. At that time it is an important wetland, attracting some 200 species of birds each year. During dry periods (usually July to September or later), farmers drive cattle down to the polje to graze.

The lake really begins at the village of Dolenje Jezero (population 225), about 2.5km south of Cerknica, where you will find the **Lake House Museum** (Muzej Jezerski Hram; ☎ 709 40 53, 041-561 870; www.jezerski-hram.si; adult/child €3/2; ☎ demonstration 3pm Sat), with a 5m by 3m, 1:2500 scale working model of Lake Cerknica, showing how the underground hydrological system

BIG MEN FOR BIG TIMES

Slovenian folk tales are rife with fairies, witches and things that go bump in the night, but among the most common stories are those describing the derring-do of 'super heroes', whose strong wills and unusual strength enabled them to overcome evil and conquer their brutish enemies.

The legends are not limited to one geographical area. Peter Klepec, who swept away his enemies using trees uprooted with his bare hands, lived on the Kolpa River and is associated with Bela Krajina. Another hero called Kumprej ruled the Upper Savinja Valley in Štajerska with his mighty voice and fearsome blade. His shoes were five times larger than those of the average person and when he disappeared shoeless a poor couple made footwear for their entire family from the clodhoppers.

But perhaps the most popular stories revolve around the feats of one Martin Krpan, the hero of the Bloke Plateau in Notranjska. Krpan's traits and characteristics are familiar. He was an outlaw with a big heart hunted by the imperial guard for smuggling salt. When he was arrested, Martin Krpan proved his super-human strength to the emperor in Vienna by picking up and carrying his own horse.

Realising his fortune at having such a powerful giant under his control, the emperor set Martin Krpan on Berdavs, the local scourge and personification of the marauding Turk. Martin Krpan defeated Berdavs and chopped off his head with his magic axe – complete with a handle made of Slovenian linden wood. For his pains the imperial court allowed him to freely transport and sell salt.

The tales of Martin Krpan are traditional but reached a wider audience when the writer Fran Levstik collected and published them under the title *Martin Krpan* in 1858.

actually works. There's also an ethnological collection.

RAKOV ŠKOČJAN

Protected Rakov Škočjan is a 6km-long gorge lying some 5km west of Cerknica. The Rak River, en route to join the Pivka River at Planina Cave, has sculpted 2.5km of hollows, caves, springs and **Veliki** and **Mali Naravni Most**, the Big and Little Natural Bridges. There are lots of hiking and biking trails through and around the gorge and the area surrounding it is a protected country park. To the south lies the Snežnik-Javornik Massif, including its tallest peak, **Veliki Javornik** (1268m).

From Rakek train station (p190), you can reach the gorge on foot in about an hour.

Activities

The tourist office sells **fishing licences** (lake/Rak River/Unica River fly-fishing per day €96/10/10) and has **boat rentals** on the lake.

The **Kontrabantar farmhouse** (☎ 709 22 53; Dolenja Vas 72; per hr €8; ☎ noon-10pm Thu-Sun) in Dolenja Vas, 2km southwest of Cerknica, has horses and offers riding lessons, as well as tours by coach around the lake.

The staff at the **Hotel Rakov Škočjan** (p190) can organise any number of activities, from hiking (from €20 per person) and caving

(from €23) to cycling and fishing in the surrounding park. They offer packages such as one that includes accommodation, half-board, a bicycle and a trip to Križna Cave (p191) for €38 per person per day in a double. Ask them for the free English-language booklet *Rakov Škočjan and the Nature Trail*.

The **Cerknica Mountain Trail** heads southwest from Cerknica to thickly forested **Veliki Javornik** (1268m). From here you can take a side trip of about two hours to the gorge at Rakov Škočjan (left). Otherwise the trail skirts the southern shore of Lake Cerknica and carries on northeast to **Križna Gora** (857m) and its nearby **cave** (p191). It continues northwest to **Slivnica** (1114m), home of the witch Uršula and other sorcerers, where you will find the mountaintop guesthouse Dom na Slivnici (p190). The next day you walk north northwest to **Strazišče** (955m) and then south along the main road for 3km to Cerknica.

Festivals & Events

Cerknica is famous for its pre-Lenten carnival called **Pustni Karneval** (www.cerknica.net/pust), which takes place for four days over the weekend before Ash Wednesday (late February/early March). Merrymakers wearing masks of Uršula, who makes her home on Mt Slivnica, and other legendary characters parade up and

down Cesta 4 Maja while being provoked by upstarts with pitchforks.

Sleeping & Eating

Domačija Zigmund (☎ 709 15 25, 041-601 661; Žerovnica 54; r/apr per person €16.70/14.60; (P)) This farmhouse at the end of Žerovnica, an idyllic village some 6km southeast of Cerknica, has rooms as well as a four-person apartment. You'll need your own transport.

Dom na Slivnici (☎ 709 41 40, 041-518 108; per person €18.50; ☞ daily May-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-Apr; (P)) This splendidly positioned five-room guesthouse (with 12 beds) atop Mt Slivnica is accessible by foot, or by road 8km east of Cerknica.

TeliCo (☎ 709 70 90, 041-711 088; Brestova ulica 9; s/d €23/35.50; (P) ☞) This small seven-bed B&B on the eastern edge of town, with two double rooms with shared bathroom and WC, has stunning views and its own swimming pool.

Valvasorjev Hram (☎ 709 37 88; Partizanska cesta 1; dishes €2.50-3.10; ☞ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat & Sun) This very basic place opposite the tourist office serves hearty dishes like *jota* (bean soup) and *klobasa* (sausage) as well as pizza, and has its own wine cellar.

