

Dolenjska & Bela Krajina



'Lower Carniola' is a gentle area of rolling hills, vineyards, forests and the Krka River flowing southeastward into Croatia. Those white hilltop churches with their red-tile roofs you'll see everywhere once protected the people from the marauding Turks and other invaders; the ones on the flat lands are newer – built in the baroque style and painted the mustard colour ('Maria Theresa yellow') so common in Central Europe.

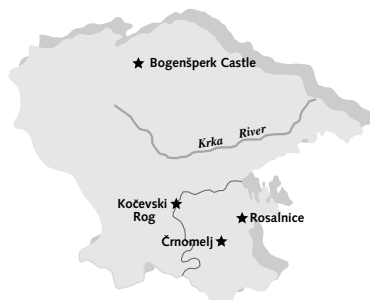
There's something of a dichotomy in the way the rest of Slovenia views Dolenjci, the natives of the charming Dolenjska province. On the one hand they are portrayed in comic sketches and literature as being unsophisticated, even dull-witted, country bumpkins. On the other hand, many people say that the 'purest' Slovene is spoken in Dolenjska – around the village of Rašica, south of the town of Krka, to be precise.

The E6 and E7 European Hiking trails pass through Dolenjska, and there are lots of chances to do some kayaking or canoeing on the Krka. The province is also the cycling centre of Slovenia and famous for its thermal spas.

Bela Krajina, the 'White March' of southeastern Slovenia, is separated from Dolenjska by the scenic Gorjanci mountain range. The province, which takes its name from the countless stands of birch trees dotting the province, is a treasure trove of Slovenian folklore, and, if you're lucky, you'll see more traditional dance and hear more music here than anywhere else in the country, particularly around Črnomelj and Adlešiči.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Go cycling along the picturesque **valley** (p198) of the Krka River
- Go on safari with a camera in the virgin forests of **Kočevski Rog** (p202)
- Walk back in time at **Bogenšperk Castle** (p197), especially in the late great Janez Vajkard Valvasor's study
- Make a pilgrimage to the **Three Parishes** (p218) churches in Rosalnice near Metlika
- Enjoy the almost medieval merrymaking of the **Jurjevanje** (p220) festival in Črnomelj in mid-June



History

Dolenjska was settled early on and is well known for its Hallstatt (early Iron Age) ruins, especially near Stična, Šmarjeta and Novo Mesto. The Romans made the area part of the province of Upper Pannonia (Pannonia Superior) and built roads connecting Emona (Ljubljana) with smaller settlements.

In the Middle Ages, the people of Dolenjska clustered around the many castles along the Krka (eg at Žužemberk and Otočec), and monasteries sprang up at Stična, Kostanjevica na Krki and near Šentjernej. Dolenjska declined after the Middle Ages and progress only came in the late 19th century when a railway line linked Novo Mesto with Ljubljana.

Like Dolenjska, Bela Krajina is famous for its Hallstatt and Roman sites; a 3rd-century shrine to the god Mithra near the village of Rožanec (p221) is one of the best preserved in Europe. In the Middle Ages, Bela Krajina was the remotest part of Slovenia, and in some ways it still feels like that. Many of the peasant uprisings of the 15th and 16th centuries started here or across the border in Croatia.

DOLENJSKA

The castles along the Krka River in Dolenjska are some of the best preserved in Slovenia, as are the many monasteries and abbeys. Keep an eye out for Dolenjska's distinctive *toplarji* (double hayracks).

RIBNICA

☎ 01 / pop 3490 / elev 489m

Though Ribnica is the oldest and most important settlement of western Dolenjska and just over the hills from the border with Notranjska, people in this region have traditionally affiliated with neither province. As far as they are concerned, this is Kočevsko, a forested, sparsely inhabited area with a unique history.

Ribnica was an important feudal centre during the Middle Ages and was ruled by a succession of lords, including the Counts of Celje, before the Habsburgs arrived. Like neighbouring Notranjska and Bela Krajina to the southeast, Kočevsko suffered greatly from the Turkish invasions of the 15th century.

Orientation

Ribnica's main street, Škrabčev trg, lies on the east bank of the tiny Bistrica River and runs

parallel to it. Buses stop in front of the Parish Church of St Stephen.

Information

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Škrabčev trg 9b; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Southeast of the Church of St Stephen.

Post office (Kolodvorska ulica 2)

Tourist Information Centre Ribnica (☎ 836 93 35, 051-415 429; turizem.ribnica@siol.net; Škrabčev trg 23; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Sights

On the west bank of the Bistrica, **Ribnica Castle** (Ribniški Grad; Gallusovo nabrežje 1) was originally built in the 11th century but was transformed and expanded over the centuries. Only a small section – a Renaissance wall and two towers – survived bombings during WWII. Today the castle houses a small **ethnographic collection** (☎ 835 03 76, 041-390 057; adult/child/student €1.70/0.85/1.25; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) showcasing the traditional woodcrafts and pottery made in the area. The castle, set in an attractive semicircular park with memorial statues and markers to Slovenian greats, is a popular venue for weddings.

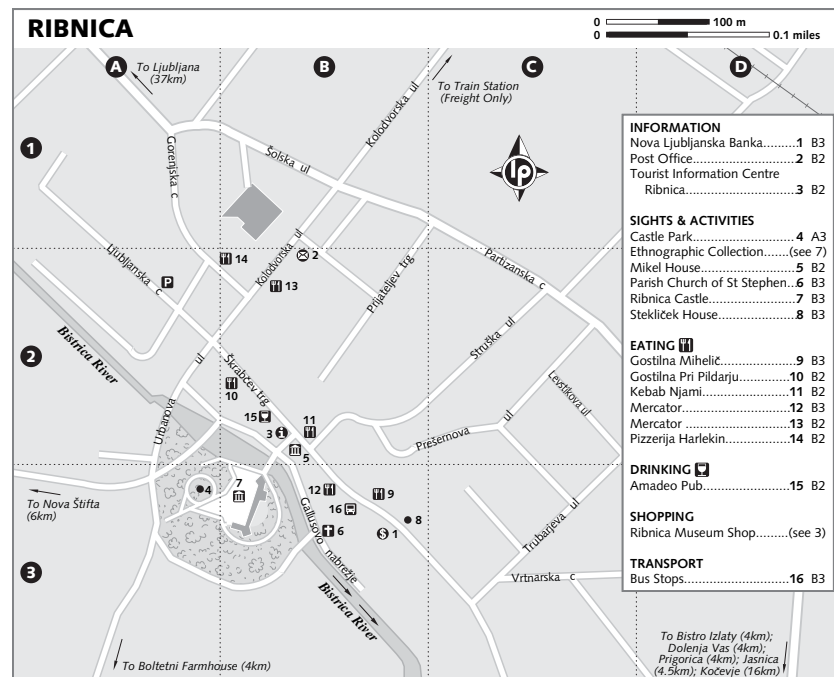
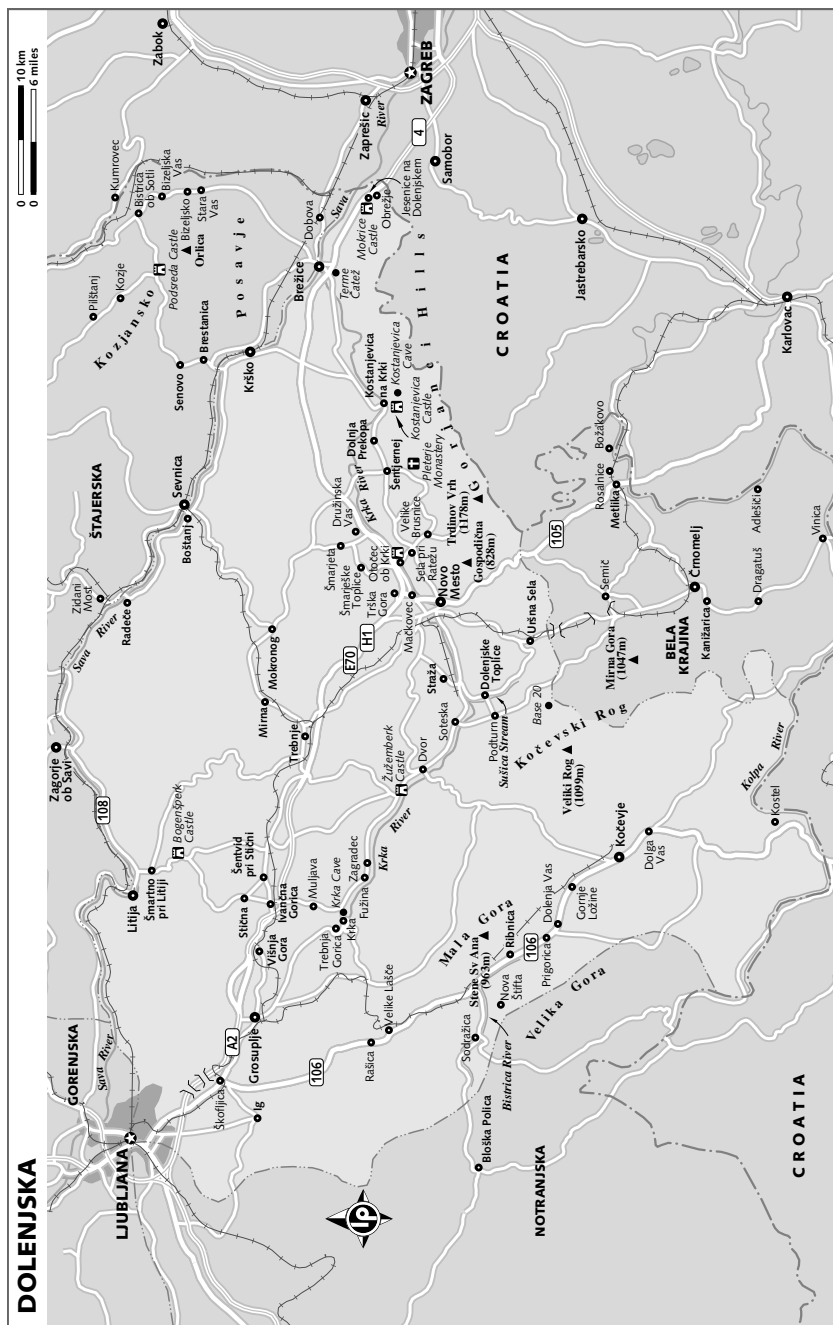
The **Parish Church of St Stephen** (Župnijska Cerkev Sv Štefana; Škrabčev trg), built in 1868 on the site of earlier churches, would not be of much interest were it not for the two striking towers added by Jože Plečnik in 1960 to replace the ones toppled during WWII.

Opposite the church is **Šteklíček House** (Šteklíčkova Hiša; Škrabčev trg 16); the plaque attached to it explains that the 19th-century poet and patriot France Prešeren spent two years here (1810–12) in what was then the region's best-known school.

The gallery at **Mikel House** (Miklova Hiša; ☎ 835 03 76; Škrabčev trg 21; admission free; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm), a lovely cream-and-white building dating from 1858, is renowned for its cutting-edge exhibitions of contemporary art.

Activities

Ribnica is the base for many excellent walks. A well-marked 'science education trail' leads north of the town for about 4.5km to the summit of **Stene Sv Ana** (963m), with fantastic views over the Ribnica Valley; ask the tourist office for a copy of the *Natural Heritage of Ribnica* pamphlet. Along the way you'll pass the entrance to France Cave and the hilltop Church of St Anne (930m).



From the Jasnica recreational centre (on the way to Kočevje), where horses are available for hire, a more difficult path leads north about 6km to the junction with the Ribnica Alpine Trail. This joins up with the E7 European Hiking Trail about 5km west of Velike Lašče.

