

## About Bled

Slovenia only has one island, but this is more attractive than many archipelagos. It reigns in the middle of an Alpine lake, embraced by a necklace of majestic peaks. Its charm is a centuries-old symbol of a place which has been frequented by curious travellers for decades.

Thousands of opportunities await cosmopolitan seekers of beauty, relaxation, inspiration, peace or sporting challenges. Romantic walks or a carriage ride around the lake, a traditional pletna-boat ride to the idyllic church on Bled Island, a visit to the imposing castle, which towers on a sheer cliff above the lake, the nearby ski slopes, alpine paths, golf courses, fishing or the casino – these are just a few of the attractions of Bled. Whoever experiences them, longs for them.



### Attractions of Bled

#### 'Fijakarji' - Horse-drawn carriage drivers

You may choose to take a carriage ride around the lake or to Bled Castle. Other excursions are possible to such places as the Vintgar gorge, through Gorje, Podhom, Zasip, Mlino, Selo, Ribno, Bodešče or Koritno villages, or alternatively to the golf courses or Šobec. By arrangement, the 'fijakarji' will also take you further afield to Begunje, Draga, Kropa or Bohinj.

The carriage stand is at the Festival Hall (Tel. (04) 574 11 21).



#### Traditional 'pletna'-boat rides to the island

The island church with its wishing bell is attractive for every visitor. You will be carried to the only Slovenian island by the unique Bled 'pletna', an old-fashioned wooden rowing boat.

The first 'pletna' was built around 1590. The appearance of the boats remains the same, although the original woven rooves, from which the 'pletna' gets its name (pletena – woven) have been replaced by a more practical linen roof that protects you from the sun and rain.



A 'pletna' can carry up to 20 guests. The pleasant journey across the lake includes a half-hour visit to the island (or longer by arrangement). If you have visited Bled, but have never had a 'pletna' ride, you have not really experienced Bled.



The skilled boatmen await you at the Health Park, below the Park Hotel, at Mlino and at the rowing centre. Other boat trips across the lake are available by arrangement (information: 031 316 575).

#### Cream cakes: Kremsnite

Cream cakes are a symbol of Bled cuisine, which have been well-known to visitors for decades. This light dessert is available in practically every patisserie, coffee house and restaurant in Bled, but there is only one original cream cake. Ivan Lukačević, a former

chef of the patisserie of the Park Hotel, spent some time testing various recipes and was finally successful. It is in this patisserie where the true and original cream cakes are still baked and sold at the café opposite the Park Hotel on the shores of Lake Bled as well as other outlets of this hotel.

### **Bled Island**

The island in the middle of Lake Bled is without doubt one of the premier attractions of the area, which surprises and charms every visitor. It is verdant with greenery up to and including the buildings themselves. Many legends exist connected to the island, one of which is described in the masterpiece of the finest Slovene poet France Prešeren. The legend relates that a temple used to stand on the island, dedicated to Živa, the Slavic goddess of love, and protected by Bogomila and Staroslav.

Experts have reconstructed the architectural development of the island church of St. Mary of the Assumption. In the early Middle Ages where the church stands today, there was a pre-Christian, probably old Slavic place of worship. 124 graves containing skeletons dating from the 9th to the 11th centuries have been discovered on the island. The foundations of a Pre-Romanesque chapel were laid in this period. In all likelihood this building reflects the work of Pavlin, the Patriarch of Aquilea, a contemporary of Charlemagne.

The first traces of Brixen rule on the island are the foundations of the Romanesque chapel, built on the site of the Pre-Romanesque. The three-nave basilica, whose foundations are clearly visible and well-preserved, was probably built in the middle of the 12th century.

The single-nave Gothic church with its large free-standing belfry was built on the southern side in 1465, when Sigmund Lamberg, the first Bishop of Ljubljana consecrated the new presbytery and the main altar.

The free-standing belfry is a special feature, as it shows the typical influence of the Venetian school. The belfry is 52 m in height and is characterised by its Gothic arch above the entrance, which was built in the 14th to 15th centuries from stone known as buckwheat grain due to its numerous holes.

On the site of the Gothic church a Pre-Baroque church was built in the middle of the 17th century, and then reconstructed in 1685. The three side altars made of black marble are the work of the Ljubljana stonemasons M. Cusse and F. Ferrata. The images by an unknown master reflect the Venetian school of the 17th century. The fourth side altar, dedicated to St. Ana dates from the end of the 17th century, and the image within it is from the Layer workshop in Kranj. The Baroque main altar has richly gilded



carvings and dates from the 1740's. The altar sculptures represent the donors of the Bled lands, Emperor Henry II and his wife Kunigunda. The wooden reliefs on the altar table and the tabernacle are from the second half of the 19th century. The church was renovated in 1972.

A special feature of the island church is the wishing bell, which attracts many tourists. It was manufactured in Padova in 1534. The bells in the belfry date from the first half of the 18th century. The other buildings and the protective walls were finally completed in the 17th century.

The monumental staircase with 99 stone steps leading to the top of the island was built in 1655. It remains traditional at weddings on the island that the groom should carry his bride up all 99 steps.

A well was constructed on the island in 1888, commissioned by Windischgraetz to the memory of a princess who had died at an early age. The water comes from a natural spring and is drinkable.

The church was saved from destruction by the fact it financially supported a primary school which was one of the first in Slovenia. The Emperor Joseph II hated churches and monasteries to the extent that he had many closed or demolished until the Pope himself asked him to desist. In 1809 Bled fell under French control. Due to lack of financial resources the French soon began to take hay from the farmers and also removed the bells from the island, apart from the wishing bell.