Pizzeria Glaž'k (☎ 709 33 44; Partizanska cesta 17; ☞ 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 7am-midnight Sat) This basic pizzeria is up a gentle slope 200m north of Cesta 4 Maja and across from the 16th-century Parish Church of Our Lady. Set lunch is a bargain at €3.

You'll find a large **Mercator** (Cesta 4 Maja 64; ☞ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) in the Imam shopping centre west of the centre, and a smaller **Mercator** (Cesta 4 Maja 50; ☞ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) diagonally opposite the tourist office.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Rakov Škocjan (☎ 709 74 70, 051-310 477; www.h-rakovskocjan.com; Rakov Škocjan 1; s/d/tr €42/70/98; (P) ☞ ☞) In the heart of Rakov Škocjan Country Park and surrounded by deep forest ribboned with hiking and cycling trails, this 13-room guesthouse 7km west of Cerknica is the ideal spot for a no-holds-barred active holiday (p189). It has a sauna and an excellent game restaurant (meals from €12; open 7am to 10pm) that serves nonguests as well, with outdoor grill and terrace seating in the warmer months.

Getting There & Around

Bus routes run between Cerknica and Ljubljana (€5.50, one hour, 49km, six to eight a day) and Postojna (€3, 30 minutes, 24km, four on schooldays). In addition about half a dozen go to Rakek (€1.70, 10 minutes, 8km) and Stari Trg pri Ložu (€6.50, 1½ hours, 64km). Three buses a day cross the Croatian border to Previd (€3.50, one hour, 30km) at 5.17am, 6.22am and 3.37pm.

Rakek, about 8km northwest of Cerknica, is on the rail line that connects Ljubljana with Sežana. About 10 trains a day to and from the capital stop at Rakek (€3.90 to €5.30, one hour, 55km). Heading south, all stop at Postojna (€1.50, 15 minutes, 12km) and Pivka, but only about half continue on to Divača (€3.30, 50 minutes, 49km) and Sežana.

The Hotel Rakov Škocjan (left) rents bicycles for €2/4.50/15 per hour/day/week.

SNEŽNIK CASTLE

☎ 01 / elev 593m

Just south of the village of Kozarišče (population 240), in the secluded Lož Valley (Loška Dolina) some 21km southeast of Cerknica, stands 16th-century Renaissance **Snežnik Castle** (Grad Snežnik; ☎ 705 78 14; www.postojna-cave.com). Surrounded by a large and protected park, it is one of the loveliest and best-situated fortresses in Slovenia. The entrance to the castle, formerly the property of the Schönburg-Waldenburg family, who used what they called Schneeberg as a summer residence and a hunting lodge until WWII, is through a double barbican with a drawbridge and moat. Unfortunately the castle is currently undergoing massive renovations and remains closed to the public.

In the 19th-century dairy building adjacent to the castle, resides the rather esoteric **Dormouse Museum & Hunting Collection** (Polharska Muzej in Lovska Zbirka; ☎ 705 75 16, 031-288 470; Kozarišče 70; adult/child €1.25/1; ☞ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Wed-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr-Oct). The dormouse (p50) or loir (*polh*) is a favourite food in Notranjska and the hunting and eating of it is tied up with a lot of tradition, which the museum explores. The fur is used to make the *polhovka*, the distinctive fur cap worn by Božiček, Slovenia's version of Santa Claus, and dormouse *mast* (fat) is a much-prized machine oil. According to popular belief, the dormouse is shepherded by Lucifer himself and thus deserves its fate in the cooking pot.

The hunting part of the museum is a nightmare of stuffed animals, antlers and other 'trophies' from the Snežnik-Javornik Massif and Cerknica Lake areas.

The big occasion in these parts of Notranjska is **Dormouse Night** (Polharska Noč) when it's open season for trapping the incredible edible *polh*. It's held on the first Saturday after 25 September.

Snežnik Castle's isolation makes it tough to reach by public transport. Without a car, bicycle or horse, you'll have to take a bus from Cerknica to Stari Trg pri Ložu (€6.50, 1½ hours, 64km, up to six a day) and walk 4km. Staff at the Hotel Rakov Škocjan (opposite) in the country park, some 30km to the northwest, can arrange transport to and from the castle.

Križna Cave (www.kovinoplastika.si/gsk/krizna-jama; adult/child €5/2.50; ☞ 3pm Sun May-Oct), about 7km north of Snežnik Castle and a kilometre or so after you turn off the main road from Cerknica, is one of the most magnificent water caves in the world.

It is 8.8km long and counts 22 underground lakes filled with green and blue water as well as a unique 'forest' of ice stalagmites near the entrance. The dry part of the cave, which includes a short boat ride, can be toured without booking in advance. To go as far as the Kalvarija chamber by rubber raft via 13 lakes (€25 to €29), you must contact the guide named Alojz Troha (☎ 041-632 153; krizna_jama@yahoo.com), in Bloška Polica (house No 7) near Grahovo, in advance. It's a four-hour tour if you elect to do the entire cave, and the price includes all equipment.

A stage of the E6 European Hiking Trail (p43) leads south from near Snežnik Castle for about 15km to **Snežnik** (1796m), the highest non-Alpine mountain in Slovenia, whose peak remains covered in snow until well into the spring. There is accommodation at the Category I PZS-maintained hut **Koča Draga Karolina na Velikem Snežniku** (☎ 041-333 198, 041-447 339; ☞ Sat & Sun May-Jul, Sep & Oct; daily Aug).

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