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LJUBLJANA “IN YOUR SPORRAN”

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About this guide

This series of downloadable NATA Mini “In Your Sporrán” Guides has been designed specifically to save the hassle of printing out reams of NATA web pages in order to make sure you don’t miss something whilst wandering the back streets of your chosen destination.

This guide has been compiled almost exclusively by me (Paul Allison), and is based entirely on personal experiences and opinions. Please do not prejudice anything on my say so – not only am I quite warped, but many places were only visited once, and therefore may have been having a particularly good or bad day.

This guide is not intended to replace more traditional sources of information, such as the excellent Lonely Planet guide books or the indispensable “In Your Pocket” guides available local in many Eastern European cities (as well as the downloadable versions from www.inyourpocket.com, which have inspired this very guide). Instead, the idea is to supplement these more detailed, better researched and more balanced guides with my own ramblings.

These guides originally came about as people were forever asking for pub tips and the like for places I’ve been to – I soon grew tired of typing out the same emails every few weeks and opted instead to keep the information on the web on the NATA Online site.

All opinions expressed in this guide are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Netley Abbey Tartan Army.

- For more information about NATA (the Netley Abbey Tartan Army), including photos and diary accounts of many trips abroad with Scotland, as well as much more travel information and guides), please visit www.netleyabbeytartanarmy.com
- For more information on me, please visit www.paulallison.co.uk



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Slovenia Introduction

Slovenia is one of those countries I'd meaning to go to for ages and never quite managed it. Fate dictated that whilst a large detachment of the Tartan Army (Rich included) passed through en route from San Marino to Croatia in 2000, I had to go home and sit a work-related exam. Rich's initial feedback, based on his one-night stay, was "nice, but small". Having now seen it for my own eyes, I'd say that was a bit of an unfair assessment – yes, it is small, but it's more than nice.

The country sits at the top of the ex-Yugoslav states, both geographically and economically. It's participation in the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s lasted days rather than years, leaving the Croats, Bosnians and Serbs to slug it out with each other, and as a result it suffered neither the widespread physical or economic damage of it's neighbours, and was well placed for EU membership in 2004.

To my casual eyes, I saw many cultural (and linguistic) similarities with the Czech Republic, although the spectacular Alpine scenery and relaxed pace of café life in the cities does have similarities to Northern Italy.

Due to the size of the country and the reasonably central location of Ljubljana, everywhere is easily accessible via the well-developed bus and train networks.

Ljubljana Introduction

Ljubljana is a beautiful city, and is the most convincing "new Prague" I've ever seen. Go NOW, before it goes the same way as the Czech capital, and sells its soul for the tourist dollar and the stag party bonhomie!

Ljubljana Airport is actually far closer to Kranj, and offers a superb view of the Julian Alps, but not such superb connections to the city itself. Taxis are plentiful but expensive; a more cost-conscious option is the bus. Two operators ply this route – an express bus connects with some of the busier flights (including the Easyjet flights by the sounds of it), or a circuitous service bus takes you via the villages in around an hour.



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The bus from the airport terminates at the bus station, which is conveniently right in front of the shiny white railway station, a little to the north of the city centre.

And speaking of a city centre, it's a little hard to pin down. The main north-south artery is Slovenska Cesta (if you come out of the station's front door and turn right, it's the massive road you'll come to after a few minutes – turn left to head to the centre). Slovenska heads past the Best Western Slon hotel to Kongresni Trg (Congress Square), which is pretty central as far as geography goes, but the actual heart of the city seems to lie in Prešernov Trg, in front of the pink Franciscan Church and the elaborate Triple Bridge. Although this area seems old-town-ish, the actual Old Town is over the bridge and to the right, down Mestni Trg (which leads into Stari Trg, neither of which are actually squares).

Things to see and do

Ljubljana and it's surrounds offer plenty to do. With the country's compact size, day trips to the likes of Bled and even Pirana on the Adriatic Coast are possible. Here's a few things we did, and a few things we'd try to do if we went back

- **Tourist Train** – more fun that it sounds. This staple tourist trap of Eastern European city centre sight-seeing circular trips is actually put to good use in Ljubljana, taking the strain of the trip up to the castle and then coming back every hour to pick you up again (if you've invested wisely in a return ticket). It goes at a fair pelt (for this kind of contraption, anyway), and isn't adverse to tilting at some of the sharper corners.
- **Union Brewery Tour** – this is best sorted before you go, as the brewery is only open one day a month by standard. A combined tour of the dedicated brewing museum and the actual production area was followed by a prolonged tasting session in the brewery tap, courtesy of our friendly guides Helena, Tina and Branko. You really can't miss the brewery – it's the massive grey cube on the outskirts of the city centre.