A trail into the Velika Gora ridge west of Ribnica that leads to a comfortable mountain hut is more easily accessible from Nova Stifca (p196).

Festivals & Events

Ribnica's main event is the **Dry Goods and Pottery Fair** (Ribniški Semenji Suhe Robe in Lončarstva; www.ribnica.si) held on the first Sunday in September, though most of the weekend is given over to music, drinking and, of course, buying and selling.

Sleeping

Bistro Izlaty (☎ 836 40 45; Prigonica 115; s/d €18/28; P) This small eatery 4km southeast of Ribnica on the road to Kočevje and less than 1km from the pottery village of Dolenja Vas has basic but comfortable accommodation.

Boltetni Farmhouse (☎ 836 02 08, 041-898 034; Dane 9; per person €21; ☹ May-Sep; P ☒) This engaging

farmhouse at Dane, an 'end-of-the-line' village 4km west of Ribnica, offers accommodation in three rooms and is about the best place to stay in the area.

Eating & Drinking

Kebab Njami (Škrabčev trg 36; dishes €1-2.80; ☹ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun) This little hole-in-the-wall that stays awake while the rest of Ribnica sleeps sells kebabs and burgers.

Pizzerija Harlekin (☎ 836 15 32; Gorenjska cesta 4; pizzas €3.10-4.60; ☹ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat) North of the centre, this convenient night owl serves pizzas and salads.

Gostilna Mihelič (☎ 836 31 31; Škrabčev trg 22; set menus €4.50-18.60; ☹ 9am-10pm Tue-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun) This place opposite the Church of St Stephen is one of the very few central places for a proper meal in Ribnica.

Gostilna Pri Pildarju (☎ 836 25 49; Škrabčev trg 27; meals from €12; ☹ 8am-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) A few doors up from the tourist office, this cosy gostilna (innlike restaurant) is the most salubrious place for a meal in Ribnica.

Amadeo Pub (Škrabčev trg 25; ☹ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7am-midnight Fri & Sat, 9am-midnight Sun) This convivial

DRY & SELL

Among the inhabitants of the Kočevsko region up until the early days of WWII were German speakers who had been brought there by feudal lords as early as the 15th century. Because the karst soil was too poor to make an adequate living from farming year-round, these Kočevjarji were allowed to supplement their income with wooden products (*suha roba*, literally 'dry goods') that they produced at home: pails, sifters, baskets, mangles and kitchen utensils. The men sold these products throughout the Habsburg Empire, and even the advent of the railway in 1893 did not put an immediate end to this itinerant way of life. Until well into the 20th century the sight of the *suha roba* pedlar – his products piled high on his *košnja* (wooden backpack) and staff in hand – was as Slovenian as a *kozolec* (hayrack). Woodcarving remains an important cottage industry today.

café-pub next door to the tourist office is a popular hang-out for young Ribničani.

There's a large **Mercator** (Kolodvorska ulica; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) supermarket next to the post office. A more central **Mercator** (Škrabčev trg 19; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 7-11am Sun) with extended hours is just up from the Church of St Stephen.

Shopping

Ribnica Museum Shop (Muzejska Trgovina Ribnica; ☎ 041-786 935; Škrabčev trg 23; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm, 9am-6pm Sat) This long-overdue shop sharing space with the tourist office sells all manner of *suha roba* (wooden products) produced in the area, as well as clay pottery and whistles from nearby Dolenja Vas. The tourist office can help you arrange visits to master craftspeople in the area, including wood carvers at Sajevec (house No 16) and Kot (house No 26) and pottery throwers in Prigorica and Dolenja Vas.

Getting There & Around

Buses run at least hourly north to Ljubljana (€5, one hour, 44km), and south to Kočevje (€2.60, 30 minutes, 19km). The infrequent bus to Sodražica (€1.70, 15 minutes, 9km) is good for stopping in Nova Štifta.

Ribnica is no longer served by passenger train. The Grosuplje–Kočevje line that passes through Ribnica handles freight only.

Ribnica is 16km northwest of the town of Kočevje, another gateway to Kočevski Rog (p202), and on highway No 106 to the Croatian port of Rijeka.

NOVA ŠTIFTA

☎ 01 / elev 300m

The **Church of the Assumption of Mary** (Cerkev Marije Vnebovzete; ☎ 836 99 43, 041-747 188; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-6pm) at Nova Štifta, in the foothills of the Velika Gora 6km west of Ribnica, is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Slovenia. Completed in 1671, the baroque church is unusual for its shape – both the nave and the presbytery are in the form of an octagon. The arcade on the west side fronting the entrance accommodated extra pilgrims on important holy days. The church proved so popular that the enclosed stairway on the north side was added in 1780 to allow even more of the faithful to reach the clerestory, the upper storey of the nave.

The interior of the church, with its three golden altars and pulpit carved by Jurij Skarnos, is blindingly ornate. Look for the painting of an aristocratic couple on stained glass on the north side of the presbytery. In the courtyard opposite the Franciscan monastery (where the church key is kept) stands a linden tree, planted in the mid-17th century, complete with a tree house that has been there for over a century.

Dom na Travnji Gori (☎ 836 63 33; Ravni Dol 10; per person €15), a guesthouse 890m up with restaurant and accommodation, can be reached in about 1½ hours on a marked trail heading southwest from Nova Štifta.

STIČNA

☎ 01 / pop 710 / elev 357m

The abbey at Stična is the oldest monastery in Slovenia and one of the country's most important religious and cultural monuments. At only 35km from Ljubljana, Stična can be visited on a day trip from the capital or en route to Novo Mesto, the valley of the lower Krka or Bela Krajina.

Orientation

The village of Stična is about 2.5km north of Ivančna Gorica (population 1570), where you'll find the train station (Sokolska

ulica 1). Long-distance buses stop in front of the station.

Sights

Stična Abbey (Štiški Samostan; ☎ 787 71 00, 787 72 95; www.2.pms-lj.si/sticna in Slovene; Stična 17; adult/student & child €3/1.70; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 2-5pm Sun, tours 8.30am, 10am, 2pm & 4pm Tue-Sat, 2pm & 4pm Sun) was established in 1136 by the Cistercians, a branch of the Benedictines who worked as farmers and observed a vow of silence. It became the most important religious, economic, educational and cultural centre in Dolenjska, but it was abandoned in 1784 when Emperor Joseph II dissolved all religious orders in the Habsburg Empire.

The Cistercians returned in 1898, and today almost the entire complex is again in use. There are currently some 15 priests and monks in residence.

The entrance to the walled monastery, an incredible combination of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance and baroque architecture, is on the east side across a small stream. On the north side of the central courtyard is the Old Prelature, a 17th-century Renaissance building, which contains the **Slovenian Religious Museum** (Slovenski Verski Muzej). Its permanent collection (History of Christianity in Slovenian) is on the 2nd floor. The museum is a hotchpotch of antique clocks, paintings, furniture and farm implements, mixed with chalices, monstrances and icons. There are a few 16th-century missals and medical texts in Latin and German, but all the medieval documents are facsimiles of the originals carted off to libraries in Vienna and Ljubljana when the order was disbanded.

On the west side of the courtyard the **Abbey Church** (1156) was built as a buttressed, three-nave Romanesque cathedral, but it was rebuilt in the baroque style in the 17th and 18th centuries. Look inside for the Renaissance red-marble tombstone of Abbot Jakob Reinprecht in the north transept and the blue organ cupboard with eight angels (1747) in the choir loft. The greatest treasures here are the Stations of the Cross painted in 1766 by Fortunat Bergant, who spelled his surname with a 'W' on the last one.

South of the church is Stična's celebrated vaulted cloister, which mixes Romanesque and early Gothic styles. The cloister served as an ambulatory for monks in prayer and connected the church with the monastery's other

wings. The arches and vaults are decorated with frescoes of the prophets and Old Testament stories as well as allegorical subjects such as the Virtues and the Four Winds. Look for the carved stone faces on the west side that were meant to show human emotions and vices – upon which the clergy were expected to reflect.

On the south side of the cloister is a typically baroque monastic refectory, with an 18th-century pink ceiling and decorative swirls and loops made of white stucco. **Neff's Abbey**, built in the mid-16th century by Abbot Volbenk Neff, runs to the west. The arches in the vestibule on the ground floor are painted with a dense network of leaves, blossoms, berries and birds.

The Cistercians sell their own products (honey, wine, herbal teas, liqueurs) in a small **shop** (☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) at the abbey entrance.

Sleeping & Eating

Grofija (☎ /fax 787 81 41; Vir pri Stični 30; per person €21; ☎ ☒) This 19th-century farmhouse called 'County' has four rooms and is 2km along a circuitous route southeast of the abbey.

Krjavcl (☎ 787 71 10; Ljubljanska cesta 38; pizza €3.35-5.80, mains €4.60-6.70; ☎ 10am-11pm Jun-Sep, 8am-10pm Oct-May) This little place in Ivančna Gorica, about 150m northeast of the train station and just off the road to the abbey, serves local favourites and quite decent pizza.

You'll find a small **Tuš** (Stična 27a; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat) supermarket just up the hill from the abbey. There's a much larger **Mercator** (Trg Of 1; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) in Ivančna Gorica just east of the train station.

Getting There & Away

Stična is served by up to a dozen buses a day from Ljubljana (€4.55, one hour, 38km) on weekdays, reducing to five on Saturday.

Ivančna Gorica is on the rail line linking Ljubljana with Novo Mesto, Črnomelj and Metlika. Up to 14 trains a day arrive from the capital (€2.65, one hour, 37km) with as many heading for Novo Mesto (€2.65, 45 minutes, 38km).

BOGENŠPERK CASTLE

☎ 01 / elev 172m

Just under 20km to the northeast of Stična is 16th-century **Bogenšperk Castle** (Grad Bogenšperk; ☎ 898 78 67, 041-703 992; www.bogensperk.si; Bogenšperk 5; adult/child/student €3/2.30/2.50; ☎ tours hourly 10am-

5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Apr-Oct; 9am-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). Here the celebrated Slovenian polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor spent the most productive two decades of his life, writing and eventually publishing *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* (1689), his encyclopaedic work on Slovenian history, geography and culture.

Valvasor bought the Renaissance-style castle from the aristocratic Wagen family in 1672, and installed his printing press, engraving workshop and extensive library here. But due to the enormous debts incurred in getting his magnum opus published, he was forced to sell up 20 years later.

The castle, with its rectangular courtyard and three towers (the fourth was struck by lightning and burned down in the 19th century), houses a museum devoted to the great man, his work and Slovenian culture. Valvasor's library is now used as a wedding hall (complete with a cradle, as is traditional in Slovenia), but his study, with its beautiful parquet, black limestone columns and painted ceiling, is pretty much the way he left it when he performed his last alchemy experiments here. Other rooms contain examples of Valvasor's original cartography and etching, an original four-volume set of his famous work, a printing press similar to

the one he used himself and a collection of hunting trophies, including a 362kg brown bear shot at Banjaloka in Kočevski Rog in 1978. The most interesting exhibits, however, are the ones that deal with folk dress (life-size mannequins sport costumes modelled exactly on Valvasor's illustrations), superstition and folk medicine.

Bogenšperk is accessible from Ivančna Gorica only by car or bicycle. Trains link Ljubljana with Litija (€2.65, 30 minutes, 31km, up to two dozen a day), but it's still another 7km south to Bogenšperk – much of it uphill.

