

Štajerska & Koroška



Štajerska (Styria in English), far and away Slovenia's largest province, gets a bum rap from other Slovenes. They dismiss the province as one huge industrial farm and tease the locals for being country bumpkins who drink too much. It's true that Štajerska has more big farms than any other part of Slovenia. And, along with wheat and potatoes, hops for making beer are an important crop, as are grapes for the province's excellent wines (which may partly explain the Štajerci's reputation for overindulgence). But Štajerska is not the flat, seemingly endless plain that is Prekmurje. Indeed, to the west Štajerska is overlooked by the Savinja Alps and to the north by the Pohorje Massif, an adventure-land of outdoor activities. Those in search of culture and the past will be drawn by three of the country's most historical cities and towns: Maribor, Celje and that little gem, Ptuj.

In stark contrast is tiny Koroška (Carinthia in English), to the north of Štajerska and a mere shadow of what it once was. Indeed, until the end of WWI, Carinthia included an area much larger than the three valleys in now encloses. A region of dark forests, mountains and highland meadows, Koroška is tailor-made for outdoor activities, including skiing, mountain biking and horse riding, but especially hiking.

There is a reason why Koroška is so small. In the plebiscite ordered by the victorious allies after WWI, Slovenes living on the other side of the Karavanke, the 120-km-long rock wall that separates Slovenia from Austria, voted to put their economic future in the hands of Vienna while the mining region of the Mežica Valley went to Slovenia. As a result, the Slovenian nation lost 90,000 of its nationals (7% of the population) as well as the cities of Klagenfurt (Celovec) and Villach (Beljak) to Austria.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Walk the narrow back streets of medieval **Ptuj** (p232), the jewel of Štajerska
- Sample some of the nightlife in the waterfront Lent district of **Maribor** (p243)
- Go native on a farm holiday in the **Central Pohorje Region** (p246)
- Pedal underground (and above!) at the spectacular **Mountain Bike Park** (p262) at Črna na Koroškem near Dravograd
- Sober up (metaphysically, mate) viewing the scary 15th-century frescoes of the Final Judgement in the **Church of the Holy Spirit** (p262) in Slovenj Gradec



History

Štajerska has been at the crossroads of Slovenia for centuries and virtually everyone has 'slept here' – at least for a time: Celts, Romans, early Slavs, Habsburgs and Nazi German occupiers. In the 14th century the Counts of Celje were among the richest and most powerful feudal dynasties in Central Europe and they challenged the Austrian monarchy's rule for 100 years. Štajerska suffered more than most of the rest of Slovenia under the black leather boot of Nazism in WWII, and many of its inhabitants were murdered, deported or forced to work in labour camps.

Despite its current size, Koroška holds a special place in the hearts and minds of most Slovenes. The Duchy of Carantania (Karantanija), the first Slavic state dating back to the 7th century, was centred here, and the word 'Carinthia' is derived from that name. The region was heavily fortified with castles during the Middle Ages and, from the 12th century onward, was an important cultural and artistic centre. Development came to western Koroška in the early 19th century with the opening of the iron mines at Prevalje and Ravne na Koroškem.

ŠTAJERSKA

Some Slovenian guidebooks divide Štajerska up simply as the 'Maribor area' and the 'Celje area'. Here we've split it into many more sections: the Kozjansko region in the southeast; the spa town of Rogasška Slatina above Kozjansko; historic Ptuj; Maribor, Slovenia's second-largest city; the Pohorje Massif; the central city of Celje; and the Upper Savinja Valley bordering Gorenjska.

KOZJANSKO REGION

Kozjansko is a remote region along the eastern side of the Posavje Mountains and the 80km-long Sotla River, which forms the border with Croatia. It is an area of forests, rolling hills, vineyards, scattered farms and the site of one of Slovenia's three regional parks, with much to offer visitors in the way of spas, castles, hiking, cycling and excellent wine.

In the Middle Ages Kozjansko became the frontier region between Austrian Styria and Hungarian Croatia, which accounts for the important castles at Podsreda, Podčetrtek and Bistrica ob Sotli.

Podčetrtek

☎ 03 / pop 560 / elev 224m

Most people make their way to this village on a little bump of land extending into Croatia to relax at the ever-expanding Terme Olimia thermal spa just a short distance from the centre. Looming overhead are the remains of a castle originally built in the 11th century and an important fortification during the wars with the Hungarians 300 years later.

In case you were wondering, the town's seemingly unpronounceable name comes from the Slovenian word for 'Thursday' – the day the market took place and the district court sat.

ORIENTATION

The centre of Podčetrtek is at the junction of four roads: to the west is Cesta Slake and the village of Olimje; to the north and northwest, Trška cesta, Cesta Škofja Gora and the castle; and to the northeast, Zdraviliška cesta and the spa complex.

All buses stop at the crossroads as well as at the spa and the camping ground. There are three train stations. For the village centre and the castle, get off at Podčetrtek. Atomske Toplice Hotel is good for Terme Olimia, the spa hotels and Lipa Village. Podčetrtek Toplice is the correct stop for the camping ground and Aqualuna water park.

INFORMATION

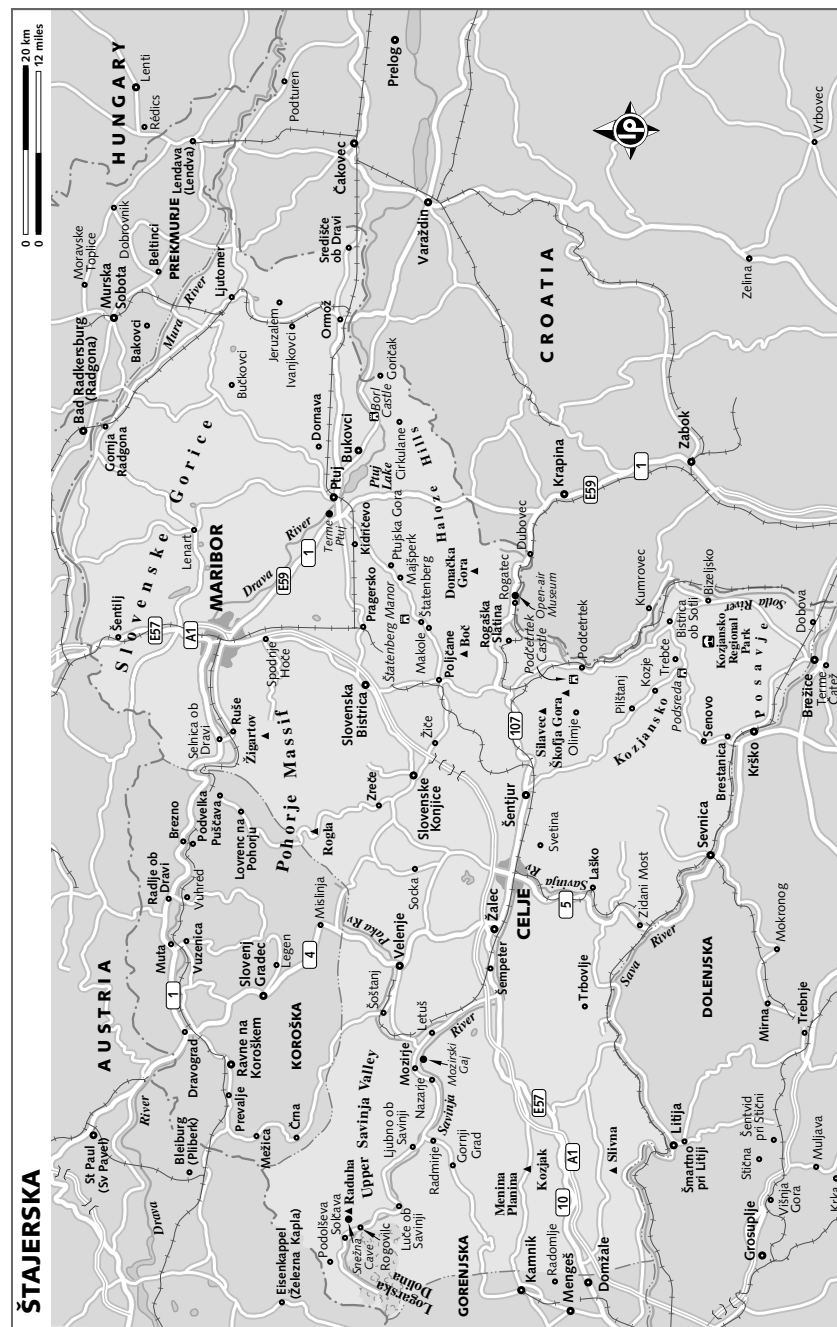
Banka Celje (Cesta Slake 1; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Next to Mercator supermarket.

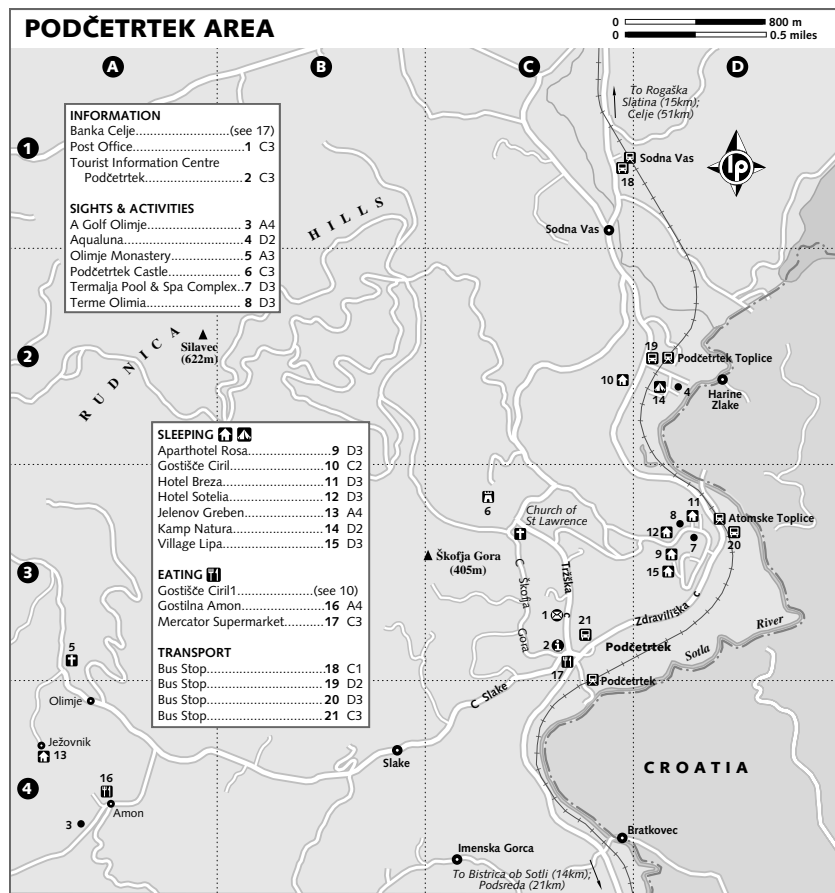
Post office (Trška cesta 23; ☎ 8am-9.30am, 10am-3.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Some 200m north of the crossroads.

Tourist Information Centre Podčetrtek (☎ 810 90 13; www.turizem-podcetrtek.si; Cesta Škofja Gora 1; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 9am-noon Sun; 8am-3pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Oct-Apr) Usually closes for a half-hour at 10am.

SIGHTS

The enormous **Podčetrtek Castle** (Grad Podčetrtek) on the hill-top (335m) to the northwest of town is not the 11th century original built by the Krško bishops; that one was razed in the 15th century during the wars with the Hungarians. The present Renaissance-style castle went up some time in the mid-16th century but was badly damaged by an earthquake in 1974. The castle, which is in very bad repair and not open to the public,





can be easily reached by walking north along Trška cesta and then west on Cesta na Grad for about 2km.

The Minorite **Olimlje monastery** (Minoritski Samostan Olimlje; ☎ 582 91 61; Olimlje 82; ☞ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat), 3km southwest of Podčetrtek, was built as a Renaissance-style castle in about 1550. When Pauline monks took over what was then called Wolimia in German about a century later, they added the baroque **Church of the Assumption**, which boasts its original ceiling paintings in the presbytery, one of the largest baroque altars in the country and the unbelievably ornate **Chapel of St Francis Xavier**. On the ground floor of one of the four corner towers is the monastery's greatest treasure: a 17th-century **pharmacy** (adult/child €1.25/0.85;

☞ 10am-noon & 1-6pm) painted with religious and medical scenes. The Franciscan monks in residence continue the monastic tradition of growing herbs and medicinal plants.

ACTIVITIES

Formerly known as Atomske Toplice, **Terme Olimia** (☎ 829 70 00; www.terme-olimia.com; Zdraviliška cesta 24; nonguests adult €8.80-10, child €6.70-7.90; ☞ 8am-10pm Sun-Fri, to midnight Sat), about 1.2km northeast of Podčetrtek, has thermal water (28°C to 35°C) full of magnesium and calcium, which is recommended for those recovering from surgery or trying to cure rheumatism. These days, however, it places most of the emphasis on recreation. The eight indoor and outdoor pools connected by an underwater passage

at the **Termalija** pool and spa complex alone cover an area of 2000 sq metres, and there's sauna, steam room, solarium and sports facilities. Next to the camping ground, about 1km north of the main Terme Olimia complex, is **Aqualuna** (adult €12.50-13.80, child €9.20-10.40; ☞ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun May-Sep), a water park with another eight outdoor pools over 3000 sq metres and the requisite slides, Adrenaline Tower, wave machines and so on.

Some of the most rewarding **hikes** and **bike** trips in Slovenia can be made in this area, and the free 1:18,000-scale *Podčetrtek-Terme Olimia* tourist maps lists dozens of excursions for walkers, cyclists and mountain bikers. The easiest walks on marked trails take an hour or two (although the circuitous one northeast to the hill-top Church of St Emma at 345m lasts about four hours), and there are bicycle routes all the way to Kozje (37km), Podsreda (41km) and Rogaška Slatina (31km).

The Jelenov Greben farmhouse (below) offers 50-minute sightseeing flights in a hot-air balloon for €100 per person.

A Golf Olimlje (☎ 810 90 66; http://agolf.podcetrtek.si; Olimlje 24; 18 holes adult/child Mon-Fri €24.20/17.50, Sat & Sun €29.20/20.50) is a nine-hole, 31-par golf course owned by and just south of the Gostilna Amon (right). Hiring half a set of clubs costs €6.25.

SLEEPING

Kamp Natura (☎ 829 78 33; www.terme-olimia.com; camp site per person €6.90-7.90, with pools €12.10-13.80; ☞ late Apr-mid-Oct) Owned and operated by Terme Olimia, this small camping ground is about 1km north of the main spa complex on the edge of the Sotla River; if you've checked in and you've got a guest card, you can take the shortcut to the spa through Croatia! More expensive rates include daily entry to the Aqualuna water park next door as well as the Termalija complex pool

Gostišče Ciril (☎ 582 91 09; www.ciril-youthhostel-bc.si; Zdraviliška cesta 10; per person €12.50-16; (P)) Hostel-like accommodation above this very popular restaurant on the main road is in 15 basic rooms with two and three beds. It's just across from the entrance to the camping ground and the Aqualuna water park.

Jelenov Greben (Deer Ridge; ☎ 582 90 46; www.jel-jelenov-greben.si; Olimlje 90; s €33.50-37.50, d €59-66, apt €58.50-67; (P)) This spectacular property, set on a ridge some 500m south of Olimlje at Ježovnik, has 12 cosy rooms (some have balco-

nies), four-person apartments and a popular restaurant (starters €3 to €8, mains €5.50 to €11.70, picnic lunches from €6.25) that is open daily from 9am and celebrated for its venison and wild mushroom dishes. There is also a shop selling farm products and souvenirs that is open 9am to 7pm. 'Deer Ridge' is a working farm and a hundred head of deer roam freely on the eight hectares of land.

Terme Olimia (☎ 829 70 00; www.terme-olimia.com; (P) ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) Along with its camp site to the north, the spa complex offers accommodation in two hotels, an apartment complex and a tourist village. Package deals are endless at this place and those staying at any of the Terme Olimia properties may use all the pools for free.

Its cheapest accommodation is **Village Lipa** (Vas Lipa; 2-4-bed bungalow €66/83), a tourist 'village' at the southern end of the complex that does not look unlike a cookie-cutter American suburban housing development. If that's what you're after, there are 25 houses with 136 apartments. **Aparthotel Rosa** (apt for 2/4 €99.50/166) just west of the spa complex has 94 apartments with living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and satellite TV. The 154-room **Hotel Breza** (s/d €71.50-118) is housed in a rather strange, five-storey structure with roofs sloping off every which way. Still, it has direct access to the Termalija complex and its very own pool.

The new kid on the block is the 145-room **Hotel Sotelija** (s/d €91.50/153), a luxurious and very 'green' hotel whose undulating design and colours seem to make it blend into the forest behind it.

The tourist office has a list of families offering **private rooms** (per person €10.50 to €25) in Podčetrtek and Sodna Vas, 2km north of the spa complex on the main road.

EATING

Gostišče Ciril (starters €4.20-5.40, mains €5.40-6.20; ☞ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 10pm Sat & Sun) This grill restaurant above the popular hostel is frequented by local Slovenes and their Croatian neighbours. The vine-covered terrace is lovely on a warm evening. They also do pizza (€3.10 to €4.60)

Gostilna Amon (☎ 818 24 80; Olimlje 24; meals from €15; ☞ 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) This Maison de Qualité establishment up in the hill south of Olimlje is simply the best place for miles around. It offers high-quality food

and organic wines. Set lunch is excellent value at €8.

There's a branch of **Mercator** (Cesta Slake 1; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) supermarket beside Banka Celje in Podčetrtek village.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Between two and five buses a day on weekdays pass by Podčetrtek and Terme Olimia on their way to Bistrica ob Sotli (€2.20, 20 minutes, 14km) and Celje (€4, one hour, 35km). During the school term there's two buses on weekdays to Rogaška Slatina (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) and Maribor (€7, 1½ hours, 73km)

Podčetrtek is on the rail line linking Celje (via Stranje) with Imeno. Up to six trains leave the main Podčetrtek station every day for Celje (€2.65, 45 minutes, 35km) and Imeno (€1, three minutes, 3km).

You can call a taxi on ☎ 041-614 847.

Kozjansko Regional Park

☎ 03 / elev to 686m

Protected under the old regime as far back as 1981 and established by parliament in 1999, 20,760-hectare **Kozjansko Regional Park** (Kozjanski Regijski Park; ☎ 800 71 00; www.gov.si/kp in Slovene; Podsreda 45; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), one of only three so designated in the country, stretches along the Sotla River, from the border with Dolenjska and Bizeljsko in the south to Podčetrtek in the north. It encompasses several communities, including Bistrica ob Sotli (population 282), just over the border from the Croatian village of Kumrovec, where Tito was born in 1892 to a Slovenian mother and a Croatian father.

The forests and dry meadows of the park harbour a wealth of flora and fauna, notably butterflies, reptiles and birds, including corncrakes, kingfishers and storks. There are a number of trails in the park, including the 32km-long **Podsreda Trail** (Pešpot Podsreda), which begins next to one of the best-preserved Romanesque castles in Slovenia.

Podsreda Castle

☎ 03 / elev 415m

Perched on a hill south of the village of Podsreda (population 205), **Podsreda Castle** (Grad Podsreda; ☎ 580 61 18; adult/child €2.50/1.90; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) looks pretty much the way it did when it was built as Hörberg in about 1200. A barbican on the southern side, with

walls 3m thick, leads to a central courtyard with a sgraffito of a knight; in the barbican is a medieval kitchen and a dungeon hidden beneath a staircase. The rooms in the castle wings, some with beamed ceilings and ancient chandeliers, now contain a glassworks exhibit (crystal from Rogaška Slatina, vials from the Olimje pharmacy, green Pohorje glass). However, the tiny Romanesque chapel is worth the visit, and there's a wonderful collection of prints of Štajerska's castles and monasteries taken from *Topographii Ducatus Stiriae* (1681) by Georg Mattäus Vischer (1628-96). The fabulous wood-panelled Renaissance Hall hosts exhibitions, classical concerts and, of course, weddings.

A rough, winding 5km-long road leads to the castle, but you can also reach it via a relatively steep 2km trail from Stari Trg, less than 1km southeast of Podsreda village. If you've built up an appetite climbing up and down those hills, there's a small *gostilna* (inn-like restaurant) called **Pri Martinu** (☎ 580 61 20; Podsreda 47; meals from €10) in the village, which has a vine-covered terrace and rooms for rent (€12.50 per person).

Getting to Podsreda from Podčetrtek is tricky if you don't have your own wheels. The only option is to catch the one daily bus to Kozje and there wait for the one headed for Bistrica ob Sotli, which passes through Podsreda village.