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- **Ljubljanski Hrad (The Castle)** – towering over the city, Ljubljana's castle offers great views (especially from the top of the tower), as well as a few tourist craft shops, a café and an 3D presentation of Ljubljana's history from Roman settlement times.
- **Bled (part of a day trip)** – we had this organised for us, but it's quite easy to get a train or a bus. Bled is famous for it's beautiful lake, and the gondolas that take people to the island church (no time for that for us), and for it's scenic castle perched high on a cliff overlooking the town – it looks better from afar than the up-close reality, but it does offer the chance to bottle your own wine and take it away with you (for around £6). Apparently, there's also an all-year bobsleigh run for anyone mental enough to give it a go.
- **Postojna Jama (caves)** – often offered as part of a day trip itinerary from the capital, we had to make our own way and did this by catching a bus and then walking the mile or so to the cave complex. A wee train takes you a couple of miles into the depths, then an hour-long tour (in a choice of languages, English included) finishes with a plug for an over-priced restaurant. Skip this bit and eat at Pizzeria Minutka in the town instead (unless you've been shipped in by tour bus).

What we didn't do, but would have liked to:

- **Stadium** – the graffiti covered football stadium, complete with column architecture, is on Dunajska Cesta to the north of the centre (carry straight on up Slovenska and don't turn right for the station) in the run-down, studenty Bežigrad area. Home to the "Green Dragons", originally Olimpia Ljubljana, but now possibly still appearing as FK Bežigrad following a financial scandal.
- **Railway museum** – because I like trains. Okay? It's near the brewery, but subject to weird opening hours so check locally.
- **Tobacco museum** – a more unusual one this. Again, check locally.
- **River cruise** – depending on what time of year you're there, wee canal-type boats may be playing the narrow waters of the Ljubjanica River.



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- **Krakovo & Trnovo suburbs** – supposedly nice areas to the south of the city centre.
- **More pubs** – we only scratched the surface, and never made it to the rumoured rooftop bar somewhere above a shopping centre on Slovenska. See below for the ones we did make it to.

Places to drink

- It's worth mentioning a little bit about Slovene beers at this juncture. In the green corner, the goat-labelled Lasko Zlatorog (it's actually a "mystical chamois" from the sticks, and in the red corner, LJ's own Union Pivo. As well as standard Union, you can also track down the chocolate/coffee-ish Crni Baron and the excellent dry Union Pils (you may have to look closely for that one – it comes in milk-bottle style bottles). Lasko's Zlatorog is often bottled, however their real gem is the excellent Lasko Temno, a dark and very tasty beer. Shots-wise, the locals like a schnapps, and one of the weirdest is viljemovka, where a pear grows inside a bottle before having brandy added. Of course, this doesn't stop it tasting like lighter fluid.
- **Cutty Sark** – in a small passageway (Knafijev prehod) near Prešernov Trg, this is the quintessential Brit-themed pub. Rammed full of young Slovenes, it's a good bet for mixing with the locals and proved to be Tartan Army HQ when we were in town.
 - **Holidays Pub** – right next to a travel agent on Slovenska (two doors up from the Slon hotel), the small yet immensely popular Holidays is well worth a visit. A great choice of beers, including draught Guinness and the similar, yet far superior Lasko Temno.
 - **Grunf Bar** – two doors further up from Holidays is the lower-key, quiet yet friendly Grunf Bar, named after a famous cartoonist.
 - **Sir Williams** – a good effort at an English pub, but with a better choice of beers. Bedecked with flags of the world and very welcoming, even if not quite big enough (and with ceilings that are too high!). To be found across the Miklosicev Park on the corner of Tavcarjeva ul.



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- **Gaudi Café** – small, cosy yet quirky designer café in the precincted Copova ul, right around the corner from the Slon.
- **Kratchowill** – a very capable brew-pub and pizzeria, hamstrung by an awkward location (opposite the station in Kolodvoska ul), but still worth seeking out for some very good unfiltered beer. Large outdoor seating area at the front for warmer weather.
- **Collegium** – a small, unpretentious local bar, directly opposite the cathedral on Ciriil-Metodov trg.
- **Sokol** – mainly a restaurant, and famed for it's mushroom soup served in a crusty roll (the pršut cured ham is also pretty special), it does have a small bar area to the left of the main entrance. The house beers (light and dark) is actually brewed by Adam Ravbar, a micro-brewery from a village between the city and the airport.
- **Mokarabia** – more a cosy coffee shop than an outright bar, this wee corner establishment is one side-street up from the right bank of the Cobblers Bridge. Does serve the excellent bottled dark beer Crni Baron.
- **Marinšek** – an honourable mention for this Naklo brewpub, which is really only worth mentioning in case you happen to be driving between Ljubljana and Bled. Excellent unfiltered beer and good food.

Was this guide useful? Please let me know:
paul@netleyabbeytartanarmy.com



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