KRKA VALLEY

The Krka River springs from a karst cave southwest of Stična, near the village of Trebnja Gorica, and runs to the southeast and east until it joins the mightier Sava River near Brežice. At 94km it is Dolenjska's longest and most important waterway.

If you are continuing on to other towns in Dolenjska and/or Bela Krajina and have your own transport – car, bicycle or four-legged beastie – the ideal way to go is to follow route No 216 along the Krka River, which cuts a deep and picturesque valley along its upper course. Infrequent buses from Ljubljana to Novo Mesto via Dolenjske Toplice follow this route.

VALVASOR, SLOVENIA'S RENAISSANCE MAN

Most of our knowledge of Slovenian history, geography, culture and folklore before the 17th century comes from the writings of one man, Janez Vajkard Valvasor, and more specifically his book *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*.

Valvasor, whose name comes from the *valvassores* (the burghers who lived in the towns of the Holy Roman Empire in the early Middle Ages), was born to a noble family from Bergamo in 1641, in Ljubljana's Old Town – a plaque marks the spot in Stari trg. After a Jesuit education there and in Germany, he joined Miklós Zrínyi, the Hungarian count and poet, in the wars against the Turks and travelled widely, visiting Germany, Italy, North Africa, France and Switzerland. He collected data on natural phenomena and local customs as well as books, drawings, mineral specimens and coins.

In 1672 Valvasor installed himself, his books and his precious collections at Bogenšperk Castle, where he conducted scientific experiments (including alchemy) and wrote. In 1689 he completed his most important work. Published in German at Nuremberg under the title *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain* it ran to four volumes, comprising 3500 pages with 535 maps and copper engravings. *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* remains one of the most comprehensive works published in Europe before the Enlightenment, a wealth of information on the Slovenian patrimony that is still explored and studied to this day.

As is so often the case with great men and women in history, Valvasor did not live to enjoy the success of his labour. Publishing such a large work at his own expense ruined him financially and he was forced to leave Bogenšperk in 1692. Valvasor died a year later at Krško, a town 65km to the east on the Sava River.

Muljava

☎ 01 / pop 270 / elev 320m

This picturesque town of double hayracks and beehives is about 5km south of Ivančna Gorica. Muljava was the birthplace of Josip Jurčič (1844–81), whose book *The 10th Brother* is considered the first novel in Slovene.

The **Church of the Assumption** (Cerkev Marijinega Vnebovzetja; ☎ 780 60 32) lies east of the main road at the start of the village; seek the key from the vicarage opposite and to the north at No 39. Not all of the paintings in the presbytery and on the vaulted arches (Cain and Abel making their sacrifices, symbols of the Apostles and St Margaret) are very clear, but the fresco depicting the death of the Virgin Mary on the south wall is still vibrant. The frescoes are signed by Johannes de Laibaco (John of Ljubljana) and dated from 1456.

The **Josip Jurčič Museum** (Muzej Josipa Jurčiča; ☎ 787 65 00; Muljava 11; adult/child/student €2.70/2.30/2.50; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun) is housed in the author's birthplace, a small cottage 250m west of the main road. South of the house is a well-preserved *kozolec* (hayrack), and a beehive with 28 still-vibrant painted *panjske končnice* (front panels) from the 19th century.

Gostilna Pri Obrščaku (☎ 787 63 81; Muljava 22; meals from €10; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) is a roadside *gostilna* in Muljava with a covered terrace, which serves up hearty Slovenian fare like *klobasa in zelje* (sausage with sauerkraut).

There's a **Mercator** (Muljava 21; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) supermarket in the heart of Muljava.

Krka Cave

☎ 01 / elev 268m

Two kilometres from the main road and just west of the village of Trebnja Gorica, **Krka Cave** (Krška Jama; ☎ 780 60 72, 041-276 252; Krka 4; adult/child/student €1.25/1/0.65; ☎ 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Sat & Sun) isn't in the same league as Postojna or Škocjan Caves, but along the 1.9km route (a bit more than half the total length) you get to see some stalactites shaped like ribbons and fragile-looking 'spaghetti' and a siphon lake that is the source of the Krka River. The usual depth of the lake is 17m, but in winter – depending on the rain and the snowfall – the lake can rise almost as high as the ceiling. The cave temperature is 8°C to 9°C.

There are a number of farmhouses offering accommodation in the valley for between €15

and €18 per person, including **Magovac** (☎ 780 60 49, Krka 13), which has 11 beds.

Žužemberk

☎ 07 / pop 1085 / elev 220m

About 17km from Muljava, this is the site of mighty **Žužemberk Castle** (☎ 388 51 81, 041-324 710; Grajski trg 1; ☎ by arrangement), which is perched on a cliff overlooking the Krka River. First mentioned in 1295, the castle was completely rebuilt and the old walls fortified with round towers in the 16th century, only to be all but flattened during air raids in WWII. Five squat towers have been rebuilt or partially reconstructed, and renovations continue apace. The Castle Cellar (Grajska Klet) is the venue for the **Summer Castle Performances** (Poletne Grajske Prireditve), a series of concerts held from June to September.

ACTIVITIES

The 9km stretch of the Krka from its mouth to Zagradec, about halfway to Žužemberk, is one of Slovenia's most popular **fishing** spots. The season lasts from March to late October, and permits, available from Gostilna Pri Gradu, cost €25 a day.

The fast-flowing Krka offers excellent **kayaking** and **canoeing**, and Žužemberk is a good spot from which to set out. Any of the following outfits can kit you out:

Carpe Diem (☎ 780 60 11; Krka 27) In Krka.

Rafting Klub Gimpex Straža (☎ 384 75 36, 031-723 922; www.rafting-gimpex.com in Slovene; Stara Cesta 1) In Straža, 12km to the southeast of Žužemberk.

Žužemberk Kayak and Canoe Club (☎ 308 70 55, 031-556 641; Prapreče 1a) 1km northwest of Žužemberk.

SLEEPING & EATING

Koren (☎ 308 72 60; www.turizem-koren.si; Dolga Vas 5; per person €15) This farmhouse in Dolga Vas near Žužemberk has accommodation for 14 people in five rooms and one apartment.

Gostilna Pri Gradu (☎ 308 72 90; Grajski trg 4; starters €3.75-7.50, mains €8-10.80; ☎ 6am-11pm Sun-Thu, 6am-midnight Fri & Sat) This old-style eatery under a linden in front of the castle has a terrace open in the warmer months.

There's a **Mercator** (Grajski trg 26; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 8-11am Sun) wedged between the Gostilna Pri Gradu and the castle.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The bus stop is in front of the post office at Grajski trg 28. Up to four buses a day go to

Ljubljana (€5.80, 1½ hours, 53km) on weekdays, with one on Saturday and Sunday. From Monday to Friday two buses a day depart at 4.55am and 8.15am for Novo Mesto (€3, 30 minutes, 22km), but there's only one at 9.15am on Saturday.

DOLENJSKE TOPLICE

☎ 07 / pop 740 / elev 176m

Within striking distance of Novo Mesto (13km to the northeast), this thermal resort is the oldest and one of the few real spa towns in Slovenia. Located in the karst valley of the Krka River below the wooded slopes of Kočevski Rog, Dolenjske Toplice is an excellent place to hike, cycle, fish or simply relax.

History

Although the curative powers of the thermal springs were known as early as the 14th century, the first spa was not built here until 1658 when Ivan Vajkard, a member of the aristocratic Auersperg family, opened the Prince's Bath. The Kopaljski Dom (Bathers' House), complete with three pools, was built in the late 18th century when the first

chemical analysis of the thermal waters was done. Within a century, Dolenjske Toplice (Strascha Töplitz) had 30 rooms, basic medical facilities and its very own guidebook, but tourism did not really take off until 1899, with the opening of the Zdraviliški Dom (Health Resort House).

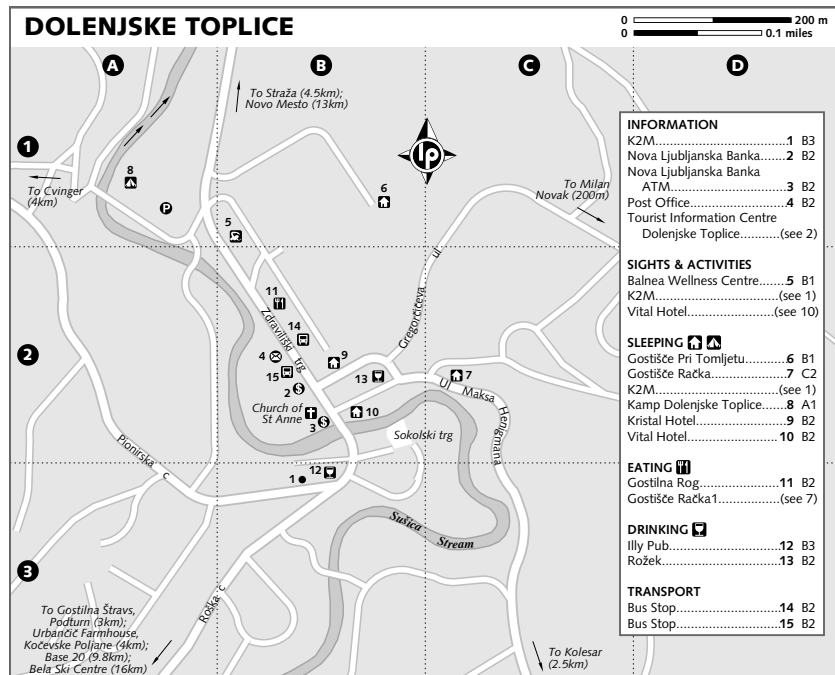
Orientation

Dolenjske Toplice lies about 1.5km south of the Krka River on an undulating stream called the Sušica. Virtually everything – including the two hotels of the thermal resort – are on or just off the main street, Zdraviliški trg. Buses stop here just south of or opposite the post office. Dolenjske Toplice is not on a rail line.

Information

Dolenjska Health Resort (Zdravilišče Dolenjske Toplice; ☎ 391 94 00; www.krka-terme.si) Central contact for hotel and camping-ground bookings, beauty and medical treatments and so on.

K2M (☎ 306 68 30, 041-887 362; www.k2m.si; Pionirska cesta 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Travel agency with private rooms, guides and local maps.



Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Zdraviliški trg 8; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Shares a building with the tourist office; ATM south of the Church of St Anne.

Post office (Zdraviliški trg 3; ☎ 8-9.30am & 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information Centre Dolenjske Toplice

(☎ 384 51 88; www.dolenjske-toplice.si; Zdraviliški trg 8; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun mid-Jun-Sep; 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun Oct-mid-Jun)

Activities

THERMAL SPA

Taking the waters is the *sine qua non* of Dolenjske Toplice: the warm mineral water (32°C to 38°C) gushing from 1000m below the two covered thermal pools at the **Vital Hotel** (☎ 391 94 00; www.krka-terme.si; Zdraviliški trg 11; nonguests Mon-Fri 8.35-9.60, Sat & Sun 9.20-10.50; ☎ 7am-8pm) is ideal for such ailments as rheumatism, and can avert backache. The health resort also offers any number of other therapies, from underwater massage (€14.30) to detox aromatherapy (€21).

The indoor and outdoor thermal pools in the **Laguna** (Lagoon; ☎ 391 97 50; day pass Mon-Fri adult/child €8.75/6.70, Sat & Sun €10.50/8.35) section of the large **Bailea Wellness Centre** (☎ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, 8am-11pm Fri & Sat) are 300m north of the hotels, reached via a lovely park. In the **Oaza** (Oasis; day pass Mon-Fri/Sat & Sun €13/14.60) section of the centre are a host of indoor and outdoor saunas and steam baths. The **Aura** section has massage and treatments. Hotel guests pay €4.20/7 for Laguna/Oaza and there are combination tickets available.