ROGAŠKA SLATINA

☎ 03 / pop 4730 / elev 228m

Rogaška Slatina is Slovenia's oldest and largest spa town, a veritable 'cure factory' with almost a dozen hotels and treatments and therapies ranging from 'pearl baths' to dreadful-sounding 'lymph drainage'. It's an attractive place set among scattered forests in the foothills of the Macelj range, and hiking and cycling in the area is particularly good.

Although the hot spring here was known in Roman times, Rogaška Slatina didn't make it on the map until 1574, when the governor of Styria, one Wolf Ungnad, took the waters on the advice of his physician. A century later a publication entitled *Roitschocrene* examined the curative properties of the springs and claimed they had helped the ailing viceroy of Croatia. The news spread to Vienna, visitors started to arrive in droves and inns were opened. By the early 19th century Rogaška Slatina was an established spa town.

Orientation

The heart of Rogaška Slatina is the spa complex, an attractive – and architecturally important – group of neoclassical, Secessionist and Plečnik-style buildings surrounding a long landscaped garden called Zdraviliški trg (Health Resort Square). The hotels and central Terapija building to the north and northeast are late 1960s and '70s vintage and not in keeping with the rest of the lovely square.

Rogaška Slatina's bus station is south of Zdraviliški trg on Celjska cesta. The train station is 300m further south on Kidričeva ulica.

Information

Post office (Kidričeva ulica 3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

SKB Banka (Kidričeva ulica 11)

Srečko exchange office (Kidričeva ulica; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) In the little pavilion opposite SKB Banka.

Tourist Information Centre Rogaška Slatina

(☎ 581 44 14; tic.rogaska@siol.net; Zdraviliški trg 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug; 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat Sep-Jun) Less-than-helpful tourist office at the southern end of the square.

Activities

The mineral water (called Donat Mg) found at the spa complex **Terme Rogaška** (☎ 811 70 10; www.terme-rogaska.com) contains the richest amount of magnesium in the world and is primarily for drinking. The stuff is sold throughout Slovenia for both curative and

ROGAŠKA SLATINA

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

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refreshment purposes, but you might find the real thing here tastes a little bit too metallic and salty. The water, which also contains calcium, sulphates, lithium and bromide, is said to eliminate stress, aid digestion and encourage weight loss. The magnesium alone, it is claimed, regulates 200 bodily functions.

You can engage in a 'drinking cure' of your own at the **Pivnica** (admission €1.50, 3-day pass €7.50; ☎ 7am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 7am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun), the round, glassed-in drinking hall where mineral water is dispensed directly from the springs. It's just beyond the gazebo-like **bandstand** where concerts are staged in the warmer months.

The centre of real action at the spa is the 12-storey **Terapija** (www.rogaska-medical.com; Zdraviliški trg 9; ☎ 7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon & 3-6.30pm Sat & Sun) building where those pearl baths (€16) are being taken and all those lymph glands are being drained (€23). At the Hotel Donat opposite the bandstand there's an **indoor thermal pool** (€8; ☎ 8am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sun), sauna, steam room and gym. A 30-minute body massage costs €20. Most of the larger hotels have their own wellness centres, including the Grand Hotel Rogaska's Vis Vita and the Lotus Terme at the Sava.

The so-called **Termalna Riviera** (☎ 819 19 50; Celjska cesta 7; 3-hr pass adult/senior & student/child €6.25/4.60/4.20, 1-day pass €7.50/5.85/5; ☎ 9am-8pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat) next to the Sonce shopping centre has one indoor and two outdoor swimming pools that are all connected. There's also a whirlpool and saunas. Terme Rogaska hotels include free entry to these pools in their rates.

The **Sport Park** (☎ 581 56 16; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-9pm), a couple of hundred metres east of the Hotel Donat and up the hill, has six outdoor and four indoor **tennis courts** (per hr €4.20 to €10.85; racquet & balls €6.25) and a **squash court** (€4.25) available for hire.

South of the sports centre on Janina Hill (362m) is a tiny **ski slope** (day/night pass €5/6.25), where you can also rent equipment. Terme Rogaska guests get to ski for free.

There are **walking trails** marked on the 1:25 000 *Rogaška Slatina* PZS map (€2.10) available from the TIC; they range from 2km to 15km and fan out from Rogaška Slatina into the surrounding hills and meadows. One leads 15km to the **Church of St Florian**, on a hill northeast of the spa, and to Ložno, from where you can continue on another 4km to **Donačka Gora**. If

you want to do it an easier way, take a bus or train to Rogatec, then walk to Donačka Gora in about two hours. Accommodation there is at the Category III **Rudjiev Dom na Donački Gori** (☎ 582 79 79, 031 730 466; ☎ mid-Apr-Oct; Sat & Sun Nov-mid-Apr) at 590m, which has 40 beds in 24 rooms.

The walk to **Boč** northwest of Rogaška Slatina takes about four hours though you can drive as far as Category III **Dom na Boču** (☎ 582 46 17, 031 743 017; Drevnik 7; ☎ year-round), a mountain hut a couple of kilometres south of the peak at 658m with 47 beds in 15 rooms.

Festivals & Events

Rogaška Musical Summer is a series of some 40 concerts, from chamber music and opera to Slovenian folk music, which is held in and around the central bandstand from June to late September. The tourist office will provide you with a list of what's on. Concerts are sometimes held in the Grand Hotel Rogaska's Crystal Hall (Kristalna Dvorana), where Franz Liszt once tickled the ivories.

Sleeping

Apartmaji Leon (☎ 492 13 60; www.virgo-sp.si; Celjska cesta 28a; apt €40-80; ☎ ☎) If you're in a group, you might try this pension with apartments measuring 40 and 60 sq metres for two to five people. It's 350m northeast of the Termalna Riviera.

Hotel Slatina (☎ 818 41 00; www.rogaska-medical.com, in Slovene; Celjska cesta 6; s/d €50/84, apt from €110; ☎ ☎) This attractive 60-room hotel in a restored late-19th-century spa building has singles, doubles and apartments for two to four people with kitchenette.

Hotel Slovenija (☎ 811 50 00; hotel.slovenia@siol.net; www.termo-rogaska.com; Celjska cesta 1; s €52-60, d €84-100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This flower-bedecked, 65-room hotel is one of the best deals for its price; it's the cheapest in town and central to everything. The service is especially friendly.

Grand Hotel Sava (☎ 811 40 00; www.rogaska.si; Zdraviliški trg 6; s €50.50-75.50, d €83-138.50, ste €128-232; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The modern Sava and the attached older (and cheaper) **Hotel Zagreb** (s €48.50-57.50, d €79-93.50; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), each with four stars, are at the northwestern end of Zdraviliški trg and count a total of 276 rooms. It's certainly the most popular and active complex in town and another plus is the recent renovation at the Zagreb.

Hotel Donat (☎ 811 30 00; www.ghdonat.com; Zdraviliški trg 10; s €62-76, d €88-148, ste €198-278; ☎ ☎ ☎) Despite the ugly modern exterior, the four-star Donat, with 250 beds, has some of the best facilities, including a large swimming pool open to nonguests

Grand Hotel Rogaska (☎ 811 20 00; www.termo-rogaska.com; Zdraviliški trg 10; s €69-104, d €108-188, ste €148-308) Along with its two branches, the contiguous Hotel Styria and Hotel Strossmayer (singles €46 to €66, doubles €68 to €108) on the eastern side of Zdraviliški trg with more than 350 beds among them, this four-star property is *la crème de la crème* of accommodation in Rogaška Slatina. The Grand, with its spectacular public areas (especially the Crystal Hall), dates from 1913 while the other two were added in the mid-19th century.

The TIC can arrange **private rooms** and **apartments** in the town and surrounding areas for between €14.60 and €20.80, depending on the season and room category.

Eating

Slaščičarna Kavarna Center (☎ 819 24 33; Kidričeva ulica 21; dishes from €2.50; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7am-1am Fri & Sat, 8am-11pm Sun) Essentially an ice-cream shop and café, the Center serves döners and kebabs until relatively late.

Pizzerija La Gondola (☎ 818 41 00; Celjska cesta 6; dishes €3.35-4.60; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Fri, to 1am Sat, to 11pm Sun) Beneath the Hotel Slatina, this delightful cubby-hole serves good pizzas, pastas and salads.

Ristorante Sonce (☎ 819 21 60; Celjska cesta 9; meals €10; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) This restaurant with impressive wine cellar near the shopping centre specialises in seafood.

Gostilna Bohor (☎ 581 41 00; Kidričeva ulica 23; pizza €3.35-4.60, mains €4.60-10.50; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-11pm Fri & Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) For hearty Slovenian fare and better-than-average pizza, try this popular local eatery. The Kmečka Pizza ('Farmer's Pizza') has virtually everything from the barnyard on top.

Allegro (☎ 811 40 00; Zdraviliški trg 5; starters €3.75-7.10, mains €6.70-16.70; ☎ 7pm-midnight) This Italian/Mediterranean restaurant, with some Slovenian favourites thrown in for good measure, is accessible from the Sava and Zagreb hotels as well as the Kavarna Imperial. Look out for daily specials. Service is friendly but painfully slow.

There's a **Mercator** (Kidričeva ulica 13; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) next to the post office.

Drinking

Kavarna Attems (☎ 819 27 10; Zdraviliški trg 22; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, to 1pm Sun) Most visitors to Rogaška Slatina spend their evenings in the hotel bars and cafés; the Attems, in the stunning Art Nouveau Tempel building dating from 1904 and renovated in 2001 at the southern end of Zdraviliški trg, is popular with a younger crowd.

Kavarna Imperial (☎ 811 40 00; Zdraviliški trg 5; ☎ 11am-midnight) One of the most pleasant places for a drink in the spa complex is this café with a huge outside terrace attached to the Hotel Zagreb. There's live music by night.

Shopping

Rogaška Slatina is almost as celebrated for its crystal as it is for its mineral water.

Steklarna Rogaska (☎ 819 09 14; Zdraviliški trg 23; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, to 1pm & 3-6pm Sun) This showroom next to the Kavarna Attems has a large selection of stemware, vases and bowls.

Steklarska Nova (☎ 818 20 27; Steklarska ulica 1; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) This outlet attached to the school where the making (presumably not breaking) of Rogaška glass is taught, is 1km south of the town centre and has a wide range of leaded crystal on sale.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Celje (€4, 45 minutes, 34km) and Rogatec (€1.70, 10 minutes, 7km) leave Rogaška Slatina almost hourly. There are buses to Maribor (€7, 1½ hours, 75km, two or three daily) and Ljubljana (€9.30, two hours, 105km, 4.47am daily). Other destinations that can be reached by bus include Dobovec (€2.20, 30 minutes, 15km, up to four daily) and the Croatian border and Ptuj (€5.75, one hour, 53km, 6.50am daily).

Rogaška Slatina is on the train line linking Celje (€2.65, 50 minutes, 36km, up to seven daily) via Rogatec (€1, 10 minutes, 6km) and Dobovec with Zabok in Croatia, where you can change for Zagreb.

AROUND ROGAŠKA SLATINA Rogatec Open-Air Museum

In Rogatec (population 1575), 7km east of Rogaška Slatina, this **outdoor museum** (Muzej na Prostem Rogatec; ☎ 818 62 00; www.muzej-rogatec.si; Ptujška cesta 23; adult/student/child €2.70/2.30/2.10; ☎ 8am-6m Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-early Nov) is Slovenia's largest and most ambitious *skanzen* (open-air museum). Ten original structures or replicas have been relocated or built here to

create a typical Styrian farm of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The large farmhouse, barn, *toplar* (double-linked hayrack) and vintner's cottage are particularly interesting.

Rogatec can be reached from Rogaška Slatina (€1.70, 10 minutes, 7km, almost hourly) by frequent bus.

PTUJ

☎ 02 / pop 18,145 / elev 229m

Ptuj, one of the oldest towns in Slovenia, equals Ljubljana in terms of historical importance. Ptuj's compact medieval core, with its castle, museums, monasteries and churches, can easily be seen in a day. But there are so many interesting side trips and a host of activities in the area that you may decide to base yourself here for a while.

History

Ptuj, whose name in English sounds not unlike someone spitting, began life as a Roman military outpost on the right (south) bank of the Drava River and later grew into a civilian settlement called Poetovio on the opposite side. Unlike so many other Slovenian towns, Ptuj doesn't have to put a spade into the ground to prove its ancient origins: Tacitus mentioned it by name in his *Historiae* as having existed as early as 69 AD.

By the 1st century AD the largest Roman township in what is now Slovenia, Poetovio lay on a major road linking Pannonia and Noricum provinces. In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Ptuj was the centre of the Mithraic cult (p221), a new religion that had gained popularity among Roman soldiers and slaves, and several complete temples have been unearthed in the area. But all this came to a brutal end when the Goths attacked the town in the 5th century. They were followed by the Huns, Langobards, Franks and then the early Slavs.

Ptuj received its town rights in 977 and over the next several centuries it grew rich through trade on the Drava. By the 13th century it was competing with the 'upstart' Marburg (Maribor), 26km upriver, in both crafts and commerce. Two monastic orders – the Dominicans and the Franciscan Minorites – settled here and built important monasteries. The Magyars attacked and occupied Ptuj for most of the 15th century, though each of a half-dozen raids by the Turks was thwarted.

When the railroad reached eastern Slovenia from Vienna on its way to the coast in

the mid-19th century, the age-old rivalry between Maribor and Ptuj turned one-sided: the former was on the line and the latter missed out altogether. Though Ptuj was rescued from oblivion in 1863 when the railway line to Budapest passed through it, the town remained essentially a provincial centre with a German majority and very little industry until WWI.

Orientation

Ptuj lies on the left (north) bank of the Drava River. The castle, with its irregular shape and ancient walls, dominates the town from a 300m hill to the northwest. Most sites of historical interest lie on or near Slovenski trg, but Minoritski trg is the gateway to the Old Town.

The bus station is about 300m northeast of Minoritski trg at Osojnikova cesta 11. The train station is another 250m further along at Osojnikova cesta 2.

Information

Ivan Potrč Library (☎ 771 48 01, 779 12 01; Prešernova ulica 33-35; per hr €0.85; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Eight terminals with internet access.

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Prešernova ulica 6) Next door to the Garni Hotel Mitra.

Post office (Vodnikova ulica 2)

Ptuj Alpine Society (☎ 771 15 11; Prešernova ulica 27; ☎ 5-7pm Tue & Fri) Information about hiking in the area.

SKB Banka (Trstenjakova ulica 2)

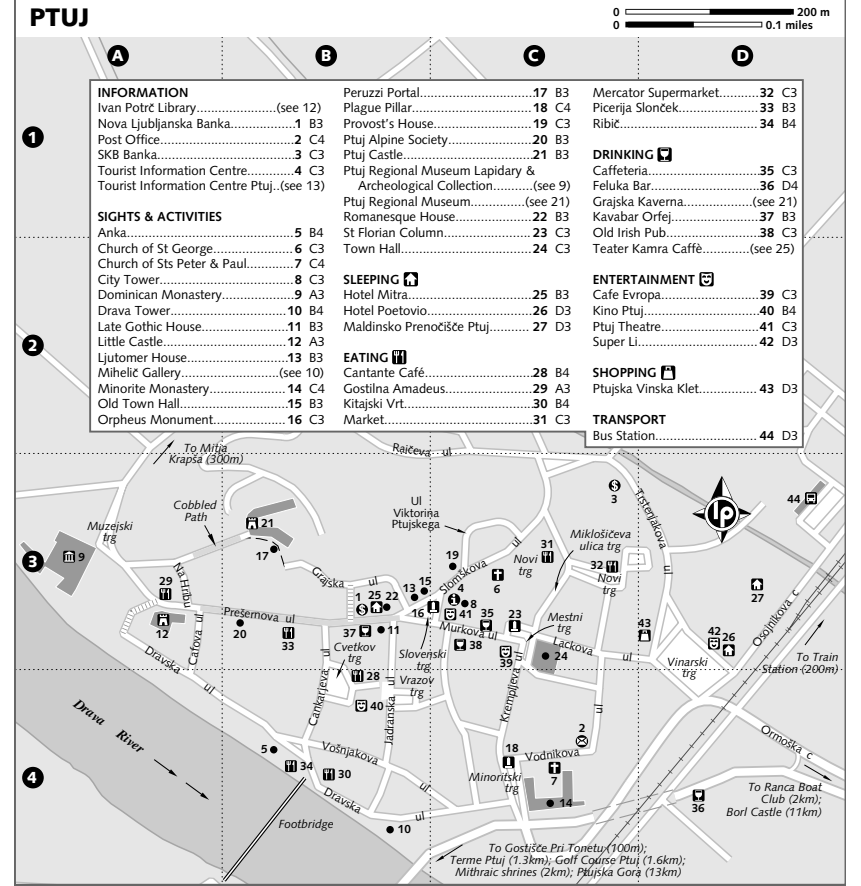
Tourist Information Centre Ptuj (☎ 771 60 11; www.ptuj-tourism.si; Slovenski trg 5; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jun; 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug; 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat Sep-May) In the 16th-century Ljutomer House.

Sights

Ptuj's Gothic centre, with its Renaissance and baroque additions, is a joy to explore on foot. The following sights can be done on a 'walking tour' if visited in the order which they appear.

MINORITSKI TRG & MESTNI TRG

On the east side of **Minoritski trg**, which has a 17th-century **plague pillar** of Mary and the Infant Jesus in the centre, is the massive **Minorite monastery** (Minoritski Samostan; ☎ 771 30 91; Minoritski trg 1; ☎ by appointment), which was built in the 13th century. Because the Franciscan Minorites dedicated themselves to teaching, the order was not dissolved under the edict issued by Habsburg Emperor Joseph II in the late 18th century, and it has continued to function in Ptuj for more than seven centuries.



The arcaded monastery, which dates from the second half of the 17th century, has a **summer refectory** on the 1st floor, with beautiful stucco work and a dozen ceiling paintings of Sts Peter (north side) and Paul (south side). One panel depicts the martyrdom of my namesake, poor St Stephen, who was stoned – as in with rocks thrown at him – to death by a group of pagans including Saul (later baptised as Paul). The monastery also contains a 5000-volume **library** of important manuscripts including part of a 10th-century codex used to cover a prayer book around 1590 and an original copy of the New Testament (1561) translated by Primož Trubar.

On the northern side of the monastery's inner courtyard, the **Church of Sts Peter and**

Paul (Cerkev Sv Petra in Pavla), one of the most beautiful examples of early Gothic architecture in Slovenia, was reduced to rubble by Allied bombing in January 1945. It was painstakingly rebuilt over the decades and has now risen – phoenixlike – as a gem of modern architecture on the same spot.

About 150m west of the monastery is round **Drava Tower** (Dravski Stolp; Dravska ulica 4), a Renaissance water tower built as a defence against the Turks in 1551. It houses the **Mihelič Gallery** (Miheličeva Galerija; ☎ 787 92 50; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Fri), which hosts temporary exhibits of modern art.

At the end of Krempljeva ulica, which runs north from Minoritski trg, is **Mestni trg**, a rectangular square once called Florianplatz in

honour of the **St Florian Column** (1745) standing in the northwest corner. To the east is the neo-Gothic **town hall** (Mestni trg 1) designed by an architect from Graz in 1907.

SLOVENSKI TRG

Murkova ulica, which has some interesting old houses on it, leads westward from Mestni trg to funnel-shaped **Slovenski trg**, the heart of old Ptuj. In the centre, the **City Tower** (Mestni Stolp) was erected in the 16th century as a belfry and later turned into a watch tower. Roman tombstones and sacrificial altars from Poetovio were incorporated into the tower's exterior walls in 1830; you can still make out reliefs of Medusa's head, dolphins and a man on horseback.

In front of the City Tower stands the 5m-tall **Orpheus Monument** (Orfejev Spomenik), a Roman tombstone from the 2nd century with scenes from the Orpheus myth. It was used as a pillory in the Middle Ages; those found guilty of a crime were shackled to iron rings attached to the holes on the lower half. The colourfully decorated building to the south is **Ptuj Theatre** (Gledališče Ptuj; Slovenski trg 13), originally built in 1786. Until 1918 it staged plays in German only.

Behind the City Tower is the **Church of St George** (Cerkev Sv Jurija), which reveals an array of styles from Romanesque to neo-Gothic. The church contains some lovely late-14th-century choir chairs decorated with animals, a carved relief of the Epiphany dating from 1515 and frescoes in the middle of the south aisle and the restored **Laib Altar**, a three-winged altar painting by Konrad Laib (c 1410–60) completed in the mid-15th century. Near the entrance is a carved 14th-century statue under glass of St George slaying the dragon.

On the northern side of the square are several interesting buildings, including the 16th-century **Provost's House** (Slovenski trg 10) with medallions, the baroque **Old Town Hall** (Slovenski trg 6) and **Ljutomer House** (Slovenski trg 5), now housing the tourist office, whose Mediterranean-style loge was built in 1565 by Italian workers who had come to Ptuj to fortify it against the Turks.

