

# Slovenia national day

## Many reasons to fall in love with small gem of a nation

SPIRIT SLOVENIA, SLOVENIAN TOURIST BOARD

Each year on June 25 the citizens of the Republic of Slovenia celebrate one of their most important national holidays — States Day. This holiday is also referred to as the Day of Slovenian Sovereignty and it commemorates the day when in 1991 Slovenia declared its independence and separated from Yugoslavia. The Declaration of Independence and sovereignty was proclaimed in the center of Slovenia's capital the following day at the Republic Square where commemorative concerts and events are held each year. Slovenia became a full member of the United Nations on May 22, 1992, and in May 2004 the country joined the European Union.

It is the only country in Europe that combines the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Pannonian Plain and the Karst. The changing landscape is constantly surprising, time and again. You can have one eye on the sea, then

look in the other direction and be surrounded by high mountains. This proximity of opposites and contrasts is a hallmark of the country.

It is also the only country in the world with the word "love" hidden in its name and Slovenia is without a doubt a small gem that is easy to fall in love with. This small green country measures 20,273 sq. km in area, which is roughly the size of Shikoku. It is a home to about 2 million hospitable people that speak their own national language — Slovene (Slovenian). Although being very proud of their own language, most Slovenes, especially the younger generations, speak at least one or two foreign languages.

Almost 60 percent of Slovenia is forested, which means it is the third most forested country in Europe. More than a third of the land is protected, and included in Europe's Natura 2000 network, which protects biodiversity. Slovenia is one of the most biodiverse countries in Europe and also rich with cultural land-

marks. Probably one of the most widely recognized landmark images of Slovenia is the image of Lake Bled. This emerald green lake is surrounded by the magnificent Julian Alps. Almost at the center of the lake there is a small island with St. Mary's Church standing on top of it. There are many traditions connected with this island; for example, it is believed that if you ring the church bell your wish will come true. On the top of a cliff overlooking the lake boasts Bled Castle, one of the oldest castles in Slovenia. But Lake Bled is only one of many magnificent treasures of Slovenia. If you love nature and hiking you will have countless choices to enjoy it in Triglav National Park.

The coastal region also has many unforgettable charms, such as the romantic port city of Piran, also the birthplace of the famous composer Giuseppe Tartini. Or the Secovlje Salt pans where the method of gathering the salt rich with minerals remains unchanged for over 700 years. Slovenia is also the birth-

place of the famous Lippizaner breed of white horses, first bred in Lipica in 1580. Not only is the land surface very invigorating, there are also wonders underground: some of the country's 9,000 karstic caves are among the most beautiful in the world. The most famous, Postojna Cave, is also the most visited cave in Europe. Skocjanc Caves on the other hand are recognized for the unique nature and listed as a world natural heritage by UNESCO.

Everywhere you go in Slovenia you can be pleasantly surprised by tasty and varied dishes. Slovenia's varied cuisine developed at the meeting place of influences from the cuisines of the Mediterranean, the Pannonian plain, the Alps and the Balkans. The popular dishes vary from prosciutto ham to fresh fish dishes on the coast to delicious cheese, bread and homemade sausages in the Alpine region.

There are many cultural and business links between Slovenia and Japan and there is a strong

interest to deepen the mutual relations and connections in the future as well. Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relationship between Japan and Slovenia. The most recent notable event of such kind was the visit of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Borut Pahor and the business delegation to Japan in March. The president met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Possibilities of deepening cooperation on various levels have been discussed. A memorandum of cooperation between SPIRIT, the Slovenian public agency and JETRO, was also signed. The president also paid a visit to His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito. At the time of the publication of this article Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino are visiting Slovenia.

There is even a culinary common ground between Slovenia and Japan, and it comes in the form of buckwheat. In Japan buckwheat flour is mainly used



**Majestic: Mount Triglav is the highest mountain in Slovenia and the national symbol.** K.KUNAVER/  
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to make the soba noodles however in Slovenia buckwheat grain is usually cooked in risotto-type dishes, such as buckwheat with porcini mushrooms. Buckwheat bread is also popular among Slovenes. If you are a fan of buckwheat you will have an excellent opportunity to taste a variety of Slovenian buckwheat dishes at the International Buckwheat Festival in Horokanai (Hokkaido) between Aug. 30 and Sept. 1. We invite you to feel, experience and taste Slovenia!

## Congratulations on the 22nd Anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia

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