HIKING

A number of walks and bike paths of less than 5km can be accessed from Dolenjske Toplice, or you might consider hiking in the virgin forests of Kočevski Rog (p202).

Marked paths listed on the free *Tourist Map of the Municipality of Dolenjske Toplice* include a 4km **archaeological walk** west to Cvinger (263m), where Hallstatt tombs and iron foundries have been unearthed. Nature lovers may be interested in the **nature trail** in the forest just west of Podturn (3km), which also takes in a small cave and the ruins of 13th-century Rožek Castle. Further afield is the 2km **Dormouse Trail** (Polharska Pot), which makes a loop from Kočevske Poljane about 4.5km southwest of Dolenjske Toplice and could be combined with a hike to Base 20 (p202). Ask the tourist office for a brochure about the trail.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Horse riding is available at the **Urbančič farmhouse** (☎ 306 53 36, 040-608 969; Kočevske Poljane 13; per hr €10.50) in Kočevske Poljane, 4km to the southwest. Horse-drawn carriages accommodating three people can be hired from **Milan Novak** (☎ 041-590 877; Gregorčičeva ulica 52; €10 per hour).

K2M (☎ 306 68 30, 041-887 362; www.k2m.si; Pionirska cesta 3; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) can organise kayak, canoe and rafting trips on the Krka. Renting a canoe/kayak from K2M or the Bailea Wellness Centre costs €12.50 to €16.70 a day.

The **Bela Ski Centre** (Smučarski Center Bela; ☎ 384 92 00; vladka.asnic@iskra-semic.si; half-day pass adult/child €6.30/5, day pass €8.25/6.30), formerly called the Rog-Črmošnjice ski centre, is located 16km south of Dolenjske Toplice. It has 6km of slopes and 7km of cross-country trails on the slopes of Mt Gače at altitudes between 700m and 965m. They are served by a chairlift and five T-bar tows.

Sleeping

Kamp Dolenjske Toplice (☎ 391 94 00; www.krka-terme.si per person €2.10-8, incl 3hr pool pass €8.80-12.10; ☎ year-round; (P) ☒) This renovated 3-hectare camping ground accommodating 100 people is just off the northern end of Zdraviliški trg, more or less opposite the Bailea complex.

Gostišče Pri Tomljetu (☎ 306 50 23, 031-643 345; Zdraviliški trg 24; d/tr without bathroom €21/31; (P) ☒) None of the eight rooms in this leafy guesthouse behind the Bailea complex has its own bathroom, but each has a sink, and cooking facilities are available.

K2M (☎ 306 68 30, 041-887 362; www.k2m.si; Pionirska cesta 3; d/apt €25/42; ☎ reception 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Has private rooms and an apartment for four to seven people available.

Gostišče Račka (☎ 306 55 10; www.gjostinstvo-luzar.si; Ulica Maksa Henigmanna 15; d/€27/46; (P) ☒) This modernised and attractive village house to the east of the centre has rooms and apartments for up to six people (33 beds) that are 10% cheaper after two nights' stay.

Vital & Kristal Hotels (☎ 391 94 00; www.krka-terme.si; Zdraviliški trg 11; s €61-66, d €102-112; (P) ☒ ☒ ☒) The health resort's pair of four-star hotels face one another and share the same facilities, including three indoor thermal pools, two saunas and a fitness centre. Both offer discounted weekend and week-long packages.

Eating & Drinking

Gostišče Račka (☎ 306 55 10; www.giostinstvo-luzar.si; Ulica Maksa Henigmana 15; pizza & pasta €3.80-5.85; ☎ 8am-11pm Sun-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat Jul & Aug; 8am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-11pm Fri & Sat Sep-Jun) This B&B does double duty as a restaurant and is a popular place for pizza and pasta.

Gostilna Rog (☎ 391 94 12; Zdraviliški trg 22; meals from €10; ☎ 9am-10pm Sun-Thu, 9am-11pm Fri, 9am-midnight Sat) On the edge of the park, the 'Horn' serves traditional Slovenian dishes and has folk music from 8pm on Friday and Saturday.

Rožek (☎ 391 94 00; ☎ 7am-10pm) This small, glassed-in café-bar at the end of the pretty plaza between the Vital and Kristal Hotels is a lovely place to relax after a soak.

Illy Pub (☎ 306 58 51, 041-331 898; Pionirska cesta 1; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 8am-midnight Sat & Sun) Dolenjske Toplice's young bloods tend to congregate at this boozier just across the bridge.

Two *gostilna* a short distance out of town but definitely worth the distance are **Gostilna Štravs** (☎ 306 53 90; Podturn 28; meals from €15, ☎ 8am-11pm) – 3km southwest in Podturn and specialising in freshwater fish and game – and our current favourite **Kolesar** (☎ 306 50 03; Dolenje Sušice 22; meals from €12), 2.5km to the southeast.

Getting There & Around

There are hourly buses to Novo Mesto (€2.20, 20 minutes, 11km) between 6.30am and 6.30pm Monday to Saturday, and two weekday buses to Ljubljana (€7, 1½ hours, 73km) via Žužemberk (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) at 5.35am and 10.29am.

You can hire bicycles from the K2M tourist agency for €3.35/10.50 per hour/day.

KOČEVSKI ROG

☎ 07 / elev to 1099m

One of the most pristine areas in Slovenia, Kočevski Rog has been a protected nature area for more than a century, and six virgin forests, covering an area of more than 200 hectares, are preserved here. Brown bears, as many as 700 of them, are said to live here and constitute the only sizeable bear populations extant in Europe.

The region was – and still is – so remote and filled with limestone caves that during the early days of WWII the Partisans, under the command of Marshal Tito, headquartered here, building bunkers, workshops, hospitals,

schools and even printing presses. The nerve centre was the so-called **Base 20** (Baza 20; ☎ 306 60 25; www.dolmuzej.com), about 10km southwest of Dolenjske Toplice at 708m, which was reconstructed and turned into a national monument after the war.

Once a favourite 'pilgrimage' spot for many Slovenes and Yugoslavs, Base 20 is now a shadow of its former self – its 26 buildings are deteriorating and the indicator maps are all but illegible. A plaque erected near the site in 1995 diplomatically pays homage to everyone involved in the 'national liberation war', presumably including the thousands of Domobranci (Home Guards) murdered here by the Partisans in 1945. The site is always open, but a **tourist guide** (☎ 306 60 25, 041-315 165; 90-min tour adult/child & student €2/1.35 ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Fri Apr-Sep) is on hand in season, near the start of the trail.

The range's tallest peak, **Veliki Rog** (1099m), is about 5km to the southwest.

There is no scheduled bus service, but Base 20 is easily reached by sealed road on foot or bicycle from Podturn, 7km to the northeast. From the car park and Gostišče Pri Bazi 20, it's a 650m walk up a well-maintained mountain path to the site.

NOVO MESTO

☎ 07 / pop 22,425 / elev 189m

Situated on a sharp bend of the Krka River, the inappropriately named 'New Town' is the political, economic and cultural capital Dolenjska, and one of the prettiest towns in the province. But – Janus-like – today's Novo Mesto shows two faces to the world. The Old Town, perched high up on a rocky promontory above the left bank of the Krka, is filled with interesting things to see. The new town, to the north and south, thrives on the business of Krka, a large pharmaceutical and chemical company, and Revoz, which produces Renault cars.

For Slovenes, Novo Mesto is synonymous with the painter Božidar Jakac (1899–1989), who captured the spirit of the place on canvas, and the writer Miran Jarc (1900–42) who did the same in prose with his autobiographical novel *Novo Mesto*. For the traveller, Novo Mesto is both a destination and an important gateway to the historical towns and castles along the lower Krka River, the karst forests of the Gorjanci Hills to the southeast, Bela Krajina and Croatia.

History

Novo Mesto was settled during the late Bronze Age around 1000 BC, and helmets and decorated burial urns unearthed in surrounding areas suggest that Marof Hill, above the Old Town, was the seat of Hallstatt princes during the early Iron Age. The Illyrians and Celts came later, and the Romans maintained a settlement here until the 4th century AD.

During the early Middle Ages, Novo Mesto flourished as a market because of its location and later became the centre of the estates owned by the Cistercian abbey at Stična. In 1365 Habsburg Archduke Rudolf IV raised it to the status of a town, naming it Rudolphswert. By the 16th century some 15,000 loads of freight passed through Novo Mesto each year. But plague, fires, and raids by the Turks on their way to Vienna took a toll on the city and, within a hundred years, Novo Mesto's main square had become grazing land for cattle.

Prosperity returned in the 18th and 19th centuries: a college was established in 1746, Slovenia's first National Hall (Narodni Dom) opened here in 1875 and a railway line linked the city with Ljubljana in the 1890s.

Orientation

Almost everything of interest in Novo Mesto is in the toe-shaped Old Town. Its centre is Glavni trg, a large, cobbled square lined with arched shops and public buildings.

The bus station is at Topliška cesta 1, southwest of the Old Town across Šmihel Bridge. Novo Mesto has two train stations: the main one on Kolodvorska ulica about 2km northwest of the Old Town and little Novo Mesto-Center on Ljubljanska cesta at the western edge of the Old Town.

Information

Abanka (Rozmanova ulica 40; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

Knjigarna Goga (☎ 393 08 02; Glavni trg 6; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Lovely bookshop with regional maps, guides and café with music; in the arcade.

Kompas Novo Mesto (☎ 393 15 20; www.robinson-sp.si; Novi trg 10; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Organises excursions and adventure sports in Dolenjska through its Robinson arm.

Post office (Novi trg 7)

SKB Banka (Novi trg 3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Information Centre Novo Mesto (☎ 393 92 63; www.novomesto.si; Novi trg 6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-

Fri, 9am-noon Sat Jun-Sep; 8am-3pm Mon & Tue, 8am-5pm Wed, 8am-2pm Thu & Fri Oct-May) On the ground floor of an office building west of Novi trg.

Sights

CHAPTER CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS

Perched above the Old Town, this Gothic church (Kapiteljska Cerkev Sv Nikolaja; Kapiteljska ulica) is Novo Mesto's most visible historical monument. And, with a 15th-century vaulted (and very floral) presbytery and crypt, painted ceiling, a belfry that had once been a medieval defence tower, and an altar painting of the church's eponymous saint supposedly painted by the Venetian master Jacopo Tintoretto (1518–94), it is also the city's most important.

If the church is locked, you'll find the key at the **Provost's House** (Proštija; Kapiteljska ulica 1), the yellow building to the northwest built in 1623. Just south of this is a section of the **medieval town walls** erected in the 14th century.

DOLENJSKA MUSEUM

Below the Chapter Church about 100m to the southeast is the enormous **Dolenjska Museum** (Dolenjski Muzej; ☎ 373 11 30; www.dolmuzej.com; Muzejska ulica 7; incl Jakac House adult/student & child €3/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr-Sep; 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar). The oldest building, which once belonged to the Knights of the Teutonic Order, houses a valuable collection of archaeological finds unearthed in the southern suburb of Kandija in the late 1960s. Don't miss the Hallstatt helmet dating from the 4th century BC with two enormous axe blows on top, the fine bronze situla (or pail) from the 3rd or 4th century BC embossed with battle and hunting scenes, and the Celtic ceramics and jewellery (particularly the bangles of turquoise and dark-blue glass).

Other collections in the complex include one devoted to recent history and an excellent ethnographic collection with farm implements, commemorative jugs presented at weddings, decorated heart-shaped honey cakes, and icons painted on glass.