PREŠERNOVA ULICA

Pedestrian **Prešernova ulica**, the town's market in the Middle Ages, leads westward from Slovenski trg. The arched spans that look like little bridges above some of the narrow side streets are to support older buildings. The **Late Gothic House** (Prešernova ulica 1), dating from about 1400, has an unusual projection held up by a Moor's

head. Opposite is the sombre **Romanesque House** (Prešernova ulica 4), the oldest building in Ptuj. The renovated yellow pile called the **Little Castle** (Mali Grad; Prešernova ulica 33-35) was the erstwhile home of the Salzburg bishops and a number of aristocratic families over the centuries.

MUZEJSKI TRG

Just past Sunny Park (Sončni Park) in Muzjejski trg is the former **Dominican Monastery** (Dominikanski Samostan; Muzejski trg 1), which contains the **lapidary and archeological collections of the Ptuj Regional Museum** (☎ 778 87 80, 748 03 60; adult/child €3/1.70; ☹ 10am-5pm mid-Apr–Nov). The monastery was built in 1230 but abandoned in the late 18th century when the Habsburgs dissolved the Catholic religious orders. The beautiful eastern wing has a cross-ribbed Romanesque window and Gothic cloisters with 14th-century frescoes of Dominican monks in their black and white garb. There's also a **refectory** with 18th-century stucco work, a chapter hall and a large Roman coin collection. But the main reason for coming is to see the Roman tombstones, altars and wonderful mosaics unearthed in Ptuj and at the **Mithraic shrines** (☎ 778 87 80; adult/child €0.85/0.45, with guide €1.70/1; ☹ by appointment) at Spodnja Hajdina (key at house No 37a) and Zgornji Breg (key at Ulica K Mitreju 3), a couple of kilometres west of town.

PTUJ CASTLE

Parts of the **castle** (Grad Ptuj; Na Gradu 1; ☎ 748 03 60) date back to the first half of the 12th century (eg the west tower), but what you see here is an agglomeration of styles from the 14th to the 18th centuries put into place by one aristocratic owner after another. The castle houses the **Ptuj Regional Museum** (Pokrajinski Muzej Ptuj; ☎ 787 92 30, 778 87 80; www.pok-muzej-ptuj.si; adult/student & child €3/1.70, with guide €3.75/2.30; ☹ 9am-6pm daily May-Jun & Sep-mid-Oct; 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug; 9am-5pm mid-Oct-Apr) on its three arcaded floors, but mostly worth the trip for the views of Ptuj and the Drava. The shortest way to the castle from here is to follow narrow Grajska ulica, which starts just west of the Garni Hotel Mitra and leads to a covered wooden stairway and the castle's Renaissance **Peruzzi Portal** dating from 1570.

As you enter the castle courtyard, look to the west at the red marble **tombstone of Frederick IX**, the last lord of Ptuj who died in 1438. The ground floor of one wing contains a fascinating **musical instruments collection** from the 17th

to 19th centuries: some 300 flutes, horns, drums, lutes, violas, harps, clavichords and so on. As you approach each case, a tape plays the music the instruments make.

The 1st floor is given over to period rooms, each with its own style, as well as an impressive **Knights' Hall** (Viteška Dvorana). The rooms are treasure-troves of tapestries, painted wall canvases, portraits, weapons and furniture left by the castle's last owners, the Herbersteins (1873–1945) or brought from Dornava Castle, 8km to the northeast of Ptuj. You'll probably notice a coat of arms containing three buckles and the motto 'Grip Fast' in English. It belonged to the Leslies, a Scottish-Austrian family who owned the castle from 1656 to 1802.

Festival Hall contains Europe's largest collection of **Turkerie portraits**, but they are of historical rather than artistic interest. They are portraits of Turkish and European aristocrats, generals and courtiers commissioned by Count Johann Herberstein in 1665 and painted in Štajerska. Partly because of these paintings, Turkish dress became all the rage for a time in the 18th century.

On the 2nd floor is the **Castle Gallery** of Gothic statues and oil paintings from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Have a look at the scene of Ptuj in winter by Franc Jožef Fellner (1721–70) and a painting from the early 19th century of the Church of St George, marred by graffiti in German. Two fine statues – one of St Catherine (with a wheel) and the other of St Barbara (with a tower) – carved from sandstone in about 1410 in the 'soft' Gothic style, are among the museum's most priceless possessions. There's also a large collection

of **Kurent masks** on this floor as well as a collection of works of the graphic artist France Mihelič (1907–98) who worked here from 1936 to 1941. His gruesome **Mrtvi Kurent** (Dead Kurent) is memorable.

Activities

Terme Ptuj (☎ 749 41 00, 749 45 80; www.terme-ptuj.si; Pot v Toplice 9; adult €7.10-9.20, child €4.60-6.30; ☹ 7am-10pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat), a thermal spa about 1.5km west of town on the south bank of the Drava, is primarily a huge recreational water park called Termalni Park, with seven outdoor swimming pools, six indoor thermal ones (water temperature 32°C to 36°C) and eight tennis courts. You can also rent **bicycles** (1 hr/half-day/day €1.25/3.80/6.30) here.

About 300m west of Terme Ptuj is 18-hole, par-71 **Golf Course Ptuj** (☎ 788 91 10, 041-791 065; www.golf-ptuj.com; Mlinska cesta 13; 18 holes €35 Mon-Fri, €40 Sat & Sun, dubs hire €8; ☹ mid-Mar-mid-Nov), by all accounts the most attractive links in Slovenia.

Licences for **fishing** in the Drava are available from the Hotel Poetovio in Ptuj (p236) and **Anka** (☎ 749 05 00; Dravska ulica 10; ☹ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri), a travel agency near the Ribič restaurant.

You can rent **rowing** and **sailing** boats from the **Ranca Boat Club** (Brodarsko Društvo Ranca; ☎ 041-791 005; www.ranca-ptuj.com, in Slovene), about 2km southeast of the centre on the Drava.

Festivals & Events

Kurentovanje (www.kurentovanje.net) is a rite of spring celebrated for 10 days in February leading up to Shrove Tuesday; it's the most popular and best-known folklore event in Slovenia (below).

KURENT: PARTY TIME IN PTUJ

Ptuj – and many towns on the surrounding plain and in the hills – marks Shrovetide with Kurentovanje, a rite of spring and fertility that may date back to the time of the early Slavs. Such celebrations are not unique to Slovenia; they still take place at Mohács in Hungary and in Bulgaria and Serbia as well. But the Kurentovanje is among the most extravagant of these celebrations.

The main character of the rite is Kurent, god of unrestrained pleasure and hedonism – a 'Slovenian Dionysus'. The Kurents (there are many groups of them) are dressed in sheepskins with five cowbells dangling from their belts. On their heads they wear huge furry caps decorated with feathers, sticks or horns and coloured streamers. The leather face masks have eyeholes outlined in red, trunk-like noses and enormous red tongues that hang down to the chest.

The Kurents move from house to house in procession scaring off evil spirits with their bells and *ježevke* (wooden clubs) topped with quills taken from hedgehogs. A *hudič* (devil), covered in a net to catch souls, leads each group. Young girls present the Kurents with handkerchiefs, which they then fasten to their belts, and people smash little clay pots at their feet for luck and good health.

Three **traditional fairs** that take place in Novi trg in Ptuj are those dedicated to St George (Sv Jurij; 23 April), St Oswald (Sv Ožbalt; 5 August) and St Catherine (Sv Katarina; 25 November).

Sleeping

Camp Terme Ptuj (☎ 749 41 00, 749 45 80; www.terme-ptuj.si; Pot v Toplice 9; adult €12-13.30, child €6-9.35; ☹ year-round; (P) 📶) This 1.5-hectare camping ground next to the thermal spa and water park has 120 sites. Rates include entry to the park and use of pools and other recreational facilities. Terme Ptuj also has what it calls camp cottages (€62.60 to €83.50), essentially stationary mobile homes for four people; attractive, cottagelike bungalows (singles €51 to €55, doubles €82 to €90) and modern apartments (singles €42 to €46.30, doubles €74 to €82) in larger villas.

Mladinsko Prenočišče Ptuj (MPP; ☎ 771 08 14; csod.yhptuj@guest.arnes.si; Osojnikova cesta 9; dm €15) This HI-affiliated dormitory near the bus station has 13 rooms with between two and six beds and is open all year. HI members get a discount of €2.

Gostišče Pri Tonetu (☎ 788 56 83; svsek.marjeta@amis.net; Zadržni trg 13; s/d €17/34; (P) 📶) This guest house with 24 beds in nine rooms and a popular restaurant (open 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-11pm Sun) just over the footbridge on the south bank of the Drava and a good springboard for cycling and walks. Ptuj's thermal baths and the golf course are nearby.

Hotel Poetovio (☎ 779 82 01; www.memoria.si; Vinarski trg 5; s/d/tr €28/39.60/49; (P) 📶) The 29-room Poetovio has small but bright and airy rooms and is handy to the bus and train stations. The noisy club below has been replaced with a quieter casino, but the bus and train stations – and the huge Super Li club – are still too close for comfort. Still, the price is right.

Hotel Mitra (☎ 787 74 55; www.hotelptuj.com; Prešernova ulica 6; s €51-61, d €71-81, apt €111) This 23-room hotel is one of provincial Slovenia's more interesting hotels. Although the guestrooms are fairly ordinary, most of them are pretty big, though the ones on the top floor have mansard ceilings. You can't beat the location, but the rooms are on three floors and there is no lift.

The tourist office can arrange **private rooms** (per person €20 to €25) but most are on the other side of the Drava near Terme Ptuj or in the

nearby village of Juršinci. If the tourist office is closed, a fairly central choice for rooms is **Mitja Krapša** (☎ 787 75 70; rozalija_k@hotmail.com; Maistrova ulica 19; per person €19), at the end of a 900m (as yet) unsealed track that starts west of Castle Hill.

Eating

Picerija Slonček (☎ 776 13 11; Prešernova ulica 19; pizza €3.50-4.20; ☹ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, to 11pm Sat) The cosy 'Little Elephant', with an interesting marble fountain out front, serves pizza and some meatless dishes as well as grills.

Kitajski Vrt (☎ 776 14 51; Dravska ulica 7; starters €2-2.50, mains €5-6.25; ☹ 11am-10pm Tue-Sun, 2-10pm Mon) Ptuj's only Chinese restaurant is almost opposite the Ribič and has a fair few vegetable dishes on its menu. It's not especially authentic but if you crave noodles, you'll find them here.

Cantante Café (Cankarjeva ulica 5; sandwiches €1.60, dishes €2.50-5.40; ☹ 7am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) A branch of the popular Maribor bar/restaurant has now opened in Ptuj.

Gostina Amadeus (☎ 771 70 51; Prešernova ulica 36; starters €5.50-7.50, mains €5.80-16.70; ☹ noon-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to 4pm Sun) This very pleasant restaurant above a pub and near the foot of the road to the castle serves *štruklji* (dumplings with herbs and cheese; €3.30), steak and pork dishes and fish. Service is very warm and efficient.

The town's open-air **market** (Novi trg; ☹ 7am-3pm) sells fruit, vegetables and more. You'll find a large **Mercator** (Novi trg 3; ☹ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) supermarket in the same square.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Ribič (☎ 749 06 35; Dravska ulica 9; starters €5.70-7.50, mains €5.90-16.70; ☹ 11am-11pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) Arguably the best restaurant in Ptuj, the 'Angler' faces the river and the speciality here is – not surprisingly – fish, especially boiled or fried trout (€7.75). The seafood soup served in a bowl made of bread (€2.50) is exceptional. If the oil on the salad tastes odd (nutty, a little smoky), that's because it's *bučno olje* (pumpkin-seed oil), a speciality of the Drava Plain region. Make sure to have the dessert speciality: chocolate fondant with ice cream (€4). There's live Slovenian folk music some nights.

Drinking

Grajska Kavarna (Castle Café; ☎ 041-711 586; Na Gradu 1; ☹ same as castle) This pleasant little café in the castle courtyard serves sandwiches, cakes and hot and cold drinks.

Teater Kamra Caffè (☎ 787 74 55; Prešernova ulica 6; ☹ 8am-11pm) A café-cum-music pub attached to the Hotel Mitra with occasional live music, the Theatre Room Café attracts Ptuj's Bohemian set.

Caffeteria (☎ 041-349 609; Murkova ulica 6; ☹ 7.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri) Ptuj can compete with Ljubljana in the earnestness stakes now that it has its own cosy teahouse serving a number of herbal concoctions and tisanes.

Kavabar Orfej (☎ 772 97 61; Prešernova ulica 5; ☹ 6am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, 10am-10.30pm Sun) The Orfej remains the anchor tenant on Prešernova ulica and is where everyone usually starts (or ends up).

Old Irish Pub (Murkova ulica 5; ☹ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, 2pm-11pm Sun) This popular watering hole 100m east of Prešernova ulica has a good selection of beer.

Feluka Bar (☎ 771 14 87; Čučkova ulica 6a; ☹ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) This über-trendy designer bar is on the wrong side of the tracks from the centre but attracts the crowds with its wonderful décor and drinks.

Entertainment

Ptuj Theatre (Gledališče Ptuj; ☎ 749 32 50; Slovenski trg 13) Just beside the City Tower, the Ptuj Theatre stages a varied programme year-round.

Kino Ptuj (☎ 748 18 10; Cvetkov trg 3; screenings 6pm & 8pm) This wonderful Art Deco movie theatre has a couple of screenings a day.

Café Evropa (☎ 771 02 35; Mestni trg 2; ☹ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, to 4am Fri, 8am-4am Sat, 2-11pm Sun) By day and evening a popular café, the Evropa turns into on of Ptuj's hottest clubs on Friday and Saturday nights.

Super Li (☎ 779 82 01; Vinarski trg 5; ☹ 9am-11pm Sun-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) If you're up for an old-fashioned disco scene head for this place neat to the Hotel Poetovio. There are live bands on Friday night.

Shopping

Ptujska Vinska Klet (Ptuj Wine Cellar; ☎ 787 98 10; Vinarski trg 1; ☹ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) One of the largest cellars in Slovenia, this is the place to go if you want to buy wine, especially local tipples such as Haloze Chardonnay, Šipon or Laški Rizling. The cellar also stocks Zlata Trta,

the 'Golden Vine' sweet wine dating from 1917 and the oldest vintage in Slovenia.

Getting There & Around

Buses depart hourly for Maribor (€3.50, 40 minutes, 27km), Majšperk (€2.20, 30 minutes, 14km) and Ormož (€3.50, 40 minutes, 26km), but count on only about half a dozen departing on Saturday and far fewer (or none) on Sunday. Other destinations and their frequencies include: Rogaška Slatina (€5.80, one hour, 53km, 7.58am) via Majšperk and Radenci (€7, two hours, 75km, 3.45pm).

Two buses a week head for Stuttgart (€74, 11½ hours, 704km, 2.14am Monday and Friday) via Munich in Germany. There's one bus once a day to Varaždin and Zagreb (€8.75, 1½ hours, 97km, 8am Monday and Friday) and another just to Varaždin (€5.50, 1½ hours, 49km, 5.05pm Sunday).

You can reach Ptuj up to six times a day by train from Ljubljana (€7.30 to €12, 2½ hours, 155km) direct or via Zidani Most and Pragersko. Up to nine trains go to Maribor (€2.65 to €4, 45 minutes, 37km). Four trains a day head for Murska Sobota (€4.50 to €6, 1¼ hours, 61km) via Ormož.

Book a taxi on ☎ 031-842 227 or 041-798 788.

AROUND PTUJ

Ptujska Gora

☎ 02 / pop 335 / elev 345m

The pilgrimage **Parish Church of the Virgin Mary** (Župnijska Cerkev Sv Marije; ☎ 794 42 31; www.ptujjska-gora.si; Ptujska Gora 40; ☹ 8am-7pm May-Oct, by appointment Nov-Mar) in this village 13km southwest of Ptuj contains one of the most treasured objects in Slovenia: a 15th-century carved **Misericordia** of the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus (p238).

The church itself, built at the start of the 15th century, is the finest example of a three-nave Gothic church in Slovenia. Among some of the other treasures inside is a small wooden **statue of St James** on one of the pillars on the south aisle and, under the porch and to the right as you enter, 15th-century **frescoes** of Christ's Passion and of several saints, including St Nicholas and St Dorothy with the Child Jesus. Look behind the modern tabernacle in the chapel to the right of the main altar for faint frescoes of St Peter and St Michael the Archangel.

The church, perched atop Black Hill (Črna Gora), is an easy 10-minute walk from where the bus headed for Majšperk will let you off.

GIMME SHELTER

The altar carving above the main altar in the church at Ptujška Gora, which dates from about 1410, portrays the images of 82 people from all walks of life taking shelter under Mary's enormous cloak. This is held aloft by seven angels; another two are crowning the Virgin. Below it people place small photographs of themselves and their loved ones in order to 'join' the throngs of the faithful. The carving is as important an historic document as it is a work of art. Among the lifelike faces looking up to Mary are the Counts of Celje (Frederick II and the three Hermans).

The protective mantle of the Madonna is a not-uncommon motif in Gothic art. Making use of her large enveloping cloak, Mary gives shelter to 'outlaws' and refugees and dispels fear and need among the faithful of all social classes. The mantle of Mary motif did not evolve into baroque and subsequent art styles, however, but more or less disappeared by the 16th century.

Dragica (☎ 725 02 70, 031-556 633; Ptujška Gora 37; ☎ 8am-11pm Tue-Sun) at the foot of the hill is a small bar with snacks.

A road called the **Wind Rattle Route** (after the unusual wind-powered noisemaker called *klopotec* used here to scare the crows away from the crops) follows a 50km course from Ptujška Gora to Zavrč via Dolena, Gorca and the town of Cirkulane. Ask the tourist office in Ptuj for a map.

Wine Roads

Ptuj is within easy striking distance of two important wine-growing areas: the **Haloze** district and the **Jeruzalem-Ljutomer** district. They are accessible on foot, by car and, best of all, by bike; ask the tourist office in Ptuj for the pamphlet *Cycle Tracks in Haloze* (Kolesarske Poti po Halozah).

The Haloze Hills extend for about 30km from Makole, 18km southwest of Ptuj, to Goričak on the border with Croatia. The footpath taking in this land of gentle hills, vines, corn and sunflowers is called the **Haloze Highlands Trail** (Haloška Planina Pot). It is accessible from near **Štatenberg** (☎ 803 02 16; adult/child €1.70/1.25; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Sun), an 18th-century manor at Makole, 9km southwest of Ptujška

Gora in the Dravinja Valley. The manor has fabulous stucco work and frescoes in eight enormous rooms; don't miss the impressive paintings of the four elements as well as Peace, the Sciences and the Arts in the Knights' Hall. There's a **restaurant** (☎ 11am-10pm Wed-Sun) and **wine cellar** here, with tastings available.

It's much easier to pick up the Haloze trail near **Borl Castle** (www.borl.org), 11km southeast of Ptuj, however. Borl was originally built in the 13th century and fell to the Hungarians until the late 15th century. It changed ownership again and again, and was used as a detention centre first by the Nazis and then the communists after the war. It is undergoing a very slow renovation, though the roof has been replaced and the tower repaired.

The **Jeruzalem-Ljutomer wine road** begins at Ormož and continues for 18km north to Ljutomer (population 3385), the main seat in the area, via the hill-top village of Jeruzalem. There are quite a few cellars, small restaurants and pensions along this positively idyllic route where you can sample any of the region's local whites, especially around Ivanjkovci, including **Gostišče Taverna Jeruzalem Svetinje** (☎ 719 41 28; www.taverna-mn.si, in Slovene; Veličina 59; r per person €21, 4-person apt €50).

MARIBOR

☎ 02 / pop 87,950 / elev 275m

Although it is the nation's second-largest city, Maribor has only about a third the population of Ljubljana, and it often feels more like a large provincial town than northeast Slovenia's economic, communications and cultural hub. It has the country's only other university – founded in 1975 – outside the capital, an important museum, a number of galleries, a theatre founded in 1786 and an attractive Old Town along the Drava River. Maribor is also the gateway to the Maribor Pohorje, a hilly recreational area to the southwest, and the Mariborske and Slovenske Gorice wine-growing regions to the north and the east.

History

Maribor rose to prominence in the Middle Ages when a fortress called Marchburg was built on Piramida, a hill to the north of the city, to protect the Drava Valley from the Magyar onslaught. The settlement that later developed along the river grew wealthy through the timber and wine trade, financed largely by the town's Jewish community, and the waterfront

landing (Pristan) in the Lent district became one of the busiest ports in the country.

The town was fortified with walls in the 14th century to protect it against first the Hungarians and then the Turks; four defence towers still stand along the Drava. Though its fortunes declined somewhat in later centuries, the tide turned in 1846 when the railroad from Vienna reached here – the first town in Slovenia to have train connections with the imperial capital. Maribor became the centre of Slovene-speaking Styria – a kind of counterbalance to German-speaking Graz in Austria – and began to industrialise.

Air raids during WWII devastated Maribor, and by 1945 two-thirds of it lay in ruin. New areas were opened up on the right (south) bank of the Drava, and in the 1950s Maribor was one of Slovenia's most 'proletarian' cities, which is still evident from the factory buildings and housing estates south of the river.