## Bled Castle

### History:

The oldest castle in Slovenia stands on a sheer cliff above Lake Bled. It was first mentioned in writing in 1011, when the German Emperor Henry II donated it to the Bishop of Brixen. It is highly likely that, at that time, on the land where the castle stands today there was simply a Romanesque tower surrounded by a protective wall. Additional towers were constructed and the fortification system was perfected in the High Middle Ages. The entrance to the castle is particularly interesting due to its Gothic arch and drawbridge across a now filled-in moat. Construction of the castle complex was completed with the addition of various buildings in the Baroque period.

The foundations of the castle are in two parts. The inner part comprises residential quarters and a Gothic chapel, while the outer part consists of administrative buildings, protected by a high Romanesque wall with defensive battlements, an entrance tower and an imposing Gothic defensive tower.

The most interesting of the remaining buildings is certainly the chapel on the upper courtyard, dedicated to the Bishop St. Albuin and to St. Ingenuin. It was first constructed in the 16th century.



Baroque elements and illusionist frescoes were added around 1700. There are images of the donors of the Bled lands, the German Emperor Henry II and his wife Kunigunda next to the altar.

Fragments of the collapsed Gothic arch are incorporated in the wall of the neighbouring building, which nowadays houses a museum. Numerous coats of arms, either painted as frescoes or carved into the stone, embellish individual castle buildings. After the roof of the castle had been destroyed by fire in 1947, and during the first post-war archaeological excavations in Bled in 1948, the National Museum suggested the conservation of the castle complex. Between 1951 and 1961 the castle was thus renovated and supplementary architectural details were added.

### **Bled Castle today**

Bled Castle today attracts visitors with its age, the picturesque architecture and an unforgettable view across Lake Bled and the wider area. The ancient history of Bled and the different stages of the development of Bled Castle are portrayed in the building next to the chapel. The ambience of the castle is enhanced in summer months with the reception of the Lord of the Manor, as well as an archery tournament. The castle herb gallery and printing press are also on display.

### **Opening hours:**

Museum: March – November: 8.00 – 19.00

November – March: 9.00 – 16.00

Restaurant: 10.00 – 22.00

Castle herb gallery: Saturdays and Sundays: 10.00 – 13.00 or by arrangement



### **The Lake**

The lake, which is tectonic in nature, was formed when the Bohinj glacier receded. It is 2,120 m long, 1,380 m wide and up to 30.6 m deep.

The lake has no larger natural inflows other than a few small springs. The thermal springs in the north-eastern part of the lake supply water to the swimming pools of the Grand Hotel Toplice, the Park Hotel and the Golf Hotel.



### **Vintgar Gorge**

The River Radovna cut a 1.6 km gorge, called Vintgar, between Hom and Boršt. The Vintgar gorge is surrounded by steep slopes, densely forested with beech and embellished by the waterfalls, pools and rapids of the river.

Although the gorge is very close to Gorje and only 4 km northwest of Bled, it has been long unknown to the people. It was discovered by accident in 1891 by Jakob Žumer, the then mayor of Gorje and



by Benedikt Lergertporer, a map maker and photographer from Bled at a time when the water level of the Radovna was very low.

On their journey through the previously impassable gorge they were so stunned by the beauty and the mystery of nature that they decided to make it permanently accessible to visitors. Construction was extremely hazardous due to the wild nature of the gorge. The official opening of the Vintgar gorge took place on August 26 1893.

Echoes of the swiftly flowing water fill the narrow gorge, which nowadays may be enjoyed by walking one of the paths, the numerous bridges and the Žumer galleries. Every visitor who walks to the end of the gorge is rewarded by the sight of the 16 m high Šum waterfall. The Vintgar gorge has been included in the list of most important Slovenian sights and attracts more and more visitors each year.

A visit to the gorge may be combined with an excursion to Sv. Katarina Hill with its historic church and an outstanding view. Drinks are available at the entrance and at the Šum waterfall. Car and bus access is possible to the car park in front of the entrance. The gorge is closed in winter.



#### **Grimsice Manor**

The manor, set in the natural park at Rečica, used to be in the ownership of the barons of Grimšic, among whom Jurij Adam Grimschitz, co-founder of the Carniolan Academy of Sciences 'Academia operosorum' in Ljubljana is especially well-known.



#### **The Area Around Bled**

Bled offers countless short trips for lovers of nature. The Vintgar gorge is an ideal place of refreshment on hot summer days. Nearby Pokljuka is a paradise for hikers and mushroom pickers in summer, while in winter it becomes a premier location for cross-country skiing, and hosts important world biathlon competitions. Bohinj will captivate you with its unspoilt glacial lake, set in a necklace of mountains that lights up in a panoply of a thousand colours in autumn.

In the immediate vicinity of Bled, there are numerous historically important places and cultural treasures. Begunje is not only well-known for its ski factory, but also for its many hidden cultural pearls. The village of Vrba is one of the most important landmarks in Slovenian cultural history as it was the birthplace of the most prominent Slovene poet, France Prešeren. Should you wish to take a walk through an old medieval town, visit Radovljica, where you may also look around a very interesting museum of apiculture. Brezje, a few kilometres from Radovljica, is the most important



<p>place of pilgrimage in Slovenia with its 15 th century basilica. Kropa used to be a centre of iron making and today its rich tradition is on display at the Forgers' Museum. There are possibilities in abundance; simply decide where to start!</p>	
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