The museum also administers **Jakac House** (Jakčev Dom; ☎ 373 11 31; Sokolska ulica 1; adult/child €1.50/1; ☎ same as museum), which exhibits some of its 830-odd works by the prolific painter Božidar Jakac. The artist visited dozens of countries in the 1920s and 1930s, painting and sketching such diverse subjects as Parisian dance halls, Scandinavian port towns, African villages and American city skylines. But his best works are

of Novo Mesto's markets, people, churches and rumble-tumble wooden riverside houses.

GLAVNI TRG

The neo-Renaissance **town hall** (rotovž; Glavni trg 7), out of step with the square's other arcaded buildings, ostentatiously calls attention to itself at all hours with its bells and odd facade. The coat of arms on the front is that of Archduke Rudolf IV, the town's founder.

Southeast of the town hall is the **Church of St Leonard** (Franciškinska Cerkev Sv Lenarta; Franciškinska ulica), which was originally built by Franciscan monks fleeing the Turks in Bosnia in 1472, and the attached, bright yellow **Franciscan monastery** (Franciškinski Samostan; Franciškinska ulica 1), whose library contains some 12,000 volumes,

including important 12th-century incunabula. The **Gymnasium** (Jenkova ulica 1), founded by Maria Theresa in 1746, is to the north.

Activities

FLYING

The **Novo Mesto Aeroclub** (☎ 334 82 22; www.aero.klub-nm.si; ☎ 9am-7pm) at Prečna (house No 46), 4.5km northwest of Novo Mesto and served by bus, has sightseeing flights over Novo Mesto and the Krka Valley in Cessna 172s. A 15-minute flight costs €63 for up to three passengers.

HORSE RIDING

About 3km south of Prečna, the **Novo Mesto Sport Equestrian Centre** (☎ 337 30 40, 041-554 265;

konji.cescavas@siol.net; per hr from €10; ☎ by appointment) at house No 55 in the village of Češča Vas, has Holsteiners and Arabians for riders of all levels. You can ride on any day, but you should book first.

Sleeping

Ravbar Apartmaji-Sobe (☎ 373 06 80; www.ravbar.net; Smrečnikova ulica 15-17; s €24-29, d €39.50-42, 2-person apt €37.50-50; ☎) This family-run guesthouse has rooms and modern, spotlessly clean apartments in a leafy and quiet suburban area south of the river. You might even get to visit their *zidanica* (cottage with wine cellar) in the Luben vineyards.

Gostilna Pri Belokranjcu (☎ 302 84 44; www.pri.belokranju-vp.si; Kandijška cesta 63; s/d/tr €32/48/65; ☎) Further afield – about 1.5km from the Old Town – this *gostilna* with 14 rooms is on a busy road but is a decent option given its proximity to Novo Mesto and its popular restaurant.

Hotel Krka (☎ 394 21 00; www.krka-terme.com; Novi trg 1; s/d/ste €75/112/150; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The only place to stay in the centre of town is this 53-room business hotel, with modern, comfortable rooms, some of which are adapted for disabled guests. Oddly, in a hotel of this class, guests have to pay for internet access (€1.70/6.70 for 20 minutes/two hours).

The tourist office has a list of private rooms (from €21 per person). The closest camping grounds are at Otočec, 7.5km to the northeast, and Dolenjske Toplice, 12km to the southwest.

Eating

Tsing Tao (☎ 332 43 88; Dilančeva ulica 7; mains €5.20-8.30) Tucked away in a cellar north of Glavni trg, this friendly restaurant named after China's favourite beer has main courses such as chicken with chilli and peanuts (€5.65). A number of set menus is available.

Gostilna Pri Belokranjcu (starters €3.70-5.85, mains €6.70-17.50; ☎ 8am-11pm Mon-Sat) This popular inn a short distance from the Old Town serves hearty Slovenian favourites and has good-value set menus (€6.70 and €9.60).

Gostišče Loka (☎ 332 11 08; Župančičevo sprehajališče; meals from €12; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-8pm Sun) Situated right on the Krka River, just beyond the small footbridge linking the two banks, the 'Meadow' serves decent fish dishes and is the place to try Cviček, the uniquely Slovenian light (9%) red wine from

Dolenjska. There's garden seating available in the warmer months.

As everywhere in Slovenia, Novo Mesto has a surfeit of pizzerias. Nothing could be more central than **Picerija Tratnik** (☎ 332 15 51; Glavni trg 11; pizza €4.20; ☎ 6am-10pm Mon-Fri, 6am-11pm Sat, 7am-10pm Sun), below a coffee shop of the same name, but head south of the river to **Don Bobi** (☎ 338 24 00; Kandijška cesta 14; pizza €4.50; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat) if you want better quality pizza and pasta.

There is an outdoor **market** (Florjanov trg; ☎ Mon & Fri) selling fruit and vegetables in the centre of the Old Town. Enter the large **Mercator** (Novi trg 5; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) supermarket from Seidlova cesta.

Drinking

Pri Slonu (☎ 332 14 95; Rozmanova ulica 22; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Fri, 6pm-midnight Sat) This intimate café-bar attracts Novo Mesto's Bohemian types.

Slaščičarna na Glavnem Trgu (☎ 332 12 47; Glavni trg 30; ☎ 7am-8pm) The 'Inn on the Square' has a pleasant old-style café on the ground floor with a sidewalk terrace and an ice-cream parlour.

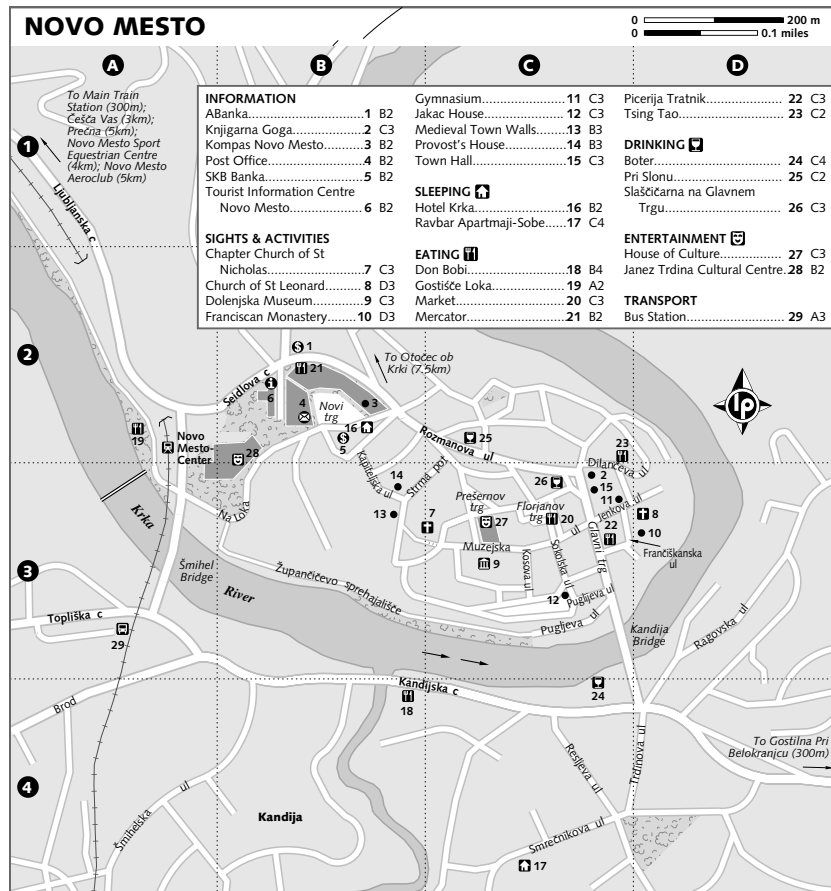
Boter (☎ 041-213 466; Kandijška cesta 9; ☎ 7am-midnight Mon-Sat, 9am-11pm Sun) This waterfront café-pub on the south side of the Krka has views of the Old Town from across the river that could be straight out of a Jakac painting.

Entertainment

The municipal **House of Culture** (Dom Kulture; ☎ 332 12 14; Prešernov trg 3) has a studio cinema with screenings at 8.30pm, and it sponsors occasional theatrical and musical performances in conjunction with the **Janez Trdina Cultural Centre** (Kulturni Center Janeza Trdine; ☎ 393 03 90; Novi trg 5). Ask the staff about concerts held in the courtyard of the Provost's House during the **Novo Mesto Summer Nights** (Novomeški Poletni Večeri; tic@novomesto.si) festival in July and August.

Getting There & Away

There are between three and six daily departures to Dolenjske Toplice (€2.20, 15 minutes, 11km), Otočec ob Krki (€1.70, 10 minutes, 7.5km), Šentjernej (€3, 30 minutes, 21km) and Šmarješke Toplice (€2.20, 20 minutes, 12km), and seven to 10 buses a day to Brežice (€5, one hour, 44km), Kostanjevica na Krki (€4.50, one hour, 39km) and Ljubljana (€7, two hours, 72km) via Trebnje or Žužemberk.



Two or three buses a day go to Črnomelj (€5, one hour, 43km), and you can also reach Zagreb (€7.80, 2½ hours, 77km) on the daily bus, which departs at 8.50am.

TRAIN

Up to 14 trains a day serve Novo Mesto from Ljubljana (€5, 1½ hours, 75km) via Ivančna Gorica and Trebnje Gorica. Ten of these continue on to Črnomelj (€2.65, 45 minutes, 32km) and Metlika (€3.30, one hour, 47km), where there are connections to Karlovac in Croatia.

Getting Around

You can call a taxi in Novo Mesto on ☎ 332 57 77 or 041-625 108.

OTOČEC OB KRKI

☎ 07 / pop 680 / elev 173m

The castle at Otočec, on a tiny island in the middle of the Krka River, 7.5km northeast of Novo Mesto, is one of Slovenia's loveliest and most complete fortresses. The first castle here stood on the right bank of the river, but during the Mongol onslaught in the mid-13th century, a canal was dug on the south side, creating an artificial island. Today the castle, which dates from the 16th century, houses a five-star hotel. The area around Otočec, the gateway to the lower Krka and the Posavje region, has become something of a recreational (especially cycling) centre.

Orientation & Information

The castle – now Hotel Grad Otočec – is 1km east of Otočec village on a secondary road running parallel to highway H1 (E70) and the river. You reach the castle via a wooden bridge. The cheaper Hotel Šport, owned by the same group, is up the hill a few steps north of the bridge. The camping ground is southwest of the island on the south bank.

Staff at the reception of the **Hotel Grad** (☎ 384 89 00, Grajska cesta 2) can provide information about recreational facilities and equipment rentals. You can change money here, at the reception of the Hotel Šport or at the post office in Otočec village. There's an ATM at the petrol station next to the Hotel Šport.

Sights

Even if you're not staying at the hotel, there's no harm in having a look around **Otočec Castle** (Otoški Grad) and, if the weather is warm, en-

joying a drink or a coffee at the terrace café in the courtyard. The castle, with elements of late Gothic and Renaissance architecture, consists of two wings and entrance block connected by a pentagonal wall. There are four squat, rounded towers with very thick walls, narrow windows and conical roofs at each end.

Activities

The **sport centre** just east of the Hotel Šport rents bicycles and mountain bikes (1 hour/5 hours/1 day €8.35/14.60/20.50). The **tennis centre** has three indoor courts (per hour €16.70 to €21, for guests €16.70 to €17.50; open 8am-11pm) and six outdoor courts (€5 to €6.70, for guests €6.30; open 8am-11pm). There's also a sauna and steam room (€7.50), and fitness centre (per hour €4.20), which guests get to use for free.