Orientation

Maribor sits on both sides of the Drava River, with the Lent waterfront district and other parts of the Old Town on the LEFT (north) bank. There are several main squares, although funnel-shaped Grajski trg is the historical centre.

Maribor's enormous bus station – built in the 1980s but decaying before our very eyes – is northeast of Grajski trg on Mlinska ulica. The train station is about 350m further north on Partizanska cesta. One of only three international airports in Slovenia, **Maribor airport** (Aerodrom Maribor; ☎ 629 11 75; www.maribor-airport.si; Letališka cesta 10) is at Orehova Vas, 8km southeast of the Old Town.

Information**BOOKSHOPS**

Mladinska Knjiga (☎ 234 31 13; Gosposka ulica 28; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Sells Lonely Planet guides and maps, including the 1:50,000-scale map *Pohorje* (GZS).

MK Univerzitetna Knjigarna (☎ 238 05 50; Gospejna ulica 8; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Behind the university library.

INTERNET ACCESS

Kibla Cyber Café (☎ 229 40 12; www.kibla.org; Ulica Kneza Koclja 9; free; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 4-10pm Sat & Sun) Perhaps the flashiest internet café in the world, with 10 terminals.

MARKS (☎ 040-500 457; www.marksmb.net; Partizanska cesta 21; free; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 5pm-midnight

Sat & Sun) Central youth club has free internet access on three terminals.

MONEY

Abanka (Glavni trg 18; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) In the mall at the eastern end of Glavni trg.

Luna exchange office (☎ 250 00 40; Grajski trg 8; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

Nova KBM Bank (Trg Svobode 2; ☎ 8-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Opposite Maribor Castle.

POST

Post office (Partizanska cesta 1) There's also another branch at Slomškov trg.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Information Centre Maribor (☎ 234 66 11; www.maribor-tourism.si; Partizanska 47; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Opposite the train station.

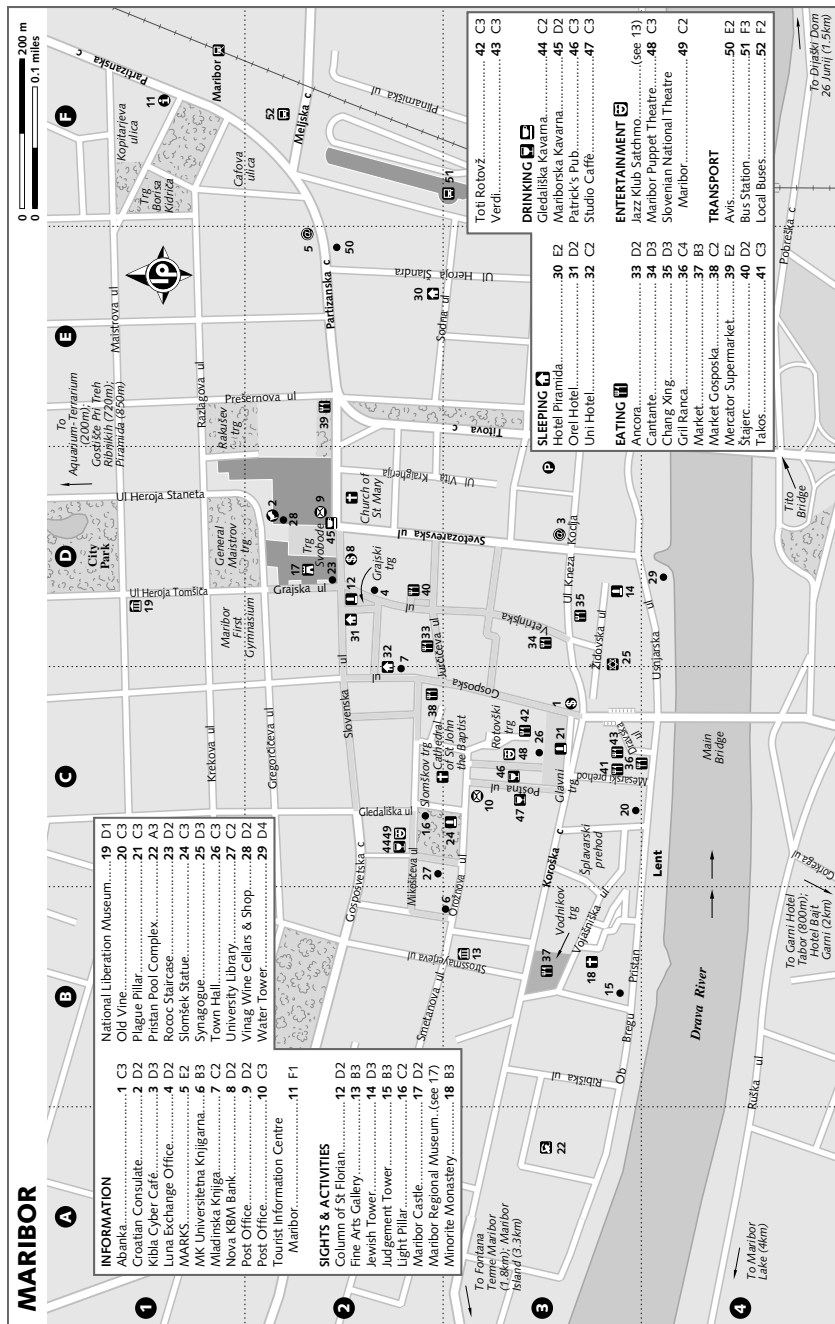
Sights**GRAJSKI TRG**

The centre of the Old Town, this square is graced with the 17th-century **Column of St Florian**, dedicated to the patron saint of fire fighters.

Maribor Castle (Mariborski Grad; Grajski trg 2), on the square's northeast corner, is a successor to the Piramida fortress of medieval times. The 15th-century castle contains a **Knights' Hall** (Viteška Dvorana) with a remarkably disproportionate ceiling painting, the baroque **Loretska Chapel** and a magnificent **rococo staircase** (1759), with pink walls, stucco work and figures arrayed on the banisters and visible through glass doors from the corner of Grajska ulica and Slovenska ulica.

The castle also contains the **Maribor Regional Museum** (Pokrajinski Muzej Maribor; ☎ 228 35 51; www.muzej-mb.si; adult/child €2.50/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Dec), one of the richest collections in Slovenia, which is arranged in 20 rooms. Be advised that at the time of research the museum was undergoing extensive renovations and parts (or all) of the permanent collection may be closed.

On the ground floor there are archaeological, clothing and ethnographic exhibits, including 19th-century beehive panels painted with biblical scenes from the Mislinja and Drava Valleys, models of Štajerska-style hayracks, Kurent costumes and wax ex voto offerings from the area around Ptuj. Upstairs there are rooms devoted to Maribor's history and its guilds and crafts (glassware, wrought



ironwork, clock-making), a complete 18th-century pharmacy, and altar paintings and sculptures from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Taking pride of place among the sculptures are the exquisite **statues by Jozef Straub** (1712–56) taken from the Church of St Joseph in the southwestern suburb of Studenci.

Two blocks north of the castle is a stunning 19th-century mansion housing the **National Liberation Museum** (Muzej Narodne Osoboditve; ☎ 235 26 00; www.muzejino-mb.si; Ulica Heroja Tomšiča 5; adult/child €1.25/0.85; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat), whose collections document Slovenia’s struggle for freedom throughout the 20th century, with particular emphasis on work of the Pohorje Partisans during the Nazi occupation.

TRG SVOBODE

This square east of Maribor Castle, along with leafy Trg Generala Maistra and Rakušev trg to the north, would be unremarkable except for the honeycomb of **wine cellars** below that cover an area of 20,000 sq metres and can store seven million litres of plonk. The cellars, dating from the early 19th century, are managed by the wine export company **Vinag** (☎ 220 81 13, 031-313 841; www.vinag.si; Trg Svobode 3; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 8am–1pm Sat). They are filled with old oak barrels, steel fermentation tanks and an ‘archive’ of vintage wine – all kept at a constant 15°C. There’s a small cellar open to the public. The wine shop here has a large selection of local vintages, including Mariborčan, Laški Rizling, Chardonnay, Traminer and Gold Muscatel.

CITY PARK

North of Maribor’s Old Town is City Park (Mestni Park): a lovely arboretum with three ponds, swans and a bandstand. It also contains a small **Aquarium-Terrarium** (Akvarij-Terarij; ☎ 234 96 63; Ulica Heroja Staneta 19; adult/senior & student/child €3.50/3/2.50; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon & 2–7pm Sat & Sun) with 45 small tanks filled with tropical fish and reptiles. To the northeast is **Piramida** (386m), where the titans of Marchburg once held sway and a chapel now takes pride of place. There’s some lovely residential architecture in the streets around the park.

SLOMŠKOV TRG

South of City Park is a square named after Anton Martin Slomšek (1800–62), the Slovenian bishop and politician who was beatified by the late Pope John Paul II in 1999, the first

Slovene to earn such distinction. That’s him seated in front of the cathedral just southwest of the **light pillar**, a 16th-century lantern that once stood in the churchyard.

The imposing **Cathedral** (Stolna Cerkev) dedicated to St John the Baptist, dates from the 13th century and shows elements of virtually every architectural style from Romanesque to modern (including some inept 19th-century attempts to ‘re-Gothicise’ it). Of special interest are the flamboyant Gothic sanctuary and the choir stalls with reliefs showing scenes from the life of the patron saint. The grand building across the park to the west is the **University Library** (Univerzitetna Knjižnica; ☎ 250 74 00; Gospejna ulica 10). On the northern side of the square is the **Slovenian National Theatre Maribor** (Slovensko Narodno Gledališče Maribor; ☎ 250 61 00; Slovenska ulica 27) housed in two mid-19th-century buildings and in a modern wing.

The **Fine Arts Gallery** (Umetnostna Galerija; ☎ 229 58 60; www.umetnostnagalerija.si; Strossmayerjeva ulica 6; adult/child €2/1.25; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sat, to 1pm Sun), southwest of Slomškov trg, has a relatively rich collection of modern works by Slovene artists.

LENT

South of the Fine Arts Gallery and across Koroška cesta is Maribor’s **market** and the dilapidated remains of the 13th-century **Minorite monastery**, closed by Joseph II in 1784 and used as a military barracks until 1927. To the south along the riverfront is the round **Judgement Tower** (Sodni Stolp), the first of four defence towers still standing, with curious friezes on the south side.

About 150m east along the Pristan embankment is Maribor’s most celebrated attraction, the so-called **Old Vine** (Stara Vrta; Vojšaška ulica 8), which is still producing between 35kg and 55kg of grapes and about 25L of red wine per year after being planted more than four centuries ago. It is tended by a city-appointed viticulturist, and the dark red Žametna Črnina (Black Velvet) is distributed to visiting dignitaries as ‘keys’ to Maribor in the form of 0.25L bottles designed by the celebrated Slovenian artist Oskar Kogoj.

About 300m east is the pentagonal **Water Tower** (Vodni Stolp; Ušnjarska ulica 10), a 16th-century defence tower. Just north of it a set of steps lead to **Židovska ulica** (Jewish St), the centre of the Jewish district in the Middle Ages. The 15th-century **synagogue** (☎ 252 78 36; Židovska ulica

4; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) has been renovated, and the square **Jewish Tower** (Židovski Stolp; Židovska ulica 6) dating from 1465 is now a **photo gallery** (☎ 251 24 90; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat).

GLAVNI TRG

Maribor's marketplace in the Middle Ages, **Glavni trg** is just north of the river and the main bridge crossing it. In the centre of the square is perhaps the most extravagant **plague pillar** found anywhere in Central Europe. Designed by Jožef Straub and erected in 1743, it includes the Virgin Mary surrounded by half a dozen saints. Behind it is the **town hall** (Glavni trg 14) built in 1565 by Venetian craftsmen living in Styria. Running north from Glavni trg is pedestrianised **Gosposka ulica**.

Activities

Maribor has several outdoor swimming pools, including several on **Maribor Island** (Mariborski Otok; ☎ 623 10 32; adult/senior & student/child €4.60/4.20/3.75; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep), a sand bank at the end of a dammed-off portion of the Drava River called **Maribor Lake** (Mariborsko Jezero), about 4km west of the Old Town. A sunbathing area is reserved for naturists. Local bus 15 from the train station will drop you off at the Kamnica stop, near the start of the footpath leading to the bridge and the island.

Fontana Terme Maribor (☎ 234 41 00; www.termemb.si; Koroška cesta 172; adult/child 4hr pass €8.35/5.85 Mon-Fri, Sat & Sun €9.20/6.70; ☎ 9am-10pm), a huge spa complex, is 2km west of the centre and accessible via bus 8 or 15. It offers thermal pools and whirlpools with a water temperature of 33°C to 37°C, sauna, solarium, fitness centre and massage.

A much less flash but more central bathing venue is the **Pristan Pool Complex** (Kopališče Pristan; ☎ 229 47 30; Koroška cesta 33; adult/senior & student/child €4.60/4.20/3.75; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-9pm Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) complex on the river west of Lent, which you can also enter from Ob Bregu. It has a pool, sauna, gym and massage. Evening swimming from 7.30pm to 9pm costs €3.

Festivals & Events

Maribor hosts a lot of events throughout the year, including the **Borštnik Meeting** (www.borštnikovo.info), Slovenia's biggest theatre festival, in the second half of October. But the biggest event on the city's calendar is the **Lent Festival** (<http://lent.slovenija.net>), a two-week celebration of folklore, culture and music in

late June/early July, when stages are set up throughout the Old Town.

Among the most colourful (and unusual) ceremonies here is the **'christening' of the rafts** on the Drava in June and the **harvesting of the Old Vine** for wine in early October.

Sleeping

The tourist office can organise private rooms (singles/doubles from €25/38) and apartments.

Dijaški Dom 26 Junij (☎ 480 17 10; www.dd26junij.si, in Slovene; Železnikova ulica 12; s/d/tr €15/22/33; ☎ Jul-late Aug; ☎ ☎) This 30-room college dormitory with triples in the southeastern suburb of Pobrežje accepts travellers in July and August only. From the train station take bus 3 and get off at the cemetery stop. Reception is open from 7am to 10am and again from 7pm to 11pm.

Uni Hotel (☎ 250 67 00; www.termemb.si; Grajski trg 3a; Hl member/nonmember per person €19.60/25; ☎ ☎) This very central, almost luxurious 53-room 'residence hotel' affiliated with Hostelling International is run by (and, following massive renovations, now attached to) the Hotel Orel, where you'll find reception. It's home to full-time students and visiting professors during the academic year but lets out beds in singles and doubles to visitors during holidays.

Hotel Bajt Garni (☎ 332 76 50; www.hotel-bajt.com; Radvanjska cesta 99; s €36-43.50, d €47-62; ☎ ☎) About 1200m south of the Garni Hotel Tabor in Nova Vas but twice as nice, the 51-bed Bajt Garni is a modern-looking pension hotel with excellent breakfast and service. The chairlift to the Maribor Pohorje is a couple of kilometres to the southwest.

Garni Hotel Tabor (☎ 421 64 10, www.hotelabor.podhostnik.si; Ulica Heroja Zidanskega 18; s €37-42, d €56-70, tr €72; ☎ ☎ ☎) This friendly, 42-room hotel is housed in an uninspiring concrete block in Tabor 3km to the southwest of the centre across the Drava. Reach it on bus 6, 12 or 18.

Hotel Orel (☎ 250 67 00; www.termemb.si; Grajski trg 3a; s €50-76, d €71-86, ste €96-180; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) After what seems like years of massive (and messy) renovations, Maribor's most central hotel has emerged all shiny and pretty and ready to kick ass. It's got 71 rooms; enter from Volkmerjev prehod 7.

Hotel Piramida (☎ 234 44 00; www.termemb.si; Ulica Heroja Šlandra 10; s €77-108, d €95-131, ste €124-148; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Maribor's only four-star hotel,

the 76-bed Piramida is essentially a former tourist hotel tarted up with a bit of paint and marble. Still, the facilities, such as the mini relaxation centre with sauna, solarium and gym, are more than adequate.

Eating

Gril Ranca (☎ 252 55 50; Dravska ulica 10; grills €3.50-5.60; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat) This place serves simple but scrumptious Balkan grills like *pljeskavica* and *čevapčići* in full view of the Drava. Cool place on a hot night.

Štajerc (☎ 234 42 34; Vetrinjska ulica 30; starters €2-3.40, mains €5.20-6.70; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) The 'Styrian' pub-restaurant is the place to head for if you're in the mood for reasonably priced local dishes. It has a lovely garden open in the warmer months.

Chang Xing (☎ 250 15 90; Ključavničarska ulica 2; starters €3.55-4.10, mains €5-8.70) The 'Long Prosperity' is the place to go for simple rice and noodle dishes.

Takos (☎ 252 71 50; Mesarski prehod 3; mains €6.25-9.20; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-2am Fri & Sat) This atmospheric Mexican restaurant in Lent serves excellent fajitas (€7.50 to €9.20) and quesadillas (€3.10 to €4.60) turns into a snappy little night spot after the 11pm happy hour on Friday and Saturday. Set menus are €6.25 and €8.40.

Cantante (☎ 242 53 12; Vetrinjska ulica 5; sandwiches €1.60, dishes €2.50-5.40; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) This popular bar/restaurant with its Cuban/Hemingway feel and mojitos for days serves Cuban and South American dishes.

Toti Rotovž (☎ 228 76 50; Rotovski trg 9; meals from €15; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) This peculiar place behind the town hall, with a wine cellar below and a terrace in a lovely arcaded square, tries (not altogether successfully) to serve Slovenian, Balkan grilled, Thai, Japanese, Italian, Greek and Mexican dishes. What is this? Fusion confusion? Set menus (don't ask) are from €6.25

Gostišče Pri Treh Ribnikih (☎ 234 41 70; Ribniška ulica 3; meals from €15; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 9pm Sun) A great place for a meal if you want to get out of the city but don't feel like travelling is the 'Inn at the Three Fishponds' in City Park. Oddly, its specialities are cheese *štruklji* (dumplings) and stuffed pork ribs, with fish all but banished from the menu. There's quite a good wine card.

Two pizzerias worth consideration are **Ancora** (☎ 250 20 33; Jurčičeva ulica 7; pizza €2.60-4.25;

☎ 9am-1am Mon-Fri, 10am-1am Sat, 10.30am-10.30pm Sun), on the 1st floor of a very popular bar/restaurant, and **Verdi** (☎ 250 81 20; Dravska ulica 8; pizza €4-6.25; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat), in a narrow alley just off Pristan; look for the sign with the three rats.

There's a **market** (Vodnikov trg; ☎ 6.30am-3pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Sun) selling produce just north of the former Minorite monastery. **Mercator** (Partizanska cesta 7; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) supermarket has a branch on the corner of Prešernova ulica, but **Market Gosposka** (Gosposka ulica 21; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-1pm Sun) is more central and keeps longer hours at the weekend.

Drinking

Gledališka Kavarna (☎ 252 37 20; Slovenska ulica 2; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri, 10am-2pm & 7pm-1am Sat) The very upmarket 'Theatre Café' next to the Slovenian National Theatre (enter from Slomškov trg) attracts a bohemian crowd.

Mariborska Kavarna (Partizanska cesta 1; ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri, 8am-midnight Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) The olde-worlde 'Maribor Café' has been renovated to within an inch of its life and the outside and inside are now generations apart. Still, it's central.

Studio Caffè (Poštna ulica 3; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Thu, to 11pm Fri & Sat, to midnight Sun) This is one of the better terraced cafés of the many in the alleyways north of Glavni trg.

Patrick's Pub (☎ 251 18 01; Poštna ulica 10; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Thu, 8am-2am Fri & Sat, 4-11pm Sun) The pubs and restaurants along the Drava in Lent can get pretty lively on summer evenings and this pub on a pedestrian street is one of the liveliest.

Entertainment

Concerts are held in several locations, including the Knights' Hall in Maribor Castle and the cathedral. Ask the tourist office for a list.

Slovenian National Theatre Maribor (Slovensko Narodno Gledališče Maribor; ☎ 250 61 00, box office 250 62 26; www.sng-mb.si; Slovenska ulica 27; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat & 2hr before performance) This branch of the SNG in Ljubljana has one of the best reputations in the country, and its productions have received critical acclaim throughout Europe. The city's ballet and opera companies also perform here. Enter from Slomškov trg.

Maribor Puppet Theatre (Lutkovno Gledališče Maribor; ☎ 228 19 70, 031-614 533; www.lg-mb.si; Ratovski trg 2) Maribor's second-most famous theatre has productions year-round at its base in the lovely arcaded courtyard north of Glavni trg.

Jazz Klub Satchmo (☎ 250 21 50; www.jazz-klub.si; Strossmayerjeva ulica 6; ☎ 9am-2am Mon-Thu, 9am-3am Fri, 7pm-3am Sat, 7pm-midnight Sun) Maribor's celebrated jazz club meets in a wonderful cellar in the Fine Arts Gallery building.

Getting There & Away

BUS

You can reach virtually any large town in Slovenia (and destinations in Austria, Croatia and even Germany) from Maribor. The bus station is huge, with 30 bays, as well as a few shops, bars and cafés.

Bus services are frequent to Celje (€5.80, 1½ hours, 55km, three to 10 daily), Dravograd (€6.50, two hours, 61km, six to 10 daily), Lendava (€10, three hours, 111km, one to three daily), Murska Sobota (€6.20, 1½ hours, 60km, seven to 12 daily), Ptuj (€3.50, 45 minutes, 27km, hourly) and Radenci (€5.50, one hour, 48km, hourly). For Ljubljana (€11.20, three hours, 127km) there are up to eight buses weekdays, five on Saturday and two on Sunday.

Other destinations include Gornji Grad (€9.30, three hours, 101km, one daily), Rogaška Slatina (€7, two hours, 75km, two daily Monday to Friday) and Slovenj Gradec (€7, two hours, 71km, three daily).

For destinations in Croatia expect two buses daily from to Varaždin and Zagreb (€10.75, two hours, 119km, 5.35pm Monday and 7pm Friday). There are daily buses from Maribor to Munich, Stuttgart and Frankfurt (€78, 12½ hours, 778km, 6.50pm and 9.50pm daily) and another at 8.12am Saturday.

CAR

Avis (☎ 228 79 10; www.avis.si; Partizanska cesta 24; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This central car-rental agency is opposite the train station. It has cars with unlimited kilometres and all insurance and taxes for €48/252 per day/week.

TRAIN

From Ljubljana (156km), you can reach Maribor on the ICS express service (€12.40, 1¾ hours, five trains daily), or any of 20 or so slower trains (€7.30, 2½ hours). About half a dozen trains a day, originating in Maribor,

go east through Pragersko to Ormož (€3.90 to €6, 1¼ hours, 59km, hourly), from where you can make your way into Croatia. Connections can be made at Ormož for trains to Murska Sobota (€4, one hour, 39km).

Three daily trains head west for Dravograd (€4.50, 1½ hours, 64km) and other stops in Koroška. These trains cross the Austrian border at Holmec, and one carries on to Klagenfurt (Celovec) on weekdays. There are also services from Maribor to Zagreb (€12, three hours, 119km, up to nine daily), Vienna (€38, 3½ hours, 257km, four daily), Belgrade (€44.30, 8½ hours, 518km, four daily), and Venice (€25, eight hours, 375km, three daily).

Getting Around

Maribor and its surrounds are well served by local buses. They depart from the stands south of the train station near Meljska cesta.

For a local taxi, ring ☎ 250 07 77 or 251 77 55.

MARIBOR POHORJE

☎ 02 / elev to 1346m

Maribor's green lung and its central playground, the eastern edge of the Pohorje Massif is known in these parts as the Maribor Pohorje (Mariborsko Pohorje). It can be easily reached by car, bus or cable car from town. The area has any number of activities on offer – from skiing and hiking to horse riding and mountain biking.

Information

Tourist Information Centre Bolfenk (☎ 603 42 11; www.maribor-tourism.si; Na Slemenu; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sun Mar-Oct; 10.30am-3.30pm Wed-Sun Nov-Feb) In the Natural and Cultural Heritage Centre Bolfenk.

www.pohorje.org Useful website, especially for activities.

Sights

The **Natural and Cultural Heritage Centre Bolfenk** (Center Naravne in Kulturne Dediščine Bolfenk; ☎ 603 42 11; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Wed-Sun) shares space with the tourist office in a disused church (1501) 150m southwest of the cable-car upper station. It has exhibits related to the Maribor Pohorje's minerals, rocks, orchids and herbs (many of them used in local teas and tisanes). There is also a permanent exhibition on the history of skiing in Slovenia,

Activities

There are heaps of easy **walks** and more difficult **hikes** in Hotel Areh, but following a stretch of the marked Slovenian Alpine Trail, which originates in Maribor and goes as far as Ankaran on the coast, west and then southwest for 5km will take you to the two **Šumik waterfalls** and **Pragozd**, one of the very few virgin forests left in Europe. Another 6km to the southwest is **Black Lake** (Črno Jezero), the source of the swift-running Lobnica River, and **Osankarica**, where the Pohorje battalion of Partisans was wiped out by the Germans in January 1943. A massive monument marks the site of the battle.

The **Pohorje Sport Centre** (Športni Center Pohorje, ☎ 603 65 09, 220 88 41; www.pohorje.org; Mladinska ulica 29) in Maribor organises most of the activities in the Maribor Pohorje, from hiking and ski trips to paintball. They can also offer excursions to the **Pohorje Adrenaline Park** (Adrenalinski Park Pohorje; ☎ 220 88 43, 031-655 665; adult/student/child from €23.75/21.20/15.85), a recreational area with all manner of towers, high-rope courses, swings and beams near Koča Luka, midway between the two cable-car stations.

The sport centre also operates the excellent **Pohorje Bike Park** (☎ 051 692 797; adult/child with bike half-day €14.20/11.70 full day €16.70/14.20), which starts at 1050m next to the upper cable-car station and wends its way down 4km through the forests, with more than 30 different obstacles such as table tops, hips, banks, step-downs and jumps up to 6m.

Cycling is an ideal way to explore the back roads and trails of the Maribor Pohorje. Make sure to ask the tourist office for the very detailed *Pohorje Cycling Map* and the simple but useful *Kolesarske Poti na Mariborskem Pohorju* (Cycle Trials in the Maribor Pohorje). The sport centre rents **mountain bikes** (per hour/day €4.20/16.70) as does the Hotel Areh and other hotels.

The **Maribor Pohorje ski grounds** (☎ 603 65 53; www.pohorje.org; half-day pass adult/student/child €20.40/18/14.60, day pass €23.75/21.20/15.85) stretch from the Hotel Habakuk (336m) near the lower cable-car station to Žigartov Vrh (1346m) west of the Areh Hotel. With 80km of slopes (10km illuminated at night), 36km of cross-country runs and 20 ski lifts and tows (plus gondola), this is Slovenia's largest ski area, and long waits for tows are uncommon here. Ski equipment rentals (per day skis €8.75 to €12.50, snowboard €18.75) are available

from the upper cable-car station, and there's a ski and snowboarding school.

You can rent horses from the **Koča Koča** (☎ 603 65 41, 041-949 776), a restaurant hut 50m from the upper cable-car station, for €4.20 if you are content to sit in the paddock; it costs €8.35/35.40 per hour/five hours to take the a nag out on the trails. A three-hour trip in a horse-drawn coach costs €16.70 per hour.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Women's World Cup Slalom and Giant Slalom Competition** – the coveted Zlata Lisica (Golden Fox) trophy – takes place on the main piste of the Maribor Pohorje ski grounds in January.

Sleeping & Eating

There are plenty of places to stay in the Maribor Pohorje, including more than a dozen **mountain lodges** and **holiday homes**, many of them run by the Športni Center Pohorje. They can provide you with a list and basic map. Places close to main roads are the Category III **Ruška Koča pri Arehu** (☎ 603 50 46, 041-666 552; ☎ year-round) with 36 beds rooms at 1246m and the more swish Category III **Poštarski Dom pod Plešivcem** (☎ 822 10 55, 875 09 06; Hočko Pohorje 40) with 38 beds rooms at 805m.

Camp Pohorje (☎ 614 09 50; www.pohorje.org; Pot k Mlinu 57; adult/child €6.70/5; ☎ year-round) This tiny camping ground, with only 20 pitches for tents and 10 for caravans, is at the foothills of the Maribor Pohorje just next to the cable car's lower station.

Hotel Areh (☎ 603 50 40, 220 88 41; www.pohorje.org; Lobnica 32; s/d 28.50/46; ☎ ☎) At the summit of Areh peak (1250m), about 6km southwest of the upper cable-car station, this pleasant 84-bed ski lodge at 1050m has rustic, wood-pannelled rooms, a pleasant restaurant and helpful staff. They rent ski equipment and mountain bikes.

Apartment Bolfenk (☎ 603 65 00, 220 88 41; info.scp@sc-pohorje.si; Hočko Pohorje 131; apt for up to 5/8 people €75/110; ☎) This well maintained property next to the landmark Bellvue Hotel (currently under renovation) has apartments for between four and 12 people that are actually quite grand. All have living room with fireplace and kitchen.

Hotel Zarja (☎ 603 60 00; www.hotel-zarja.si; Frajhajm 34; s/d €29/48, apt €80; ☎) Just east of the Hotel Are and the ski fields, the chaletlike Zarja has 15 comfortable and airy rooms.

Hotel Habakuk (☎ 300 81 00; www.termemb.si; Pohorska ulica 59; s €118-140, d €169-211, ste from €259; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒) This huge, five-star property, with 137 rooms near the lower cable-car station, offering luxurious accommodation along with an ample recreation and wellness centre with the indoor and outdoor thermal water pools. The high season runs from January to March.

Almost everyone takes their meals in their hotels in the Maribor Pohorje; there are almost no independent restaurants. Be on the lookout for dishes and drinks unique to the region, including *pohorski lonec* (Pohorje pot), a kind of goulash; *pohorska omleta*, a pancake filled with fruit; and *boroničevac*, a brandy made with berries harvested in the Pohorje.

Getting There & Away

You can drive or, if ambitious, cycle the 20km from the Old Town in Maribor south past the Renaissance-style Betnava Castle, turning west at Spodnje Hoče before reaching a fork in the road at a small waterfall. Go left and you'll reach the Arh Hotel after about 5km. A right turn and less than 4km brings you to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Centre and the upper cable-car station.

A much easier – and more exhilarating – way to get to the Bellevue and the heart of the Maribor Pohorje is to take the **cable car** (vzpenjača; ☎ 041-959 795; Pohorska ulica) from the station in Zgoranje Radvanje, 6km southwest of Maribor's Old Town. There are clamps on the outside of each cabin for mountain bikes and skis.

From the train station in Maribor take local bus 6, which leaves about every 15 to 20 minutes, and get off at the terminus. On weekdays the cable car runs every hour from 8am till noon and 6pm to 8pm; from 12.30pm to 5.30pm they go every half-hour. At the weekend departures are at 8am, 9am, 6pm, 7pm and 8pm and half-hourly between 9.30am and 5.30pm. A one-way ticket for adults/children is €5.85/4.60, a return €7/5.85.

CENTRAL POHORJE REGION

☎ 03 / elev to 1517m

Travellers can easily sample Pohorje's recreational offerings along its eastern edge from Maribor and its western fringes from Slovenj Gradec and Dravograd in Koroška. But the pear-shaped massif's highest and most beautiful area is in the centre.

Although it's true that the Pohorje peaks can't hold a candle to those of the Julian and the Kamnik-Savinja Alps – most here barely clear the 1500m mark – this is the only part of the country where you can appreciate the sheer vastness of the mountains without feeling hemmed in or vertiginous. What's more, hiking and trekking in the winter here is as good as it is in the summer. Many of the hillsides have been cleared and are now given over to brush, pasture and meadows. Others have been planted with oak trees.

Zreče (population 2875), about 40km southwest of Maribor, is the springboard for the central Pohorje region; indeed, the region is also known as the Zreče Pohorje (Zreško Pohorje). Although certainly not Slovenia's most attractive town – it's dominated by the tool-manufacturing company Unior – Zreče has a modest spa and is within easy striking distance of the ski and sport centre around **Rogla** (1517m), 16km to the north, where teams – including the Slovenian Olympic one – come to train.

Information

Banka Celje (13b Cesta na Roglo, Zreče; ☎ 8-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) In the Zreče Bazaar (Zreški Bazar) shopping centre above the bus station 150m from the spa's main entrance.

Post office (13b Cesta na Roglo, Zreče; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) To the southeast of the bank.

Tourist Information Centre Zreče (☎ 759 04 70; tic.zrece.lto@siol.net; Cesta na Roglo 11j, Zreče; ☎ 7am-3pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 7am-5pm Thu, 9am-noon Sat) In the modern market complex southeast of the Zreče Bazaar. www.rogla.si Useful website, especially for activities.

Activities

HIKING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

The 1:50,000 GZS *Pohorje* (€7.50) map outlines various circular hiking trails that are as short as 2km (30 minutes) and as long as 32km (eight hours). The latter covers much of the hike described in the Maribor Pohorje section – Šumik waterfalls, Black Lake and Osankarica – but from the other side. Another good one is the 12km hike (three hours) that leads northwest to the **Lovrenc Lakes** (Lovrenska Jezera), a turf swamp with 19 lakes that are considered a natural phenomenon.

Mountain bikers should get hold of a copy of the excellent 1:100,000 *Pohorje Cycling Map*, with a dozen trails outlined from Maribor in the east to Slovenj Gradec and Dra-

vograd in the west. A brochure produced by Terme Zreče called *Kolesarske Poti na Zreškem Pohorju* (Bike Trails in the Zreče Pohorje) is much more basic and limits its focus (eight trails) to the areas between Zreče and Rogla.

HORSE RIDING

The **Rogla Equine Centre** (Konjeniški Center Rogla; ☎ 041-612 456; riding per hr from €12.50, 45min lesson from €16.70; ☎ 11am-5pm) is about 3km northeast of Rogla next to the Dom na Pesku (p248). In winter it offers **husky sledge rides** (open 2pm to 4pm Fri).

SKIING & SNOWMOBILING

The **Rogla ski grounds** (☎ 757 61 61, 232 92 64; www.rogla.si; half-day pass adult/student/child €20.50/18.30/13.30, day pass €23.30/20.80/15) has 12km of ski slopes and 18km of cross-country trails served by two chairlifts and 11 tows. The season is a relatively long one – from the end of November to as late as April. There's also the **Rogla Ski School** (Smučarska Šola Rogla; ☎ 757 74 68; www.unior.si; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 5-8pm Sun), in a little wooden cabin at the base of the ski lift where you can also learn to snowboard. You can rent equipment from **Ski Servis** (☎ 757 74 89; per day skis €10.50-15; ☎ 8.15am-2pm) office at the Planja Hotel.

An outfit called **AALT** (☎ 041-624 131; www.aalt.si) based at the Pizzerija Planja (p248) has snowmobile rides and trips ranging from a single lap of 400m (€3) to a 120km 'safari' with overnight for €200 (second person €65). Most people will be satisfied with a 15km ride (€45, second person €19) lasting an hour.

THERMAL SPA

While **Terme Zreče** (☎ 757 62 68; www.term-zrece.si; Cesta na Roglo 15) is a serious treatment centre for post-operative therapy and locomotor disorders (especially those involving sports injuries), it is also a place where you simply have fun. Along with an indoor **thermal pool** (water temperature is 32°C), there's a large covered recreational and two outdoor **swimming pools** (adult/child 3hr Mon-Fri €6.20/4.60, Sat & Sun €7.50/5.85 all day Mon-Fri €8/5.85, Sat & Sun €9.60/7.50; ☎ 9am-9pm) as well as a couple of **Jacuzzis**, **saunas** and **steam rooms** (pool, sauna & steam room adult weekday/weekend €11.70/13.30; ☎ 11am-9pm Mon-Thu, 10am-9pm Fri-Sun). There are a number of treatments (eg aromatic oil massage, medicinal mud treatment, milk bath for two) on offer.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The **Rogla Sport Hall** (Športna Dvorana Rogla; ☎ 757 74 31) has a covered stadium for all kinds of team sports (including basketball and volleyball), jogging tracks, lawn bowls, a squash court (per 45 minutes €8.40) and a badminton court (one hour €10.50), and indoor and outdoor **tennis courts** (1hr €14.60; ☎ 9am-9pm). The Planja Hotel has an **indoor swimming pool** (adult/child €6.25/4.20, with sauna adult €10.40; ☎ 9am-9pm).

The **Bicycle Centre** (Kolesarski Center; ☎ 757 63 57; bicycles/mountain bikes 1hr 4.20/6.25, day €11.70/16.60) is at the Terme Zreče.

Sleeping

Garni Hotel Zvon (☎ 757 36 00; www.hotelzvon.biz; in Slovene; Slomškova ulica 2; s €36-42, d €58.50-71; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) There's no particular reason for staying at Zreče; all the fun is up in Rogla. But if you're a serious disciple of things thermal, the pensionlike 'Bell' is just opposite the entrance to the spa and has 15 spotless rooms.

Dobrava 2000 Hotel (☎ 757 60 00; www.term-zrece.si; Cesta na Roglo 15; s €71-118.50; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) The spa's flagship hotel, this four-star place has 76 rooms in an unexceptional block at the entrance to the spa. Several rooms are adapted for guests with disabilities. Make sure you get one of the rooms with a balcony. The Dobrava Hotel (singles €66 to €109) is a slightly cheaper, three-star extension with 35 rooms. More pleasant still are the Terme Zreče Villas (singles €50 to €55, doubles €83 to €95) in a small wooded area 150m from the main spa building with 40 apartments and an equal number of double rooms.

Planja Hotel (☎ 757 71 00; www.term-zrece.si; €52.50-66, d €83.50-111; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) This four-star, 30-bed property, the poshest place to stay in Rogla, also has a three-star wing with 88 beds called the Rogla Hotel (singles €45 to €52, doubles €68.50 to €81). Its rooms, frankly, are brighter and more attractive than those in the main hotel. Hotel Brinje (singles €36 to €40, doubles €56 to €64) is essentially just a poky annex of the Planja with 22 apartments. The hotel also has a couple of bungalows (singles €33 to €37, doubles €50 to €58.50) set off on their own.

The central Pohorje region abounds in farmhouses with rooms and apartments for rent, particularly along Cesta Kmečnega near Resnik, about 7km southwest of Rogla. One of the best is the four-room **Pačnik farmhouse** (☎ 576 22 02; Resnik 21; per person €22-27; ☎ Jul-Sep,

mid-Dec–mid-Mar; **P**), a very isolated farmhouse where your humble author first 'discovered' Slovenia in the early 1990s and then wrote the 1st edition of this book. In the same settlement, the three-room **Kočnik-Kovše farmhouse** (☎ 576 11 28; Resnik 33; per person €20-24; **P**) stands next to a small wood and is open all year.

Eating

Špajza Inn (☎ 576 26 15; Cesta na Roglo 13b; pizza €3.75-5.40; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Thu, 7am-10pm Fri & Sat, noon-9pm Sun) If you feel like pizza in Zreče, try the 'Pantry' in the shopping centre.

Pizzerija Planja (☎ 757 72 50; pizza €3.85-5.60; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sep-Jun; to 8pm Jul & Aug) Along with pizza this place – just north of the Planja Hotel in Rogla and near the ski lift – does breakfasts and Slovenian dishes.

Stara Koča (☎ 757 74 47; set lunch €8.75; ☎ 7am-11pm) The 'Old Hut' is the main restaurant at the Planja Hotel and is done up to look like a rustic mountain hut.

Dom na Pesku (☎ 759 27 61; meals from €10; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Oct; 7am-9pm Nov-Mar) Also called Dom Pesek, this mountain lodge 3km north of Rogla on the unsealed road to Koroša is a popular place for hearty Slovenian fare.

Gostilna Jančič (☎ 752 04 83; Cesta na Roglo 4b; starters €3.35-4.20, mains €4-6.70; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat) This *gostilna* in Zreče on the main road to Rogla and opposite the shopping centre is a friendly place for a quick meal.

There's a **Mercator** (Cesta na Roglo 11; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun) supermarket in the Zreče Bazaar shopping centre in Zreče.

Getting There & Away

There are regular connections from Zreče to Celje (€3.50, 45 minutes, 26km, eight buses on weekdays) via Slovenske Konjice (€1.30, 15 minutes, 5km, eight to 10 weekdays, two on Saturday). Two buses a day from Celje (and at least three from Slovenske Konjice) stop at Zreče and then carry on to Rogla (€9, 2½ hours, 97km). Local buses make the runs from Zreče bus station to Rogla and to Resnik.

In winter there are special ski buses from Zreče (five in each direction) as well as Celje and Slovenske Konjice. Terme Zreče runs buses hourly from 6am to 8.30pm or 9pm up to Rogla for its guests in winter, with up to eight a day in each direction departing during the rest of the year.

CELJE

☎ 03 / pop 36,950 / elev 238m

With its time-warp historical centre, fabulous architecture, excellent museums and enormous castle looming over the picturesque Savinja River, Celje might at first appear to have won the tourism sweepstakes. But tell that to the city fathers... Slovenia's third-largest city can be a dispiriting place after dark, with even the simplest of places to eat and drink at a premium.

History

Celje (then known as Celeia) was the administrative centre of the Roman province of Noricum between the 1st and 5th centuries, and roads linked the town with other Roman settlements at Virunum (near Klagenfurt in Austria), Poetovio (Ptuj) and Emona (Ljubljana). It was an affluent town, as is evident from the large baths, mosaics and temples unearthed in the area. In fact, it flourished to such a degree that it gained the nickname 'Troia secunda', the 'second Troy'. Celeia's glory days came to an end when it was sacked by the Huns in 452 and overrun by subsequent tribes during the Great Migrations.