Rent canoes, rowing boats and rafts from the **camping ground** (☎ 384 89 00, 384 86 00; per day €12.50-16.70); the best areas for boating on the Krka are downstream from Struga.

The Krka River around Otočec is a popular **fishing spot** for pike, perch and carp, and fishing permits (per day €13.50) are available from the castle hotel.

Slovenia's newest golf course, the nine-hole, par-36 **Golf Grad Otočec** (☎ 384 89 05, 041-304 444; www.terme-krka.com; 9 holes Fri/Sat & Sun €25/30), opened along the Krka just 800 metres from the castle hotel in the summer of 2006. Hiring a set of clubs costs €10 and a pull car is €4.

Sleeping & Eating

Kamp Otočec (☎ 384 86 00, 384 89 00; www.krka-terme.com; per person/car/tent/caravan €5/2/1.50/3; ☹ mid-May-Sep; ☎) This camping ground, with 50 sites accommodating 200 guests, is on a 2-hectare strip of land running along the south bank of the Krka River. To reach it from the castle, cross the second bridge, turn left (east) and walk for 300m. It has its own tennis court and pool, and there's a 'beach' along the river.

Seruga farmhouse (☎ 334 69 00; turist.kmetija.seruga@siol.net; per person €22) If your budget won't extend to accommodation at the Hotel Grad Otočec and you want something a bit more rural, this farmhouse in the village of Sela pri Ratežu (house No 15), about 2km south of Otočec village, has nine double rooms (some with kitchen), an apartment for three and a recommended restaurant (open 6am to 10pm) specialising in trout and *štruklji* (dumplings made with cheese) of various types.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hotel Grad Otočec (☎ 384 89 00; www.krka-terme.com; s €104-113, d €148-164; ☎ ☹) The five-star Castle hotel is one of the most atmospheric places to stay in Slovenia. Many (but not all) of its two-dozen rooms of varying sizes have polished parquet floors, Oriental carpets, marble-topped tables and large baths; in fact, a few are in dire need of renovation. There are lots of packages on offer as well. This is not the place where you want to spend the night alone – for many different reasons. Guests may use the pools at the Šmarješke Toplice spa (p208) free of charge.

Hotel Šport (☎ 384 86 00; www.krka-terme.com; s €62.50-70.50, d €84-100; ☎ ☹) This hotel, housed in a concrete-and-glass box opposite the island and the castle, has 78 rooms as well as a separate 37-room motel (singles €32 to €37, doubles €50 to €62) and 24 more attractive bungalows (singles €40 to €46, doubles €64 to €78) in the adjacent holiday centre.

Tango (☎ 384 86 00; meals from €10; ☹ 11am-10pm Sun-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) This flagship restaurant diagonally opposite the Hotel Šport building should be a distant second choice to the Grad, but given how fast the Grad fills up with nonguests and wedding parties you may have no choice.

Grad (☎ 384 8702, 384 8700; starters €5.40-11.70, mains €8-15.50; ☹ 8am-midnight) At the Hotel Grad Otočec, this restaurant seats 76 people and the smaller Hunter's Room accommodates two dozen more. With ancient stone walls, chandeliers and stained glass, it's loaded with atmosphere though the service is not very good. Specialities are game and fish; try the unusual red trout with a glass of Dolenjska Cviček. The four-course set menu is excellent value at €14.60.

Getting There & Away

The buses linking Novo Mesto (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7.5km) and Šmarješke Toplice (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7km) stop at the bridge leading to the castle between three and six times a day.

AROUND OTOČEC OB KRKI

The vineyards of **Trška Gora** (428m) can be reached by road and trail from Mačkovec, about 5km southwest of Otočec on the road

to Novo Mesto. From Mačkovec follow the road north for 1km to Sevno and then continue along the winding track for 2km until you reach Trška Gora and the **Church of St Mary**. From here there are wonderful views of the Gorjanci Hills, Kočevski Rog and the Krka Valley.

Further afield is **Gospodična** (828m) in the Gorjanci Hills and **Dom Vinka Paderšiča na Gorjancih** (☎ 041-682 469, 031-456 293; ☹ mid-Apr–mid-Oct Wed-Mon, mid-Oct–mid-Apr Sat & Sun), a Category III mountain lodge with a restaurant and 49 beds. Gospodična and the lodge are about 13km southeast of Otočec in the shadow of **Trdinov Vrh** (1178m), the highest peak in the Gorjanci, on the Croatian border. The route from Otočec goes for 5km southeast to **Velike Brusnice**, famous for its cherries and **cherry festival** (☎ 041-354 455) in mid-June, then to Gabrje (4.5km) and to Gospodična (3.5km).

ŠMARJEŠKE TOPLICE

☎ 07 / pop 490 / elev 258m

If all that Cviček wine is taking its toll on you, consider taking a break at Šmarješke Toplice, a spa town in a small, lush valley about 5km north of Otočec. While it doesn't have anything close to the history or atmosphere of Dolenjske Toplice, 25km to the southwest, it has lovely grounds and more than enough facilities to keep you busy and help recharge those batteries.

The three natural pools that once stood on the site of the spa were used by local people as far back as the 18th century and were collectively known as the Lake Spa. Development did not come until 1950, when the first hotel was built, but even that remained a rather exclusive facility reserved for the *no-menklatura* (communist honchos). Only in the last decade has Šmarješke Toplice really made it onto the map. It is now well known as both a serious therapy centre for those with cardiovascular problems, as well as a haven for relaxation and healthy living.

Orientation & Information

The spa complex and its hotels are north of the tiny village of Šmarješke Toplice. Buses stop in front of and opposite the Tuš supermarket, where an ATM can be found out the front. You can change money at the **post office** (☹ 8-9.30am & 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) next door.

Activities

The spa counts six thermal pools fed by 32°C spring water rich in carbon dioxide and minerals. The two **indoor pools** (nonguests Mon-Fri €4.80-8.35, Sat & Sun €7.30-9.20) are in the hotel complex and used for therapy.

Nearby is the **Vitarium Centre** (☎ 384 34 00; www.vitarium.si), a health spa with treatments, a sauna, solarium and fitness centre. Here you'll also find the **Centre for Nordic Walking** (Center Nordijske Hoje; nordiccenter-st@email.si), which can provide you with walking sticks (€4.20) not unlike cross-country ski poles and a guide or brochure with nine self-led walks of between 2.8km and 11km around Šmarješke Toplice. The wine-growing areas surrounding Šmarješke Toplice make for some excellent walking, and there are trails and footpaths southwest to Trška Gora and northeast to Vinjki Vrh.

The largest of the four **outdoor pools** (nonguests Mon-Fri €5.85, Sat & Sun €6.70) is below the sports centre; there's a children's pool nearby. The basin of an older (and smaller) pool directly above the hot spring is made of wood. As a result the water temperature is 2°C warmer.

The **sports centre** has four clay tennis courts (one illuminated at night) available for hire, and racquets are available. There are also facilities for table tennis, minigolf and lawn bowls.

Sleeping & Eating

Domen farmhouse (☎ 784 30 10, 041-890 901; domen.zorko@email.si; Družinska Vas 1; s/d €18/30; (P) (i)) A budget alternative to staying at the spa is this 18-room pension in Družinska Vas, about 1.5km southeast of Šmarješke Toplice. The Domen also has a tennis court and a decent restaurant (mains €5 to €8.35; open noon to 8pm Saturday and Sunday), with simple but tasty Slovenian home-style dishes available at the weekend.

Apartmaji na Dobravi (☎ 384 41 00; www.apartmaji.nadobravi.si; Šmarješke Toplice 240; 2-/5-person apt May-Oct €66/101, Nov-Apr €55.50/91; (P) (X) (♿)) This villa, about 1km east of the main complex on the road to Bela Cerkev, has 15 luxury apartments for two to five people, with kitchens. It has its own steam bath, sauna, solarium and massage pool.

Šmarješke Toplice spa complex (☎ 384 34 00; www.terme-krka.com; (P) (X) (♿)) The complex has three hotels and a villa with two apartments.

Vila Ana (Šmarješke Toplice spa complex; s & d €46-57) These two attractive apartments are in a luxury villa opposite the Tuš supermarket and post office. They're a bit far from the action, though.

Toplice (Šmarješke Toplice spa complex; s €63-66, d €102-108) The Toplice is in the middle section of the complex and was built in 1983. Some of its 47 rooms have small balconies with views of the nearby hills and forests.

Šmarjeta (Šmarješke Toplice spa complex; s €69.50-72.50, d €104-120) This hotel, which was totally renovated in 2006, has 100 rooms and is the largest hotel in the complex. Some of the rooms also have balconies.

Vitarium (Šmarješke Toplice spa complex; s €71.50-74.50, d €118-124) This new 72-room hotel offers the best (and most expensive) accommodation in Šmarješke Toplice.

Tuš (Šmarješke Toplice 116; (X) 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-5pm Sat) This supermarket is next to the post office in Šmarješke Toplice village.

Getting There & Around

There are four to five buses a day to Novo Mesto (€2.20, 20 minutes, 12km) and Otočec (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7km) from the village of Šmarješke Toplice.

The sports centre rents bicycles for €4.20 per hour. You can call a taxi on ☎ 307 56 50 or 041-625 108.

KOSTANJEVICA NA KRKI

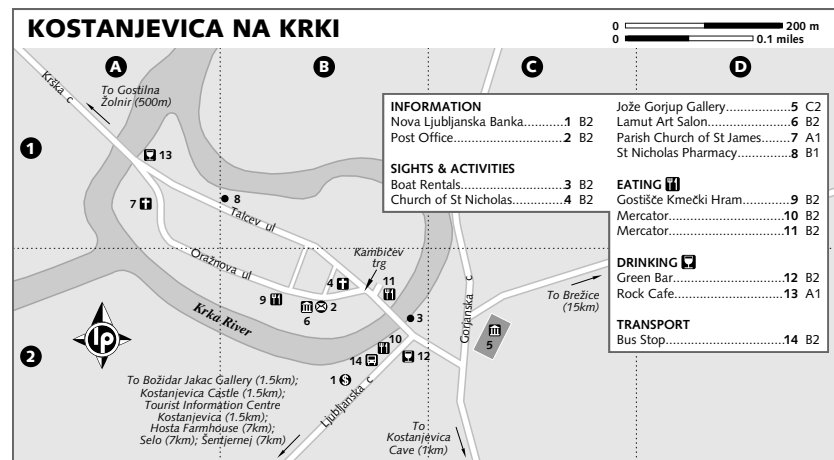
☎ 07 / pop 700 / elev 180m

The glory days of Kostanjevica have long since passed, and today the town is so sleepy it is almost comatose. Though it is dubbed 'the Venice of Dolenjska' by the tourist industry, as well as being under full protection as a cultural monument, many of its buildings are in poor condition with the exception of the former Cistercian monastery a kilometre south of town. Still, it remains an important art centre and its location is magical.

Kostanjevica, situated on an islet just 500m long and 200m wide enclosed by the Krka River, was an important commercial centre in the Middle Ages. In 1563 after repeatedly attacking the town, the Turks were defeated by Ivan Lenkovič, supreme commander of the Military March.

Orientation

Although most of Kostanjevica's historical sights are on the island, some other interesting



places as well as things of a more practical nature are on the mainland to the northwest or southeast, reached by two small bridges. Buses stop outside and opposite the Green Bar.

Information

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Ljubljanska cesta 6; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Near the bus stops on the main road into town.