Celje's second Camelot came in the mid-14th century when members of the Žonk family took control of the area. The Counts – later the Dukes – of Celje, one of the richest and most powerful feudal dynasties in Central Europe, were the last on Slovenian soil to challenge absolute rule by the Habsburgs, and they united much of Slovenia for a time. Under their rule, which lasted for just a century, Celje acquired the status of a town, and they built the castles, town fortifications and most of the churches still standing today. The counts left Celje and the nation an invaluable legacy, and a part of their emblem – three gold stars forming an inverted triangle – have been incorporated into the Slovenian state flag and seal.

Celje was never able to repeat those glory days, and plagues, flooding, invasions and revolts struck the town over the ensuing centuries. Celje was in fact more German than Slovene until the end of WWI, when the town government passed into local hands for the first time. Celje's most recent claim to fame is the opening in 2004 of the spanking new, 8600-seat Celje Sport Park (Športni Park Celje; Podjavošokva ulica) multiuse stadium in the northern suburb of Golovec,

home ground of the local CMC Publikum football as well as where the national league plays.

Orientation

Celje's compact Old Town is bordered by Levstikova ulica and Gregorčičeva ulica to the north and northwest, the area around the Lower Castle to the west, the train tracks to the east and the Savinja River to the south.

The town has two main squares: Glavni trg at the southern end of Stanetova ulica, a pedestrian street, and Krekov trg opposite the train station. The main bus station is 300m north of the train station opposite the huge Celeia shopping mall on Aškičeva ulica. Local and suburban buses stop south of the train station on Ulica XIV Divizije.

Information

Abanka (Krekov trg 10; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 11am Sat) Opposite the train station.

Banka Celje (Vodnikova ulica 2; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) In a building designed by Jože Plečnik in 1930.

Cyber Cafe Stane (☎ 492 41 69, 031-324 400; Stanetova ulica 17a; per hr €0.65; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Internet access on seven terminals.

Kompas (☎ 428 03 08; Glavni trg 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Accommodation and car hire; enter from Prešernova ulica.

Mladinska knjiga (☎ 428 52 52; Stanetova ulica 3; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Sells regional maps and guides.

Post office (Krekov trg 9)

Tourist Information Centre Celje (☎ 428 79 36; tic@celje.si); Celje Hall (Krekov trg 3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat); Celje Castle (Cesta na Grad; ☎ 9-7pm late Apr-Sep)

Sights

KREKOV TRG

Opposite the train station is where you'll find mammoth neo-Gothic **Celje Hall** (Celjski Dom; Krekov trg 3), built in 1907 and erstwhile social centre for German-speaking *Celjani*, which now contains the year-round tourist office and the **Children's Art Gallery** (Galerija Likovnih Del Mladih; ☎ 548 17 71; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat), devoted to art produced by those under the age of 20 and the only such museum in all of Slovenia. Next door is the **Hotel Evropa** (Krekov trg 4), the oldest hotel in Celje. Just south of the hotel (and connected to it) is a medieval **defence tower**, and about 150m further on, the

Water Tower (Vodni Stolp; Razlagova ulica 19), part of the city wall and ramparts and built between 1451 and 1473. Many of the blocks used are of Roman origin. On the same street is the **Josip Pelikan Photo Studio** (Fotografski Atelje Josipa Pelikana; ☎ 548 58 91; www.2.arnes.si/~cemncz; Razlagova ulica 5; ☎ 10am-2pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat, 2-6pm Sun), the complete studio of an early 20th-century Celje photographer and part of the Museum of Recent History.

SLOMŠKOV TRG & GLAVNI TRG

A few steps to the northwest of the tower is the **Abbey Church of St Daniel** (Opatijska Cerkev Sv Danijela), dating from the early 14th century. The church has some magnificent frescoes and tombstones, but its greatest treasure is a 15th-century carved wooden **pietà** in the **Chapel of the Sorrowful Mother** to the left of the sanctuary. The chapel has carved stone walls and vaults with remnants of frescoes from the early 15th century and carved effigies of the Apostles. Parts of Celje's **medieval walls and ramparts** can be seen along Ulica na Okopih, west of the church.

Contiguous with Slomškov trg is **Glavni trg**, the heart of the Old Town. It is filled with lovely townhouses dating from the 17th and 18th centuries and, in the warmer months, outdoor cafés. In the centre of the square is the requisite **plague pillar** (1776) dedicated to Mary.

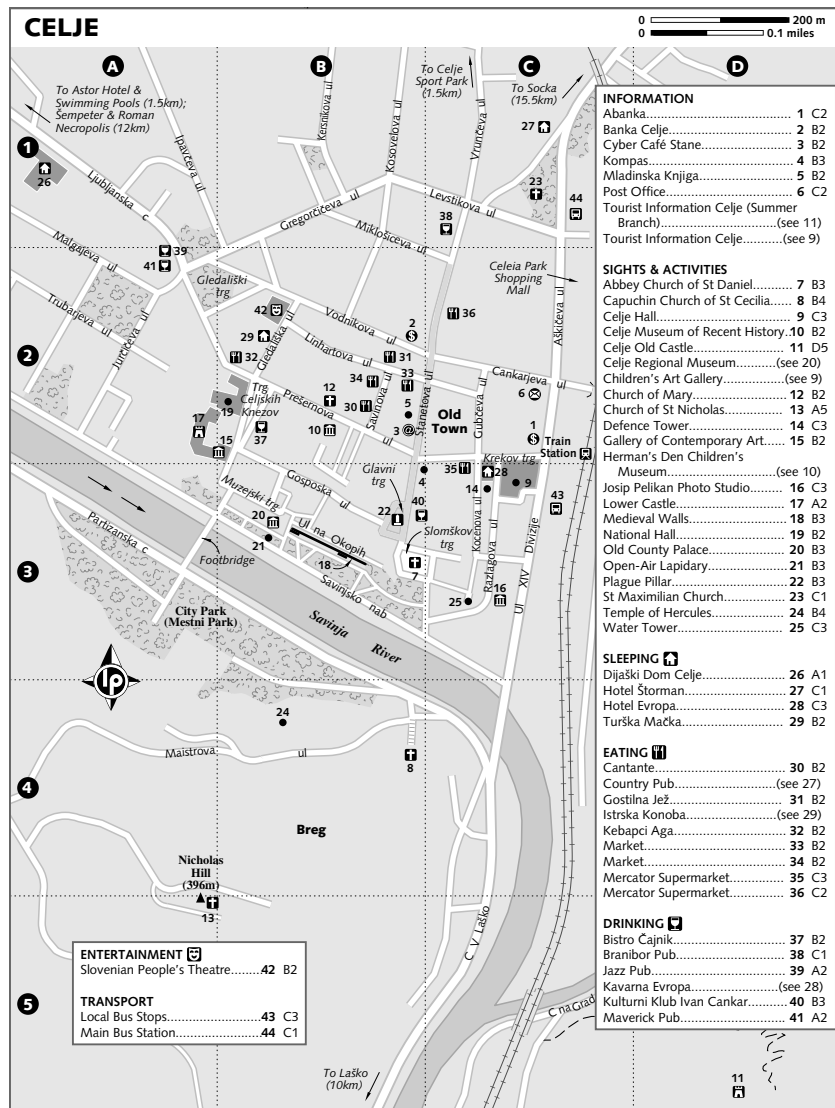
MUZEJSKI TRG

A birch-lined park along the Savinja River's northern embankment has an **open-air lapidary** of Roman remains unearthed in the Celje area. Overlooking it is the 16th-century **Old County Palace** (Stara Grofija; Muzejski trg 1), a lovely Renaissance building with a two-level arcade around a courtyard, which contains the renovated **Celje Regional Museum** (Pokrajinski Muzej Celje; ☎ 428 09 50; www.2.arnes.si/~pokmuzce; adult/student/child €3.30/2.10/1.70; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct; 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to noon Sat Nov-Feb).

Needless to say, the museum places much emphasis on Celeia and the Counts of Celje, right down to exhibiting 18 of the nobles' skulls in glass cases. (They were taken from the Minorite Church of Mary on Prešernova ulica in 1956, and the one belonging to Ulric is particularly gruesome.) The museum has a dozen rooms, many of them done up in styles from different periods (eg baroque, neo-classical, Biedemeier, Secessionist), painted

with various scenes and filled with fine furniture. Don't miss the 18th-century cabinet with hunting scenes inlaid with ivory, the 20-drawer 'bank' desk with a secret compartment and the neoclassical combined clock and music box that still works. But the museum's main attraction is the **Celje Ceiling** (Celjski Strop), an enormous trompe l'oeil painting

in the main hall of columns, towers, angels frolicking skyward, noblemen and ladies looking down at you looking up. Completed in about 1600 by a Polish artist, the mural was meant to lift the ceiling up to the sky, and it does just that. Other panels represent the four seasons and show scenes from Roman and Greek mythology.



TRG CELJSKIH KNEZOV

The funnel-shaped 'Square of the Celje Counts' leads north from Muzejski trg. At the start is the **Lower Castle** (Spodnji Grad) built in the 14th century for the Celje Counts and today containing the **Gallery of Contemporary Art** (Galerija Sodobne Umetnosti; ☎ 426 51 50; Trg Celjskih Knezov 8; admission free; 🕒 11am-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-noon Sat, 2-6pm Sun). To the north is the **National Hall** (Narodni Dom; Trg Celjskih Knezov 9), the cultural and social centre for Celje's Slovenes at the end of the 19th century and now the city hall.

PREŠERNOVA ULICA

Walking eastward along this street from trg Celjskih Knezov, you'll pass the **Celje Museum of Recent History** (Muzej Novejše Zgodovine Celje; ☎ 428 64 10; www.muzej-nz-ce.si; Prešernova ulica 17; adult/senior & student/child €2.10/1.25/0.85; 🕒 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat, 2-6pm Sun) in the former town hall building, which was built in 1830. The museum records the story of Celje ('Living in Celje: 1900-2000') from the late 19th century onwards and includes a re-creation of an early 20th-century street complete with tailor, hairdresser, clockmaker and goldsmith. It also contains the **Herman's Den Children's Museum** (Otroški Muzej Hermanov Brlog), the first children's museum in Slovenia.

BREG

On the south bank of the Savinja River a covered stairway with 90 steps at Breg 2 leads to the **Capuchin Church of St Cecilia** (Kapucinska Cerkev Sv Cecilije). The Germans used the nearby monastery (now apartments) as a prison during WWII. Between the church and **City Park** (Mestni Park; Partizanska cesta) is the reconstructed Roman **Temple of Hercules** (Heraklejev Tempelj; Maistrova ulica) dating from the 2nd century AD. Further south, you can walk up 396m-high **Nicholas Hill** (Miklavški Hrib), topped by the **Church of St Nicholas** (Cerkev Sv Miklavža), for a wonderful view of the castle, the Old Town and the Savinja.

CELJE OLD CASTLE

The largest fortress in Slovenia, the **Celje Old Castle** (Stari Grad Celje; ☎ 031-348 296; Cesta na Grad; admission free; 🕒 9am-9pm May-Sep; 9am-6pm Apr & Oct; 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), is perched on a 407m-high escarpment about 2km southeast of the Old Town; the walk up via a footpath from Cesta na Grad takes about half an hour. The castle was originally built in the early 13th century

and went through several transformations, especially under the Counts of Celje in the 14th and 15th centuries.

When the castle lost its strategic importance in the 15th century it was left to deteriorate, and subsequent owners used the stone blocks to build other structures, including parts of the Lower Castle and the Old County Palace. A surprisingly large portion remains intact, however, and has been restored, including the 35m-high **Frederick Tower** (Friderikov Stolp).

Activities

The tourist office has brochures listing a number of **walks** and **hikes** into the surrounding countryside lasting between one and four hours. The longest one (28km) leads south-east to **Mt Tovst** (834m) and the picturesque village of Svetina via the Category III **Celjska Koča** (☎ 577 41 15) mountain hut at 650m. This can also be done by car or bicycle. They also distribute the brochure *Poti Primerne za Kolesarjenje* (Trails Suitable for Cycling), with 10 routes outlined for Celje and settlements to the north.

There are a couple of open-air **swimming pools** (☎ 547 30 10; adult/child €4.20/3.35; Ljubljanska cesta 41; 🕒 noon-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) on the Savinja just south of the Astor Hotel, about 1.5km west of the centre.

Sleeping

Dijaški Dom Celje (☎ 426 66 00, 041-621 266; mojca.golouh1@guest.arnes.si; Ljubljanska cesta 21; s/d/tr €18/33/44.50; 🕒 Jul & Aug) Northwest of the centre, this 600-bed dorm accepts travellers for the most part in summer only though between 60 and 100 beds are frequently available during the school year as well.

Turška Mačka (Turkish Cat; ☎ 548 46 11; turska.macka@siol.net; Gledališka ulica 7; s/d €32.50/51; 📍) This evocatively named, 26-room hotel behind the Slovenian People's Theatre is the nicest small place to stay in Celje. It has small but comfortable rooms and a decent restaurant.

Hotel Evropa (☎ 426 90 00; www.hotel-evropa.si; Krekov trg 4; 1st & 2nd fl s/d €37/60, 3rd & 4th fl s/d €34.50/55/64; 📍) Located near the train station and in the centre of town, this 60-room historic hotel has pleasant, helpful staff. The rooms on the 1st and 2nd floors, with three stars, are renovated and relatively attractive; the two-star rooms on the 3rd and 4th floors are older and somewhat gloomy.

Astor Hotel (☎ 548 23 50; www.astor-hotel.net; Ljubljanska cesta 39; s/d/tr €37.50/58/70; P) This modern, 32-room hotel is about 1.5km west of the Old Town but as close as you'll get to the Savinja River. It has its own swimming pool and casino.

Hotel Štorman (☎ 426 04 26; www.storman.si; Mariborska cesta 3; s €41-56.50, d €64-83, tr €74.50, ste from €100; P) The 52-room Štorman is in a canary-yellow, nine-storey block just north of the 15th-century Church of St Maximilian. The hotel is a favourite with businesspeople but eschew any of the rooms facing Mariborska cesta – it's a major highway.

Kompas can arrange **private rooms and apartments** (s/d/t €33.30/50.80/65).

Eating

Kebapci Aga (Prešernova ulica; dishes €3-4.60; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Thu, 6pm-4am Fri & Sat, 5pm-1am Sun) This little kiosk opposite the National Hall attracts punters by the carload, but it's still not clear whether it's the kebabs or dearth of alternatives in Celje that attracts them.

Gostilna Jež (Linhartova ulica 6; dishes €3.25-4.60, ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Fri, 7am-10pm Sat, 6am-4pm Sun) This very simple eatery is a great place for a cheap and filling lunch (as so many market-goers seem to think).

Cantante (☎ 490 01 36; Savinova ulica 9; sandwiches €1.60, dishes €2.50-5.40; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-2am Sat, noon-midnight Sun) This popular bar/restaurant with branches in Maribor and Ptuj has portraits of Che, good music and even better cocktails. Food leans toward Tex-Mex.

Country Pub (☎ 426 04 14; salads €2.40-5.30, burgers €3.25-3.70, steaks €10.30-13.70; ☎ 6am-1am) It's not often that we recommend hotel outlets but this pleasant pub/restaurant on the ground floor of the Hotel Štorman is a viable option in a city with few choices.

Istrska Konoba (☎ 548 46 11; starters €5-8, mains €7.50-10.80; ☎ 7am-10pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri & Sat) The 'Istrian Cellar' restaurant at the Turška Mačka hotel is one of the few proper dining rooms in Celje open nightly. It was designed by Karst artist Lojze Spalac; check out the lovely stained-glass doors and windows.

There's an outdoor **market** (cnr Savinova ulica & Linhartova ulica; ☎ 6am-3pm) with fresh fruit, vegetables and other foodstuffs behind the Minorite Church of Mary. You'll find a large **Mercator** (Stanetova ulica 14; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat, 8-11am Sun) supermarket almost opposite the Banka Celje to the northeast. There's a

more central **Mercator** (Prešernova ulica 1; ☎ 6am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat) branch next to the Hotel Evropa.

Drinking

Kavarna Evropa (☎ 496 90 00; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) This olde-worldle café in the Hotel Evropa – all dark wood panelling, gilt mouldings and fusty chandeliers – is a good place for a cup of coffee and a cake.

Bistro Čajnik (☎ 548 32 00; Trg Celjskih Knezo 3; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-10pm Sat) If tea is your drink, head for the 'Teapot Bistro'. It's also worth a stop for a snack (cakes €1.50, sandwiches €2.10 to €3.50).

Kulturni Klub Ivan Cankar (Glavni trg 7; ☎ 8am-10pm) This ever-so-cool literary café attracts the thinking men and women of Celje. Retro décor and lots and lots of attitude.

Branibor Pub (☎ 492 41 44; Stanetova ulica 27; ☎ 6am-1am Mon-Thu, 6am-2.30am Fri, 7am-2am Sat, 8am-1am Sun) This is one of the best pubs in town, with jazz and other live music some nights.

There's a group of pubs bunched up opposite Gledališki trg, including **Maverick Pub** (Ljubljanska cesta 7; ☎ 6am-midnight Sun-Thu, 8am-2am Fri & Sat), a lively place with a large outdoor terrace for people-watching in the warmer months, and the more subdued **Jazz Pub** (Ljubljanska cesta 9; ☎ 6am-11pm Mon-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat, 3-11pm Sun) next door.

Entertainment

Slovenian People's Theatre (Slovenski ljudsko Gledališče; ☎ 426 42 00, box office 426 42 08; Gledališki trg 5; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri) The SLG, which encompasses part of a medieval tower on Vodnikova ulica, stages six plays a season.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Intercity buses, which leave from the main station, run at least once an hour (less frequently at weekends) to Mozirje (€4.60, one hour, 36km), Rogaška Slatina (€4, one hour, 34km) and Zreče (€3.50, 45 minutes, 26km). Count on up to six buses on weekdays and three at the weekend to Ljubljana (€7, 1½ hours, 71km) and Maribor (€5.80, 1½ hours, 55km). Other destinations accessible by bus from Celje and their frequencies include: Dravograd (€6.50, 1¼ hours, 65km, one daily), Gornji Grad (€5.80, 1½ hours, 53km, one or two daily), Logarska Dolina (€12.50, four

hours, 149km, 9.10am Monday to Friday April to October), Murska Sobota (€10, three hours, 115km, two daily) and Podsreda (€4.60, one hour, 39km, six weekdays).

For destinations like such as Šempeter (€2, 20 minutes, 12km, hourly), Škofja Vas and Šentjur, go to the bus stops south of the train station on Ulica XIV Divizije.

TRAIN

Celje is one of the few rail hubs in all of Slovenia, and for once you have a real choice between taking the train or the bus. Celje is on the main line between Ljubljana and Maribor; from Ljubljana (€5.35 to €9.40, 1½ hours, 89km) you can reach Celje up to two dozen times a day by regular train and eight times a day by ICS express train.

Celje is also on the line linking Zidani Most (connections to and from Ljubljana and Zagreb) with Maribor (€4.50 to €6, one hour, 67km, half-hourly) and the Austrian cities of Graz and Vienna.

A spur line links Celje with Velenje (€2.65, 50 minutes, 38km) via Šempeter up to nine times a day Monday to Saturday in each direction. A third line connects Celje with Zabok in Croatia via Rogaška Slatina (€2.65, 50 minutes, 36km), Rogatec and Dobovec. Up to seven trains arrive and depart on weekdays but only a couple at the weekend.

Getting Around

For a local taxi ring ☎ 544 22 00 or ☎ 041-606 070.

ŠEMPETER

☎ 03 / pop 1900 / elev 257m

Twelve km west of Celje and accessible by bus and train, Šempeter is the site of a **Roman necropolis** (Rimska Nekropola; ☎ 700 20 56; www.td-sempeter.si; Ob Rimski Nekropoli 2; adult/student/child €3/2.10/1.70; ☎ 10am-6pm daily Apr-Sep; 10am-3pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) reconstructed between 1952 and 1966. The burial ground contains four complete tombs and scores of columns, stela and fragments carved with portraits, mythological creatures and scenes from daily life. They have been divided into about two dozen groups linked by footpaths.

Tomb No I, the oldest of them all, was commissioned by Gallus Vindonius, a Celtic nobleman who lived on a nearby estate in the 1st century. The largest is the **Priscianus tomb** (No II), raised in honour of a Roman official and

his son. (Notice the kidnapping scene on the side relief.) The most beautiful is the **Ennius tomb** (No III), with reliefs of animals and, on the front panel, the princess Europa riding a bull. If you compare these three with the more recent tomb erected in about 250 AD in honour of Secundanius, it is obvious that Roman power and wealth was on the decline here in the mid-3rd century.

If you get hungry, **Gostišče Štorman** (☎ 703 83 00, www.storman.si; Šempeter 5a; meals from €18, set menus €8.70-20.50; ☎ 7am-midnight), one of the first private restaurants to open in Slovenia under the former regime, is about 2km east of the site on the road to/from Celje.

UPPER SAVINJA VALLEY

The Upper Savinja Valley (Zgornja Savinjska Dolina) refers to the drainage areas and tributaries of the Savinja River from its source in the eastern Savinja Alps to a gorge at Letuš, 12km northwest of Šempeter. Bounded by forests, ancient churches, traditional farmhouses and Alpine peaks higher than 2000m, the valley is a land of breathtaking beauty. There are activities here to suit every taste and inclination – from hiking, mountain biking and rock climbing to fishing, kayaking and swimming in the Savinja.

The Savinja begins its rapid flow above Rinka – at 90m Slovenia's highest waterfall – then it enters Logarska Dolina and continues past isolated hamlets and farmland. The region beyond the gorge at Ljubno is quite different, with a number of towns – really overgrown villages – of historical importance, including Radmirje, Gornji Grad, Nazarje and Mozirje.

The valley has been exploited for its timber since the Middle Ages, and until WWII the Savinja was used to power 200 sawmills. Rafters transported the timber from Ljubno to Mozirje and Celje and some of the logs travelled as far as Romania. The trade brought wealth and special rights to the valley, evident from the many fine buildings still standing here.

The free English-language brochure entitled *The Savinjska and Saleška Valleys* is helpful if you intend spending a fair bit of time in the area. Serious hikers should pick up a copy of the 1:50,000 *Zgornja Savinjska Dolina* map (€7.30) by GZS.

The destinations mentioned in this section fall along the 45km valley road from Mozirje to the Rinka Waterfall, which can be done by bus or car but is tailor-made for bicycles.

THE HAYRACK: A NATIONAL ICON

Nothing is as Slovenian as the *kozolec*, the hayrack seen almost everywhere in the country except in Prekmurje and the Karst area of Primorska. Because the ground in Alpine and hilly areas can be damp, wheat and hay are hung from racks, allowing the wind to do the drying faster and more efficiently.

Until the late 19th century, the *kozolec* was looked upon as just another tool to make a farmer's work easier and the land more productive. Then the artist Ivan Grohar made it the centrepiece of many of his Impressionist paintings, and the *kozolec* became as much a part of the cultural landscape as the physical one. Today it is virtually a national icon, and a sure way to reduce Slovenian *izseljenci* (emigrants) or *zamejci* (ethnic Slovenes living outside the national borders) to nostalgic tears is to send them a postcard or Christmas card of a *kozolec* on a distant slope covered in snow.

There are many different types of Slovenian hayracks: single ones standing alone or 'goat hayracks' with sloped 'lean-to' roofs, parallel and stretched ones and double *toplarji* (hayracks), often with roofs and storage areas on top. Simple hayracks are not unknown in other parts of Alpine Central Europe, but *toplarji*, decorated or plain, are unique to Slovenia.

Hayracks were made of hardwood (usually oak) from the early 17th century. Today, however, the hayrack's future is in concrete, and the new stretched ones can go on forever.

Mozirje

☎ 03 / pop 1960 / elev 340m

The administrative centre of the Upper Savinja Valley lying on the Savinja's left bank, Mozirje is a town with a long history has little to show for its past except for a much rebuilt Gothic Church of St George at the at the western end of Na Trgu just after you cross the small Trnava Stream. Mozirje is really just a convenient stop on the way to Logarska Dolina though the town's botanical garden opposite the bus station is worth a look and there's skiing in winter.

INFORMATION

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Na Trgu 9; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (Savinjska cesta 3) About 200m southwest of the bank.

Tourist office (☎ 839 47 00; td.mozirje@siol.net; 1st fl, Savinjska cesta 7; ☎ 9am-5pm Apr-Oct; 8am-2pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar) In council building opposite Mercator.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Worth the short walk south of town and across the river is **Mozirski Gaj** (Savinja Grove; ☎ 583 27 19; www.mozirskogaj.com; Hribernikova ulica 1; adult/student/child €4.20/3.35/2.10; ☎ 8am-7pm Apr-Sep), a seven-hectare botanical park and flower garden with a small open-air ethnographic museum.

In winter, a cable car runs from Žekovec, 4km northwest of Mozirje, to the **Golte ski centre** (☎ 839 12 00; www.golte.si; half-day pass adult/child €16.30/11.20, day pass €21.70/16), where there are

12km of slopes up to 1600m high and 5km of cross-country trails.

SLEEPING & EATING

Levc farmhouse (☎ 839 53 60; tklevc@volja.net; per person €17; 📍) About 800m southeast of Savinjski Gaj in Loke (house No 19) is this farmhouse with five guestrooms. The main activity here is cattle breeding.

Korošec farmhouse (☎ 583 11 22; www.turizemko-rosec.com in Slovene; Ljubija 5; 2-/6-person apt from €32/60; 📍) At the eastern entrance to Mozirje is this attractive tourist farm with three apartments sleeping up to six people as well as sauna and Jacuzzi.

Kozorog (☎ 583 10 22; Na Trgu 32; meals from €8.50; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-7pm Sun) This is a simple and inexpensive restaurant in the centre of Mozirje that is a popular destination in these parts.

Gaj (☎ 839 51 56; mains €3.80-8; ☎ 10am-10pm) This restaurant at the entrance to the Mozirski Gaj botanical garden also does pizza (€3.80 to €5).

Mercator (Savinjska cesta 4; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) This branch of the supermarket chain is opposite the tourist office.

Nazarje

☎ 03 / pop 950 / elev 365m

The town of 'Nazareth', at the confluence of the Savinja and Dreta rivers 2km south of Mozirje, is dominated by a 15th-century double-towered 'castle' (manor house, really) that

has a museum, a music school and offices of the Glin logging company, the industry that built Nazarje. In fact, the town's coat of arms bears a stylised image of the castle and three fir trees. **Nova Ljubljanska Banka** (Savinjska cesta 2; ☎ 8.30-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) is in the 1960s-styled Dom Kulture (Culture House), opposite Vrbovec Castle.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Vrbovec Castle (Grad Vrbovec; Savinjska cesta 4) contains the **Forestry and Woodworking Museum** (Muzej Gozdarstva in Lesarstva; ☎ 839 16 13; adult/child €1.70/0.85; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Nov), which is the industry that has kept bread on the tables of Nazarje for centuries (witness the huge pulp-processing plant just across the road).

Towering above the town on a hill called Gradišče is the **Franciscan monastery** (Franciškiški Samostan; ☎ 583 19 93; Samostanska pot 50) and its **Church of the Annunciation**, originally from the mid-17th century, all but flattened by Allied bombs in 1944 and now rebuilt. The twin-spired church has a choir loft with fine grill work; the original chapel, built by Bishop Tomaž Hren of Ljubljana in the early 17th century, now serves as the presbytery. The monastery has a lovely garden surrounded by an arcaded courtyard though most people make the drive up to the monastery or climb its 200-odd steps to see its **library** (by appointment) which has 16th-century manuscripts as well as priceless parchment incunabula dating from the 11th and 12th centuries.

The Hotel Burger Veniše (below) has **horses** for hire.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Burger Veniše (☎ 839 25 50, 041-698 424; venise@siol.net; Lačja Vas 22; s/d €35/60) This 15-room hotel and riding centre is in a beautiful valley 3km southwest of Nazarje.

Three kilometres west of Nazarje, you'll find a couple of camping grounds on opposite sides of the river, including **Camping Menina** (☎ 583 50 27, 041-771 846; www.campingmenina.com; Varpolje 105; adult €5-6.50, child €3.50-4.50; ☎ mid-Apr-mid-Nov), a 6.5-hectare site on the north bank of the Savinja with cottages (€60) for up to 10 people, and **Camping Savinja-Petrin** (☎ 583 54 72, 041-528 098; primozbitenc@siol.net; Spodnje Pobrežje 11; per person €5; ☎ May-Sep), with 80 sites on the south bank of the river.

Gostišče Grad Vrbovec (☎ 583 28 00; Savinjska cesta 4; starters €3-6.25, mains €4.80-8.20; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri,

11am-10pm Sat) This fine restaurant in Vrbovec Castle and overlooking the river is an excellent place to stop for lunch. Be sure to try the trout.

Ljubno ob Savinji to Solčava

Two kilometres before the town of Ljubno ob Savinji (population 1160), there's the option for a detour to two historical towns along route No 225. **Radmirje** (population 470), 1km to the southwest, is very picturesque with Štajerska-style hayracks and two important churches: the 16th-century **Church of St Michael** in the centre of town and the 18th-century pilgrimage **Church of St Francis Xavier** (☎ 584 10 96; Radmirje 50) on Straža Hill, containing a rich **treasury** of Mass vestments donated by the kings of Poland and France and a gold chalice from Habsburg empress Maria Theresa. Both can be easily reached from the main road. Five kilometres further on in the Zadrecka Valley is **Gornji Grad** (population 930). The **former Benedictine monastery** (Attemsov trg 2) contains the small **Gornji Grad collections** (☎ 584 34 47, 041-299 013; ☎ 3-5pm Sat, 9-11am & 3-5pm Sun), in the **Šteкло**, a 16th-century defence tower at the entrance to the complex. It contains everyday objects relating to life on the Menina Planina, an area of mountain pastures and slopes south of town. The large baroque **Cathedral of Sts Hermagoras and Fortunatus** (Katedrala Sv Mohorja in Fortunata) in the same complex was built in the mid-18th century (although parts go back to the 13th century) and modelled after the cathedral in Ljubljana. There's a **tourist information centre** (☎ 839 18 58, 584 3 072; tic@gornji-grad.si; Attemsov trg 3) in the nearby town hall that keeps very erratic hours.

Once you've passed Ljubno, the Upper Savinja Valley begins to feel – and smell – truly Alpine, with the mountains so close you can almost touch them, the houses built entirely of wood and the heady scent of pine in the air. The road continues along the winding Savinja, past wooden bridges, more hayracks and, in a gorge 4km beyond **Luče** (population 445) and visible from the main road, a curious rock tower called the **Igla** (Needle).

Just before **Rogovilc**, the usual starting point for canoeing and kayaking trips on the Savinja, there's a turn south to **Robanov Kot** (population 140), a pristine valley and protected park with trails and farmhouse accommodation.

To the northeast of Robanov Kot and below Mt Raduha (2062m) there's an ice cave called **Snežna Jama** (Snow Cave; ☎ 572 48 66, 041-424 091; silvo_ramsak@hotmail.com; admission €4.20; 🗺️ tour every 2hr 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-mid-Jul; daily mid-Jul-Aug; 9am-4pm Sat & Sun Sep) is accessible by car via a forest road. Temperature ranges from 0°C to 3°C, so dress appropriately.

Solčava (population 240), at 642m the highest town in the Upper Savinja Valley, has some lovely road markers with folk icons and painted barns. Road No 926 north from Solčava to the Alpine village of **Podolševa** (population 70), which continues west and down into Logarska Dolina as the No 927, is one of the most picturesque in Slovenia.

Logarska Dolina

☎ 03 / elev to 1100m

Most of the glacial 'Forester Valley' (Logar Valley) – about 7.5km long and no more than 500m wide – has been a country park of just under 2438 hectares since 1987. This 'pearl of the Alpine region' with more than 30 natural attractions, such as caves, springs, peaks and waterfalls as well as endemic flora (golden

slipper orchid) and rare fauna (golden eagles, peregrine falcons), is a wonderful place to explore for a few days. The **Tourist office** (☎ 838 90 04; www.logarska-dolina.si; Logarska Dolina 9; 🗺️ 9am-3pm Apr-Sep) is in a small wooden kiosk opposite the Plesnik Hotel car park.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Logarska Dolina Country Park (Krajinski Park Logarska Dolina) is open year-round, but from April to September (and at weekends in October) cars and motorcycles entering the park must pay €5 and €3 respectively; pedestrians and cyclists always get in free. A road goes past a chapel and through the woods to **Rinka Waterfall** (Slap Rinka), but there are plenty of trails to explore and up to 20 other waterfalls in the area.

The bottom of the Rinka Waterfall is a 10-minute walk from the end of the valley road. The climb to the top takes about 20 minutes. It's not very difficult, but it can get slippery. From the top to the west you can see three peaks reaching higher than 2200m: Kranjska Rinka, Koroška Rinka and Štajerska Rinka. Until 1918 they formed the triple border of

Carniola (Kranjska), Carinthia (Koroška) and Styria (Štajerska). Ask the tourist office for the *Trail around Logarska* brochure.

Opposite Dom Planincev (below) is a trail leading to **Sušica Waterfall** and **Klemenča Cave**.

Another magnificent and much less explored valley, the 6km-long **Matkov Kot**, runs parallel to Logarska Dolina and the border with Austria. You can reach here by road by turning west as you leave Logarska Dolina.

The tourist office can organise any number of activities: from horse riding (per hr €8.35 to €10.85) and coach rides (€20.80) for up to five people to paragliding (€50), guided mountaineering and rock climbing (€8.35 to €14.60). It also rents mountain bikes (1-1/4-hour €2.10/8.35). Nonguests can use the Plesnik Hotel's swimming pool and sauna (per day €12.50). The valley also has some very basic ski grounds (day pass €8.35), including two small towns, 1km of slope and 15km of cross-country ski trails.

SLEEPING & EATING

Dom Planincev (☎ 584 70 06, 031- 269 785; Logarska Dolina 15a; per person €15.50; 🗺️ late Apr-Oct; 📍) This mountain hut 2.5km from Rinka has a relaxed, rustic feel to it and sleeps up to 32 people.

Planšarija Logarski Kot (☎ 383 90 30, 041-210 017; info@logarska.si; per person €15.50; 🗺️ late Apr-Oct; 📍) More isolated than the Dom Planincev but closer to the falls, this locally run hut has accommodation for two dozen hikers.

Juvanija farmhouse (☎ 838 90 80; juvanija@email.si; Logarska Dolina 8; per person €19; 📍) Just inside the entrance to the park, this farmhouse has four rooms sleeping up to 11 people.

Lenar farmhouse (☎ 838 90 06; ltk.lenar@siol.net; Logarska Dolina 11; per person €19, apt for 3 €42; 📍) Another farmhouse with four rooms and apartments, Lenar is a couple of kilometres further south from the entrance.

Pension Na Razpotju (☎ 839 16 50; razpotju@siol.net; Logarska Dolina 14; s/d €45/74; 📍 📺 📶) A spanking new, 24-bed pension set back from the main road is a nice alternative to the Palenk complex, a short distance to the north.

Hotel Plesnik (☎ 839 23 00; www.plesnik.si; Logarska Dolina 10; s €78-83, d €124-132; 📍 📺 📶) A 30-room hotel in the centre of the valley with a pool, sauna, a fine restaurant (🗺️ 8am-10pm) and lovely public area, the Plesnik pretty much is Logarska Dolina. As a result it seems to be resting on its laurels, and both the standards of reception and service have dropped

dramatically in recent years. Its annexe, the Villa Palenk (singles/doubles €66/106), with 11 rooms done up in generic 'Alpine style', takes the overflow.

The closest **Mercator** (🗺️ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat, 8-11.30am Sun) supermarket is in Luče (house No 105).

In the Logarska Valley itself, along with the restaurants at the Plesnik Hotel and Dom Planincev, there are a couple of simpler places to grab a bite, including:

Pod Slapom (☎ 838 90 36; Logarska Dolina 15b; 🗺️ 10am-10pm) This attractive little snack bar and restaurant, with things like goulash and Balkan grills, is above the car park close to the Rinka Waterfall.

Orlovo Gnezdo (☎ 584 70 06; 🗺️ 10am-6pm) The 'Eyrie' is a simple eatery in a tall wooden tower overlooking the falls and reached by a steep set of steps.

Getting There & Away

From Mozirje, there is an hourly bus service to Celje (€4.50, one hour, 36km) on weekdays but only two on Saturday. Other destinations are Gornji Grad (€2.60, 30 minutes, 16km, up to six a day) and Solčava (€3.50, 45 minutes, 29km, five on weekdays).

From Gornji Grad, buses go to Ljubljana (€5.80, 1½ hours, 51km, four daily Monday to Friday, 4.38am Saturday and 12.01pm Sunday) and Kamnik (€3, 45 minutes, 23km, five, with one or two at the weekend). There's a 7.51am bus on Sunday to Logarska Dolina (€3.50, one hour, 30km) from June to September only.

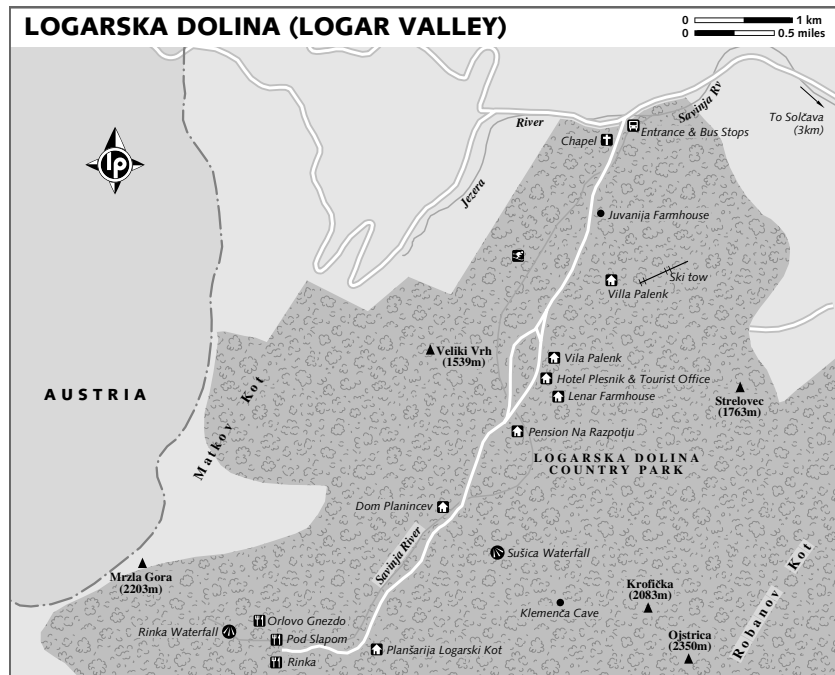
KOROŠKA

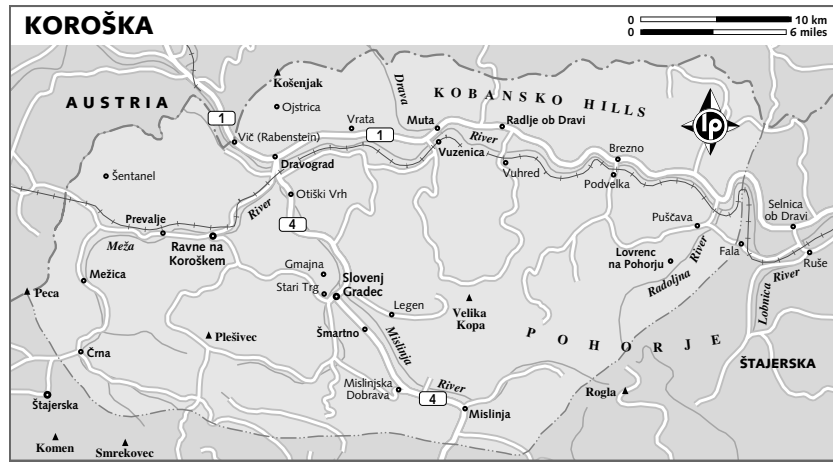
The truncated province of Koroška is essentially just three valleys bounded by the Pohorje Massif on the east, the last of the Karavanke peaks, Mt Peca (where good King Matjaž is said to be resting), on the west and the hills of Kobansko to the north. The Drava Valley runs east to west and includes the towns of Dravograd, Muta and Vuzenica. The Mežica and Mislinja valleys fan out from the Drava; the former is an industrial area with such towns as Ravne, Prevalje and Črna na Koroškem while the latter's main centre is Slovenj Gradec.

DRAVOGRAD

☎ 02 / pop 3385 / elev 362m

Dravograd, situated on both sides of the Drava (which, at 144km, is Slovenia's second-longest river after the Sava), is a sleepy place with





few sights of its own (though students of history might make a trip here for its infamous WWII connections). It is, however, an excellent springboard for exploring the Kobansko Hills to the north and the Drava Valley to the east.

The town whose name means 'Drava Castle' is much smaller than its sister city, Slovenj Gradec, 12km to the south. It is just as old, however, with a recorded history dating back to the 12th century. It was at this time that the castle, the ruins of which can be seen on the hill to the north of town, was built. Located on a bend in the Drava at the point where the smaller Meža and Mislinja Rivers flow into it, the castle and the town were of great strategic importance for centuries and at the beginning of the 20th century as many as 2000 rafts sailed between here and Maribor, 60km to the east, each year. The river traffic came to a grinding halt in 1943 when the Dravograd hydro-power plant opened.

Orientation

Dravograd's historical centre and its main street, Trg 4 Julija, are on the north bank of the Drava. The bus and train stations are about 1km southeast on the south bank.

Information

Koroška Banka (Trg 4 Julija 44; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Two doors east of the Church of St Vitus.