Post office (Kambičev trg 5; ☎ 8-9.30am & 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information Centre Kostanjevica (☎ 498 71 08; tic-gbj@galerija-bj.si; Grajska cesta 45; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct; 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar) In a wonderful old mill to the right, after the main entrance of Kostanjevica Castle.

Sights

OLD TOWN

No-one is going to get lost or tired touring Kostanjevica – walk 400m up Oražnova ulica and 400m down Talcev ulica and you've seen the lot.

On Kambičev trg, across the small bridge from the bus stop, stands the **Church of St Nicholas** (Cerkev Sv Miklavža) a tiny late-Gothic structure dating from the late 16th century. In the presbytery the brightly coloured frescoes of scenes from the Old and New Testaments were painted by Jože Gorjup (1907-32). You can see more of this expressionist's work, including the wonderful *Bathers* series, at the **Jože Gorjup Gallery** (☎ 486 60 13; Gorjanska cesta 2; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) in the primary school back over the same bridge.

If you walk northwest along Oražnova ulica for about 200m, you'll reach a 15th-century manor house which now contains the **Lamut Art Salon** (Lamutov Likovni Salon; ☎ 498 74 06; Oražnova ulica 5; ☎ during exhibitions 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat), a branch of the Božidar Jakac Gallery (p210). The painter and graphic artist Vladimir Lamut (1915-62) completed a large portion of his work here.

Continue along Oražnova ulica, passing a lovely *fin-de-siècle* house (No 24), to the **Parish Church of St James** (Župnijska Cerkev Sv Jakoba), a 13th-century Romanesque building with a mostly baroque interior, at the island's northwestern tip. Above the carved stone portal on the western side are geometric designs and decorative plants and trees. On the south side is a 15th-century depiction of Jesus rising from the tomb.

Talcev ulica, the island's other street, is lined with attractive 'folk baroque' houses, including the 200-year-old **St Nicholas Pharmacy** (Talcev ulica 20).

KOSTANJEVICA CASTLE

About 1.5km southwest of town, this former Cistercian monastery, which most people call **Kostanjevica Castle** (Kostanjeviški Grad; ☎ 498 70 08; www.galerija-bj.si; Grajska cesta 45; adult/student & child €2.50/1.25; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), was established in the mid-13th century and remained a very wealthy institution in the Middle Ages. It was abandoned in 1785 when monastic orders were dissolved. Today it houses a large and important art gallery.

FORMA VIVA

The Kostanjevica Castle grounds are used to exhibit more than a hundred large wooden sculptures from Forma Viva, an international exhibition that was held in several places in Slovenia from 1961 to 1988, whereby sculptors worked with materials associated with the area. Here it was oak, in Portorož stone, iron at Ravne in Koroška and (shudder) concrete in Maribor. In 1998 Forma Viva was revived at Kostanjevica and it is once again an annual event.

The beautifully painted main entrance through two squat painted towers leads to an enormous courtyard enclosed by a cloister with 260 arcades on three floors. To the west stands the disused **Church of the Virgin Mary** containing elements from the 13th to 18th centuries; it is now used as exhibition space.

The **Božidar Jakac Gallery** upstairs contains 16th-century frescoes taken from the church, with works by such Slovenian artists as the impressionist Božidar Jakac (1899–1989) and brothers France (1895–1960) and Tone Kralj (1900–75). There is also a permanent collection of Old Masters from the Carthusian monastery at Pleterje (opposite). Much of Jakac's work here consists of lithographs and etchings done while documenting the underground Partisan movement in 1943, although some of his oils and pastels (eg *Before the Storm* and *Midnight on Hradčani*), are outstanding. The expressionist France Kralj was incredibly versatile and prolific, turning out hundreds of works in oil, ink, bronze and wood; don't miss his sculptures *The Reapers*, *Mother and Child* and *Stallion*. Some of Tone Kralj's early work (like *Veined Sunset* and *Evening of Life*) is almost surreal, but his later move to a kind of socialist realism obliterates all traces of it. The collection from Pleterje features works by French, German, Italian and Flemish artists of the 16th to 18th centuries and is pretty sombre stuff.

KOSTANJEVICA CAVE

This tiny **cave** (Kostanjeviška Jama; ☎ 498 70 88, 041-297 001; adult/child/student €4.20/1.25/3.35; 🗺️ tours 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm & 6pm daily Jul & Aug; 10am, noon, 2pm, 4pm & 6pm Sat & Sun mid-Apr–Jun, Sep & Oct), on a partly unsealed road about 1.5km southeast of town, has half-hour tours in spring, sum-

mer and autumn. The guide will lead you 300m in (only 750m of the cave has been fully explored), past a small lake and several galleries full of stalactites and stalagmites. The temperature is a constant 12°C.

Activities

The little ice-cream kiosk next to the bridge, just before you cross over to the island, rents **canoes** and **kayaks** (per hour €6.25) from April to September for excursions on the Krka.

The **Hosta farmhouse** (☎ 308 1034, 041-690 066; Sela 6) in the village of Sela near Šentjernej, 7km west of Kostanjevica, has horses for hire and even boasts a riding school.

Sleeping & Eating

Gostilna Žolnir (☎ 498 71 33; www.zolnir-sp.si; Krška cesta 4; s/d €27/43.50; 📍 🚻) This old-style *gostilna*, about 700m northwest of the island, has 12 double rooms and a wonderful restaurant (starters €4.60 to €7.10, mains €5.58 to €10.80) open from 7am to 10pm. The owners are very serious about the food and wine they serve. A speciality of Kostanjevica is duck served with *mlinci* (pancakes) and, of course, Cviček wine.

Gostišče Kmečki Hram (☎ 498 70 78; Oražnova ulica 11; meals from €10; 🗺️ 🚻 7am–11pm Tue–Thu, 7am–midnight Fri & Sat, 8am–8pm Sun) This wonderful old-style inn, which recently received a tarting-up, really looks like the 'Peasant House' it calls itself and offers good home cooking. Note the old wine press outside.

There's a **Mercator** (Ljubljanska cesta 4a; 🗺️ 7am–7pm Mon–Fri, 7am–1pm Sat, 7–11am Sun) supermarket next to the bus stop and a smaller but more central **Mercator** (Kambičev trg 2; 🗺️ 7am–7pm Mon–Fri) just over the bridge at the eastern end of the town.

Drinking

Green Bar (☎ 041-586 576; Ljubljanska cesta 3; 🗺️ 6am–midnight) This bar in an attractive old baroque building next to the bus stop is a pleasant place for a drink.

Rock Cafe (☎ 041-233 312; Talcev ulica 28; 🗺️ 6am–11pm Mon–Fri, 6am–1am Sat, 7am–midnight Sun) At the northeastern end of the island, the Rock attracts a relatively raucous (for a comatose town) crowd.

Getting There & Away

There are one or two daily buses from Kostanjevica to Novo Mesto (€4.55, one hour, 39km),

Brežice (€3, 45 minutes, 24km), Šentjernej (€1.70, 15 minutes, 7.5km) and Ljubljana (€9.30, three hours, 104km) and two or three to Krško (€2.20, 30 minutes, 16km).

PLETERJE MONASTERY

Located 9km southwest of Kostanjevica na Krki, the enormous **Pleterje Monastery** (Samostan Pleterje; ☎ 308 12 25; admission free; 🗺️ 7.30am–6pm) belongs to the Carthusians, the strictest of all Roman Catholic monastic orders. The Gothic **Holy Trinity Church** (also called the Old Gothic Church or Stara Gotska Cerkev), 250m up a linden-lined path from the car park, is the only part of the complex open to the general public. But the monastery's location in a narrow valley between slopes of the Gorjanci Hills is so attractive and peaceful that it's worth a visit. The **Pleterje Trail** (Pleterski Pot) is a 1½-hour walk in the hills around the complex.

Pleterje was founded in 1407 by Herman II, one of the Counts of Celje, and its construction was supervised by an English abbot called Prior Hartman. The complex was fortified with ramparts, towers and a moat during the Turkish invasions, and all but abandoned during the Protestant Reformation, which swept Dolenjska in the 16th century. The Carthusian order, like all monastic communities in the Habsburg Empire, was abolished in 1784. When the monks returned to Pleterje more than a century later, they rebuilt the complex according to the plans of the order's charterhouse at Nancy in France.

You may catch a glimpse of the dozen or so white-hooded monks quietly going about their chores – they take a strict vow of silence – or hear them singing their offices in the Gothic church at various times of the day. But the ubiquitous signs reading *Klavzura* – *Vstop Prepovedan* (Seclusion – No Entry) and *Območnje Tišine* (Area of Silence) remind visitors that everything apart from the church is off limits.

Above the ribbed main portal of the austere church (1420) is a fresco depicting Mary and the Trinity. Inside, the rib-vaulted ceiling with its heraldic bosses and the carved stone niches by the simple stone altar are worth a look, but what is most interesting is the medieval rood screen, the low wall across the aisle that separated members of the order from lay people.

There's a monastery **shop** (🗺️ 7.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) at the new reception building to the left as you enter the complex, where the monks sell some of their own products, including packs of beeswax candles (€3), honey (€5.40), propolis (€1.90 for a small flask), Cviček wine (€2.50 a litre) and various brandies, including *sadjevec* (fruit; €5), *brinjevec* (juniper; €14.20), *slivovka* (plum; €5.85) and everyone's favourite: *hruška* (pear; €17.50). If you're wondering how they got that pear into the seamless bottle, well, the explanation is simple. An empty glass bottle is placed upside-down over the immature fruit while it is still on the tree. When the pear ripens inside, the bottle and pear are 'picked' and filled with brandy. Drink too much of this stuff and you'll see visions of that place the monks warn us all about.

To the west of the monastery car park is the **Pleterje Open-Air Museum** (Pleterski Muzej na Prostem; ☎ 337 76 81, 031-639 191; Drča 1; adult/child/family €1.90/1.25/5; 🗺️ 9am–6pm Apr–Sep), with 10 structures dating from the 19th century – thatched peasant houses, a pigsty, hayracks and even an outhouse – moved here from the areas around Šentjernej.

Šentjernej (population 1350), 3km north of Pleterje and 7km west of Kostanjevica, can be reached on one of five Novo Mesto (€3, 30 minutes, 21km) buses; return to Kostanjevica (€1.70, 15 minutes) on one of up to five buses headed for Brežice. Buses stop in Trg Gorjanskega Bataljona, the main square, from where you'll have to make your way to Pleterje on foot.

POSAVJE REGION

Most of what is called Posavje, the area 'on the Sava River' that extends as far as the border with Croatia, is in Štajerska. Historically and geographically, however, Posavje is closely tied to Dolenjska and easily accessible from many of its towns.

History

Like Dolenjska, Posavje was settled early and is rich in archaeological finds from the Hallstatt, Celtic and Roman periods. The Sava River, of course, was paramount, and the Romans built a major port here called *Neviodunum* near today's Drnovo.

Posavje took centre stage during the Turkish invasions starting in the 15th century – which explains the large number of heavily fortified castles in the region – and again a

century later during the Slovenian-Croatian peasant uprisings and the Protestant Reformation. River traffic increased in the 19th century after a 20km stretch of the Sava was regulated, and the arrival of the railway in 1862 linking Ljubljana and Zagreb helped the region develop industrially.

Posavje had more than its share of suffering during WWII. In a bid to colonise the area the occupying German forces engaged in a brutal programme of 'ethnic cleansing' and expelled more than 15,000 Slovenes.

Brežice

☎ 07 / pop 6265 / elev 158m

Brežice is not the largest town in Posavje – that distinction goes to Krško, 12km upriver – but from a traveller's point of view it is certainly the most interesting. The town lies between the Orlica Hills to the north and the Gorjanci Hills to the south, and opens onto a vast plain to the east.