Post office (Trg 4 Julija 1) At the eastern end of Trg 4 Julija just before the bridge over the Drava.

Tourist office (☎ 871 02 85; info@dravograd.si; Trg 4 Julija 57; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Oct)

Sights & Activities

The **Church of St Vitus** (Cerkev Sv Vida), at the western end of Trg 4 Julija and opposite No 47, is one of the most important Romanesque buildings extant in Slovenia. Built in the second half of the 12th century and only recently renovated, it is a solid structure of light-brown stone with a high tower between the nave and the small circular presbytery.

The basement of the **town hall** (☎ 878 30 11; Trg 4 Julija 7; admission €1; ☎ by arrangement) was used as a Gestapo prison and torture chamber during WWII, and can be visited; ask at the tourist office. The hydroelectric dam on the Drava nearest Dravograd was built by German soldiers during the war, and many of them were lodged in town.

It's an easy hike north from Dravograd to the **castle ruins** (not much more than a wall); just head up Pod Gradom, a lane just before Trg 4 Julija 22. The more energetic may want to carry on further into the **Kobansko Hills**, where you just might encounter some traditional charcoal burners. A circular section of the **Kozjak Mountain Trail** leads north past Goriški Vrh to Mt Košenjak (1522m) and returns to Dravograd via Ojstrica.

The tourist office can arrange three-hour **rafting trips** (☎ 871 0200; per person €16) on the Drava. The trip starts at Vrata, about 10km to the east, and carries on to Dravograd. The price includes food and drink.

Sleeping & Eating

Planinski Dom Košenjak (☎ 878 35 04, 041-887 4444; pd.dravograd@email.si; ☎ Thu-Sun Mar-mid-Nov; Sat & Sun year-round) If you don your hiking boots and set out for Mt Košenjak, there is accommodation at this 43-bed Category II mountain lodge situated at 1169m north of Dravograd.

Restavracija-Prenočišča Koroška (☎ 878 69 11; www.korosica.si; starters €3.70-5.75, mains €5.80-9.60; ☎ 7am-10pm, 11am-midnight, 11am-10pm) This popular restaurant in Otiški Vrh (house No 25a) about 3km southeast of Dravograd has 15 comfortable rooms (singles/doubles €34/60).

Hotel Hesper (☎ 878 44 40; www.hesper.si; Koroška cesta 48; s/d/tr €38/57/85; ☎ 7am-10pm) About 1.5km northwest of Trg 4 Julija in the Traberg shopping centre, this 24-room property is the only place to stay in central Dravograd. One redeeming feature is its restaurant **Narodna** (National; ☎ 878 44 40; meals from €15; ☎ 7am-10pm), which is popular with *Avstrijci* from over the border.

There is a surfeit of **farmhouse** accommodation at Šentanel (p260), about 18km southwest of Dravograd.

Kaiser (☎ 878 31 04; 4 Trg Julija 27; meals from €8; ☎ noon-10pm) Light meals are served at this central café-restaurant.

Lovski Rogl (☎ 878 32 88; Trg 4 Julija 37; meals from €10; ☎ 5.30am-11pm Mon-Thu, 5.30am-midnight Fri, 6am-10pm Sat, 7am-8pm Sun) Come to the 'Hunting Bugle' for stick-to-the-ribs Slovenian dishes. It's most popular at breakfast and lunch.

You'll find a **BA Center** (Trg 4 Julija 15; ☎ 7am-9pm) supermarket with extended hours in the centre of town and a much larger but less central **Mercator** (Koroška cesta 48; 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) next to the Hotel Hesper.

Getting There & Away

Count on a bus every hour or so to Črna (€3.50, one hour, 27km), Maribor (€6.50, two hours, 61km) via Radlje ob Dravi and Slovenj Gradec (€1.70, 15 minutes, 10km). Buses also serve Celje (€6.50, two hours, 65km, one at 2.30pm), Gornji Grad (€6.65, two hours, 67km, one at 1.10 Monday to Saturday) and Ljubljana (€10.80, three hours, 121km, two or three daily).

Dravograd is on the rail line linking Maribor and Bleiburg (Pliberk) and Klagenfurt in Austria. Up to five trains a day on weekdays depart for Maribor (€4.50, 1½ hours, 64km) via Vuzenica and Vuhred. Four trains leave for Ravne na Koroškem and Prevalje

(€1.50, 20 minutes, 12km), one of which crosses the Austrian border and carries on to Klagenfurt.

AROUND DRAVOGRAD

An excellent bike trip follows the spectacular Drava Valley through the Pohorje and Kobansko Hills, 60km eastward to Maribor. The river, whose highest flow is reached at the start of the summer, is at its most scenic at Brezno and just above Fala, where it narrows into a gorge. Just before Maribor, the Drava widens into a lake with the help of a major dam.

You don't have to go that far to see some great scenery, however. Vuzenica and Muta, two very attractive villages, are just 14km from Dravograd and can be reached by train or on the Maribor bus.

Vuzenica

☎ 02 / pop 1625 / elev 366m

The **Church of St Nicholas** (Cerkev Sv Nikolaja; for key ☎ 876 40 34 or ☎ 040-858 236) in Vuzenica, on the Drava's right bank, was built in the 12th century and expanded later; note the Gothic buttresses outside. Its outstanding features include a fabulous baroque gold altar, a star-vaulted ceiling typical of Koroška, 15th-century frescoes in the porch and an original fortified wall surrounding the churchyard. The ruins of a 16th-century **castle** can be seen on Pisterjev Vrh northeast of town.

Muta

☎ 02 / pop 2410 / elev 369m

A two-tier village across the Drava from Vuzenica, Muta has churches on both levels, but you want the one in **Spodnja Muta** (Lower Muta) near the main road. The austere **Rotunda of St John the Baptist** (Rotunda Janeza Krstnika; for key ☎ 876 13 97, 040-959 491) is one of the oldest churches in Slovenia – it was built while Pope Leo IX (1002-54) toured Carinthia and Styria in the mid-11th century. Its round shape, wooden-shingled roof and steeple are typical of the province, and the tiny church appears quite content with itself sitting in a field with the hills far behind it. There are fragmented reliefs on the east side of the apse, and near the west entrance is a stone relief of an eagle dating from Roman times. If you can manage to get the rotunda opened, you'll see 14th-century frescoes in the choir and the painted wooden ceiling in the presbytery dating from

UNDER THE LINDEN TREES

If cities can have municipal animals – where would Rome be today without the she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus or Berlin without its bear – why can't a country have a national tree? Slovenia's is the linden (or common lime), and its heart-shaped leaf has become something of a symbol of Slovenia and Slovenian hospitality.

The stately linden (*lipa*) grows slowly for about 60 years and then suddenly spurts upward and outwards, living to a ripe old age. It is said that a linden grows for 300 years, stands still for another 300 and takes 300 years to die.

Linden wood was used by the Romans to make shields and, as it is easy to work with, artisans in the Middle Ages carved religious figures from it, earning linden the title *sacrum lignum*, or 'sacred wood'. Tea made from the linden flower, which contains aromatic oils, has been used as an antidote for fever and the flu at least since the 16th century.

More importantly, from earliest times the linden tree was the focal point of any settlement in Slovenia – the centre of meetings, arbitration, recreation and, of course, gossip. The tree, which could never be taller than the church spire, always stood in the middle of the village, and important decisions were made by town elders at a table beneath it.

In fact, so sacred is the linden tree to Slovenes that its destruction is considered a serious offence. In discussing the barbarous acts committed by the Italians during the occupation of Primorska between the wars, one magazine article passionately points out that 'Kobarid had to swallow much bitterness... The fascists even cut down the linden tree...'

In today's Slovenia, the linden represents not just hospitality but democracy too – something that has not been lost on seekers of high office. More than one politician facing an election has been known to waltz around Slovenia's oldest linden, the 800-year-old Najevska Lipa under Koroška's Mt Peca, which was featured on a commemorative stamp in 2002.

the late 16th century. The relief of an eagle at the entrance dates back to Roman times.

Šentanel

☎ 02 / pop 180 / elev 411m

This picturesque (and award-winning!) village in the Mežica Valley, 6km northwest of Prevalje, is not a destination in itself but if you have your own transport and would like to get away from it all, consider spending a night or two in one of the dozen or so farmhouses here. Prevalje is 12km southwest of Dravograd and easily accessible by bus and train.

Ploder farmhouse (☎ 823 11 04, 041-867 375; kmetijaplode@hotmail.com; per person €18) This farmhouse in Šentanel (house No 3) has 11 rooms, including one that has six beds with dormitory accommodation.

Marin-Miler farmhouse (☎ 824 05 50, 041-654 886; per person €19) A more isolated place at Šentanel 8 with 6 rooms, this farmhouse has views of Mt Peca.

SLOVENJ GRADEC

☎ 02 / pop 8030 / elev 410m

Slovenj Gradec is not the capital of Koroška – that distinction goes to the industrial cen-

tre of Ravne na Koroškem to the northwest – but it is certainly the province's cultural and recreational heart. A large number of museums, galleries and historical churches line its main square, while the sporting opportunities in the Pohorje Massif to the east are endless.

History

The history of Slovenj Gradec is closely tied to Stari Trg, a suburb southwest of the Old Town where there was a Roman settlement called Colatio that existed from the 1st to the 3rd centuries. At that time an important Roman road from Celeia (Celje) to Virunum (near Klagenfurt in Austria) passed through Colatio. Slovenj Gradec was an important trade centre in the Middle Ages and minted its own coins. Later it became an important cultural and artistic centre with many artisans and craft guilds. Among the prominent Habsburg nobles based in Slovenj Gradec over the centuries were members of the Windisch-Grätz family, a variant of the German name for the town (Windisch Graz). *Windisch* (or *wendisch*) was once the general German term for 'Slavic'; 'Gradec' is Slovene for 'Graz'.

Orientation

Slovenj Gradec's main street is Glavni trg, a colourful long 'square' lined with old town houses and shops. The bus station is at Pohorska cesta 15, about 500m northeast of the tourist office. Slovenj Gradec is not on a train line.

Information

Koroška Banka (Glavni trg 30; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri)

Mladinska Knjiga (☎ 881 22 83; Glavni trg 12; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Stocks regional maps and guides.

Post office (Francetova cesta 1) At the northern end of Glavni trg.

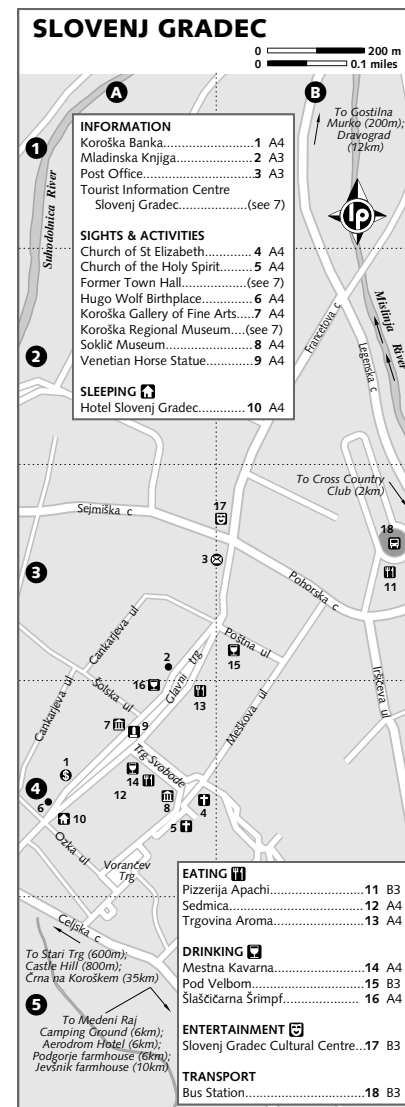
Tourist Information Centre Slovenj Gradec (TIC; ☎ 881 21 16; www.slovenj-gradec.si; Glavni trg 24; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) On the ground floor of the former town hall.

Sights

MUSEUMS

The **former town hall**, where the tourist office is located, also contains two important museums. The **Koroška Regional Museum** (Koroški Pokrajinski Muzej; ☎ 884 20 55; Glavni trg 24; http://gostje.kivi.si/muzej; adult/student/child €2.10/1.70/1.50; ☎ 8am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat & Sun) has exhibits on the 2nd floor devoted to the history of Slovenj Gradec and the Koroška region – from local sport heroes' awards and farm implements to painted beehive panels and models of wartime hospital rooms and schools run by Partisans. There's also a very good archaeological collection focusing on the Roman settlement of Colatio. It includes jewellery and other effects taken from a Slavic burial ground at Puščava near Castle Hill (Grajski Grič) to the west.

The **Koroška Gallery of Fine Arts** (Koroška Galerija Likovnih Umetnosti; ☎ 884 12 83; www.glu-sg.si; adult/student & child/family €2.10/1.25/4.20; ☎ 9-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat & Sun) on the 1st floor of the former town hall has rotating exhibits but counts among its permanent collection African folk art, bronze sculptures by Franc Berneker (1874-1932) and naive paintings by Jože Tisnikar (b 1928). Tisnikar is among the most interesting and original artists in Slovenia, and his obsession with corpses, distorted figures and oversized insects is at once disturbing and funny. Don't miss *Rojstva in Smrt* (Birth and Death), *Ti, ki Ostanejo* (Those who Stay) and *Crička* (Crickets). The paintings are all very black and blue. Outside the



town hall is the **Venetian Horse**, a life-size work by contemporary sculptor/designer Oskar Kogoj. It has become something of a symbol for Slovenj Gradec.

The items on display at the **Soklič Museum** (Sokličev Muzej; ☎ 884 15 05; Trg Svobode 5; ☎ by appointment) in the church rectory were amassed by Jakob Soklič (1893-1972), a priest who

began squirreling away bits and bobs in the 1930s. Among the mediocre watercolours and oils of peasant idylls and the umpteen portraits of the composer Hugo Wolf (1860–1903), whose **birthplace** (Glavni trg 40) is nearby, are green goblets and beakers from nearby Glazuta (an important glass-manufacturing town in the 19th century), local embroidery and linen, religious artefacts and some 18th-century furniture. The statue of a saint holding a chalice with a snake coming out of it represents St John the Evangelist. (In quite a reversed role for a biblical reptile, a serpent once warned the apostle that he was about to quaff poisoned wine.)

CHURCHES

The sombre **Church of St Elizabeth** (Trg Svobode) was built in 1251 and is the town's oldest structure. But aside from the Romanesque nave and a couple of windows, almost everything here is baroque, including the massive gold altar and the altar paintings done by local artist Franc Mihael Strauss (1647–1740) and his son Janez Andrej Strauss (1721–82). Far more interesting is the 15th-century **Church of the Holy Spirit** (Trg Svobode) to the south with an interior covered with Gothic frescoes by Andrej of Otting. The 27 panels on the north wall represent the Passion of Christ; the scenes on the archway are of the Final Judgment.

Activities

The **Slovenian Alpine Trail** passes through Stari Trg and the centre of Slovenj Gradec before continuing up to Mala Kopa (1524m), where it meets the E6. There is a Category II 48-bed mountain hut at 1102m to the northwest called **Koča pod Kremžarjevimi Vrhovi** (☎ 884 48 83; 041-832 035; ☹ Wed–Mon late Apr–Sep, Sat & Sun Oct–late Apr). The E6 heads north through Vuhred and Radlje ob Dravi to Austria, and the Slovenian Alpine Trail carries on eastward to Rogla and Maribor. There is more accommodation on Velika Kopa at 1377m at the 68-bed **Grmovškov Dom pod Veliko Kopo** (☎ 883 98 60, 041-643 663; ☹ year-round). If you are going to do a fair amount of hiking in the western Pohorje, pick up a copy of the 1:50,000-scale *Pohorje GZS* map (€7.50).

Koroška is becoming something of a centre for mountain biking. The adrenalin-pumping **Mountain Bike Park** (☎ 870 30 60; www.mtbpark.com; Center ulica 153) is situated at the Hotel Club Krnes in Črna na Koroškem, near Dravograd. It sits at the centre of a network of some

1000km of marked forest and mountain trails ranging in length from 20km to 350km – some of which climb up to 1690m – and a downhill racecourse. There's even a 5km trail through a 300-year-old Frederick Mine (Fridrihov Rov), which must be booked in advance. The hotel offers single or multiday guided mountain-bike tours and organises training camps and competitions. Mountain bikes cost per day €15/20 for front/full suspension and per week €84/133.

Three ski slopes are within striking distance of Slovenj Gradec, but the closest is **Kope** (☎ 882 27 40; www.pohorje.org; half-day pass adult/student/child €17/15/12.50, day pass €20.50/17.50/14.60), 1300m to 1520m above the Mislinja Valley on the western edge of the Pohorje Massif. The ski grounds have 8km of runs, 15km of cross-country trails and seven lifts on Mala Kopa and Velika Kopa peaks. To reach Kope, follow the Velenje road (No 4) for 3km south and then turn east. The ski area is another 13km at the end of the road.

Two farmhouses in the vicinity have horses and ponies for hire including the **Podgorje 91 farmhouse** (☎ 041-619 621) at house No 91 of Podgorje pri Slovenj Gradcu, 6km to the southwest, and the **Jevšnik farmhouse** (☎ 041-325 698; Straže 125) at Mislinja, 10km to the southeast.

Sleeping & Eating

Medeni Raj camping ground (☎ 885 0500; www.aero.drom-sg.si; Mislinjska Dobrava 110; camp site per person €6.50, bungalows €25; ☹ mid-Mar–mid-Oct) 'Sweet Paradise' is a small, friendly place with sites for 200 tents and caravans and six bungalows set among pine trees of Turiška Vas just beyond the Aerodrom hotel in Mislinjska Dobrava.

Hotel Slovenj Gradec (☎ 884 52 85; www.kope.si; Glavni trg 43; s/d €31/57.50; ☎ ☒ ☹ ☹) The only hotel option in town is this depressing 68-room property with rather gloomy rooms and long, dark corridors that seem to go on forever. It still desperately needs a makeover.

Aerodrom (☎ 885 0500, 051-603 556; www.aero.drom-sg.si; Mislinjska Dobrava 110; s/d €48/66; ☎ ☒ ☹ ☹ ☹) It's a bit of a schlep 6km southeast of Slovenj Gradec but the four-star Aerodrom is head and shoulders above any other accommodation in the area.

Sedmica (☎ 884 51 09, 041-769 797; Trg Svobode 7; dishes €3.75-5; ☹ 9am–10pm Mon–Sat, noon–midnight Sun) The 'Little Seven' is a pizzeria and *špageterija* in the centre of town with pizzas and all kinds of pasta dishes.

Pizzerija Apachi (☎ 883 17 84; Pohorska cesta 17b; pizza €3.75-4.80; ☹ 9am–midnight Mon–Thu, 9am–2am Fri & Sat, 3–10pm Sun) This pizzeria with a 'cowboys and Indians' theme (go figure) is next to the bus station.

Gostilna Murko (☎ 883 81 03; Francetova cesta 24; meals from €12; ☹ 8am–10pm) About 400m north of the centre on the Mislinja, Gostilna Murko is a roadside inn popular with Austrian tourists on the go.

There's a small **Trgovina Aroma** (Glavni trg 17; ☹ 6am–8pm Mon–Sat, 8am–6pm Sun) supermarket on the main square.

Drinking

Mestna Kavarna (☎ 884 51 09; Trg Svobode 7; ☹ 6.30am–midnight Mon–Thu, 8am–2am Fri & Sat, 8.30am–midnight Sun) This updated yet old-style café on the corner of Glavni trg is the most comfortable place in town to tip back a coffee or maybe even something stronger.

Šlaščičarna Šrimpf (☎ 884 14 82; Glavni trg 14; ☹ 8.30am–8pm) This long-established café draws the crowds with its fabulous cakes. Try the *zagrebska* (€1.35), a rich concoction of custard, cream, chocolate and flaky pastry.

Pod Velbom (☎ 884 28 00; Glavni trg 1; ☹ 6am–midnight Sun–Thu, 6am–2am Fri, 9am–2am Sat) If you're looking for some company, the best place for meeting people in the centre of Slovenj Gradec is this pub-café; enter from Poštna ulica.

Entertainment

Classical music concerts are sometimes held at the Church of St Elizabeth and the **Slovenj Gradec Cultural Centre** (Kulturni Dom Slovenj Gradec; ☎ 884 50 05; Francetova ulica 5).

Getting There & Away

There are hourly buses to Črna (€4, one hour, 35km), Dravograd (€1.70, 15 minutes, 10km) and Mislinja (€2.20, 30 minutes, 14km). Other destinations served by bus from Slovenj Gradec include Celje (€5.80, 1½ hours, 55km, 3.10pm daily), Gornji Grad (€6.20, 1½ hours, 57km, one at 1.31pm Monday to Saturday), Ljubljana (€10, three hours, 111km, two to three daily) and Maribor (€7, two hours, 71km, two or three daily).

You can call a taxi in Slovenj Gradec on ☎ 041-645 901.

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