HISTORY

Situated in a basin just north of where the Krka flows into the Sava, Brežice was an important trading centre in the Middle Ages and was granted a town charter in 1354. Brežice's most dominant feature has always been its castle, mentioned in documents as early as 1249, with a strategic position some 400m from the Sava. In the 16th century the original castle was replaced with a Renaissance fortress to strengthen the town's defences against the Turks.

The castle was built with the help of Italian masters and is not dissimilar in design to the ones at Otočec and Mokrice. Over a century later, the castle's new owners, the Counts of Attems, renovated the building in the baroque style and added several sumptuous rooms, including the largest function room in Slovenia. Today the castle houses the Posavje Museum.

ORIENTATION

Brežice's main street is Cesta Prvih Borcev. Heading south it becomes Prešernova cesta and crosses the Sava. Going north it changes its name to Trg Izgnancev and Cesta Bratov Milavcev. The main artery going eastward is Bizeljjska ulica.

The bus station is behind the big shopping centre on Cesta Svobode, 200m north of Bizeljjska ulica and about 1km from the

Posavje Castle. The train station is further afield on Trg OF, about 2.5km north of the town centre.

INFORMATION

There is no tourist office in Brežice. Seek help from the staff at the **Posavje Museum** (☎ 496 12 71) or try the **Čatež Tourist Office** (☎ 493 67 77; www.visitbrezice.com; Topliška cesta 35, Čatež; ☎ 9am-5pm) opposite the wellness centre.

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Cesta Prvih Borcev 40;

☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (Trg Izgnancev 1a) In a lovely Art Nouveau building.

SKB Banka (Cesta Prvih Borcev 39; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

SIGHTS

Housed in the Renaissance Posavje Castle, the **Posavje Museum** (Posavski Muzej; Cesta Prvih Borcev 1; ☎ 466 05 11; www.posavski-muzej.si; adult/student & child €2/1; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun) is one of provincial Slovenia's richest museums, particularly for its archaeological and ethnographic collections.

From the courtyard you ascend a staircase whose walls and ceiling are illustrated with Greek gods, the four Evangelists and the Attems family coat of arms. Rooms on the 2nd floor contain bits and pieces from early times to the arrival of the Slavs; don't miss the skeletons from the 9th century BC unearthed near Dobova, the 5th-century BC bronze bridle and the Celtic and Roman jewellery. In the ethnographic rooms, along with the carved wooden bowls, decorated chests and plaited loaves of bread, is a strange beehive in the shape of a soldier from the early 1800s.

Other rooms in the museum cover life in the Posavje region in the 16th century (focusing on the peasant uprisings in the area and the Protestant Reformation) and during the two world wars, with special emphasis on the deportation of Slovenes by the Germans during WWII. But the museum's real crowd-pleaser is the Knights' Hall (Viteška Dvorana), an Italian baroque masterpiece where everything except for the floor is painted with landscapes, gods and heroes from Greek and Roman mythology, allegories, the Muses and so on.

ACTIVITIES

Rheumatics have been bathing in the thermal spring near Čatež ob Savi (population 320), 3km southeast of Brežice, since the late 18th

century. Today, while the huge **Terme Čatež** (☎ 493 67 00, 493 50 00; www.terme-atez.si; Topliška cesta 35) complex still attracts those suffering from such aches and pains, it is every bit as much a recreational area. The spa counts 10 thermal-water (27°C to 36°C) **outdoor pools** (3hr/day pass Mon-Fri €5.85/8, Sat & Sun €7/8.75; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Aug; 9am-7pm Apr, May & Sep), with huge slides,

fountains and artificial waves over an area of 10,000 sq m. The indoor **Zimska Termalna Riviera** (Winter Thermal Riviera; Terme Čatež; 3hr/day pass Mon-Fri €6.70/8.80, Sat & Sun €8.80/10.80; ☎ year-round) complex measures 1800 sq m with a water temperature of about 32°C. The spa also has eight different saunas, a steam room, Roman bath, solarium, gym, a jogging track along the river and tennis courts.

You can rent a **bicycle** (per day €6.25) at the Kamp Terme Čatež.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Festival Brežice** (www.festivalbrezice.com) is a month-long series of concerts featuring ancient music and is held from late June to late July in various venues around the region, including the Knights' Halls in the castles at Bizeljjsko and Mokrice.

SLEEPING

Gostilna Les (☎ 496 11 00; www.gostilna-les.com; Rimska cesta 31; s/d/tr €28/44/56; ☎ ☎) This attractive B&B with seven rooms and one five-person apartment is about 1.5km south of Brežice at the confluence of the Krka and Sava Rivers. It's about the same distance west of Terme Čatež.

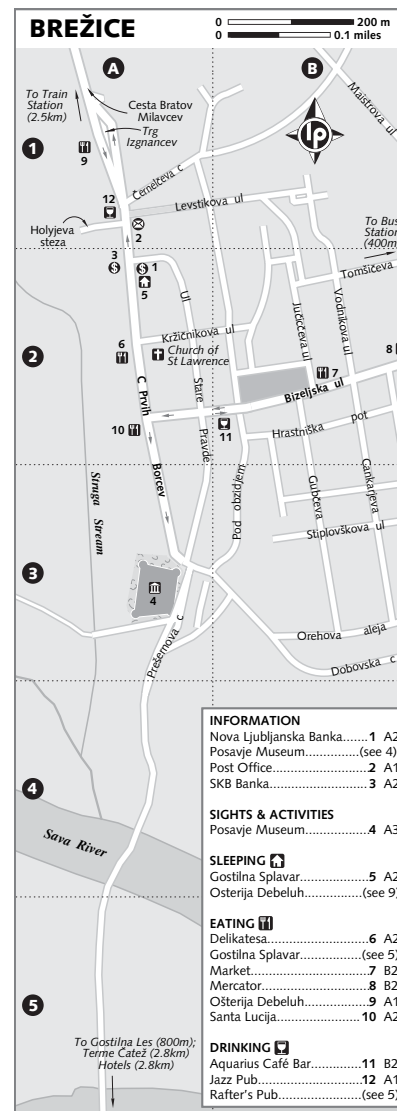
Gostilna Splavar (Raftman's Inn; ☎ 499 06 30; www.splavar.si; Cesta Prvih Borcev 40; s/d €45/66; ☎ ☎) This welcoming 15-room *pension* on Brežice's high street is above the Splavar restaurant and popular Rafter's Pub. The staff are friendly.

Ošterija Debeluh (☎ 96 10 70, 041-565 859; Trg Izgnancev 7; s/d €45/66) Not as nice as the Splavar but still in central Brežice, this 18-room guesthouse is above a popular restaurant of the same name.

Terme Čatež spa complex (☎ 493 5000, 493 67 00; www.terme-atez.si; Topliška cesta 35) The complex has three hotels as well as a huge camping ground. There are also 400 apartments (one to three people €59 to €95, four to five people €70.50 to €104).

Kamp Terme Čatež (Terme Čatež; ☎ 493 50 00; www.terme-atez.si; Topliška cesta 35, Čatež; per person €12.50-14; ☎ year-round; ☎ ☎) The daily rate at this 3.5-hectare camping ground accommodating 555 guests at the Terme Čatež spa complex includes two daily entrances to the outdoor swimming pools or one to the Winter Thermal Riviera.

Hotel Čatež (Terme Čatež; s 73-75, d €117-120; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A three-star place with some 60 rooms and a new addition generally reserved for those who are taking the spa seriously.



Hotel Toplice (Terme Čatež; s €94-96, d €146-149; P X ☎) This 131-room hotel with four stars has a new and an old (1925) wing.

Hotel Terme (Terme Čatež; s 101-104, d €160-166; P X ☎) The nicest of the three properties, this four-star hotel in a somewhat isolated section of the complex has 146 rooms.

EATING

Santa Lucija (☎ 499 25 00, 041-624 596; Cesta Prvih Borcev 15; pizza €4.20-5, grills €4.40-6.90; ☎ 6.30am-midnight) This pizzeria with an over-the-top ceiling fresco does a roaring a trade in takeaway, as it does in eat-in pizza.

Gostilna Splavar (starters €5-8, mains €7-11.70; ☎ 6am-midnight Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) A popular B&B, this *gostilna* is also a fine restaurant with a winter garden and summer terrace. The Laški Rizling, a slightly fruity, medium-dry wine from Bizeljsko, is not a bad accompaniment to the fish dishes on offer. It's also celebrated for the homemade ice cream (one/two/three scoops for €0.75/1.35/1.85).

Ošterija Debeluh (☎ 496 10 70, 496 67 52; Trg Izgnancev 7; grills €4.60-7.50, mains €7.50-10.80; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat) This attractive eatery, whose name roughly translates as 'Fatty's', serves Balkan specialities.

There's a supermarket called **Delikatosa** (Cesta Prvih Borcev 23; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat) diagonally opposite the Church of St Lawrence. You'll find a much larger **Mercator** (Bizeljska ulica 23; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat, 7-11am Sun) beyond the produce market in the direction of the bus station.

DRINKING

Rafter's Pub (☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) This popular English-style pub is at the Gostilna Splavar.

Jazz Pub (Trg Izgnancev 2; ☎ 6am-midnight Mon-Fri, 7am-midnight Sat, 8am-midnight Sun) The very attractive and friendly drinking spot is popular with students.

Aquarius Café Bar (☎ 499 25 05; Bizeljska cesta 4; ☎ 6am-1am Mon-Sat, 8am-1am Sun) Housed on three levels of Brežice's unmistakable pink water tower (1914), this café-bar is decorated with old photos of the town and antiques.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Buses make the run to Terme Čatež (€1.30, 10 minutes, 4.5km) at least once an hour. There are some four buses a day to Bizeljsko (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) and Ljubljana (€9.60, three

hours, 109km), and six to Kostanjevica (€3, 45 minutes, 24km) and Novo Mesto (€5.10, one hour, 44km).

As many as 15 trains a day serve Brežice from Ljubljana (€6, 1¼ hours, 107km) via Zidani Most, Sevnica and Krško (€1, 10 minutes, 9km). Many of these trains then cross the Croatian border near Dobova and carry on to Zagreb.

You can order a taxi on ☎ 041-611 391 or 041-790 842.

Mokrice Castle

☎ 07 / elev 148m

Near Jesenice na Dolenjskem, about 10km southeast of Brežice, renovated **Mokrice Castle** is the loveliest in the Posavje region and is now a 29-room luxury hotel. With one of Slovenia's few 18-hole golf courses, a 20-hectare 'English park' full of rare plants, a large orchard of pear trees and a small disused Gothic chapel with a vaulted ceiling and wedding-cake plaster tracery, a trip to the castle makes a delightful excursion from Brežice.

The castle as it stands today dates from the 16th century, but there are bits and pieces going back to Roman times (inscription stones, part of a tower and so on) built into the structure. Like many other castles in the region, it was built as a defence against the Turks and later turned into a baronial manor. The castle is supposedly haunted by the ghost of a 17th-century countess named Barbara, who committed suicide after her lover failed to return from sea. She is particularly active on her name day (4 December).

The greens fee for a round at Mokrice's 18-hole, 71-par **golf course** is €37/45.50 weekdays/weekends. A half-set of clubs costs €12.50 to rent.

The 11 rooms at the **Mokrice Castle Golf Hotel** (☎ 457 42 40; www.terme-catez.si; s €94-101.50, d 138.50-153, ste €276-304; P X ☎) have beamed ceilings and period furniture, and some of the eight suites – one measures 240 sq m – have fireplaces. The **Grad** (starters €5.85-9.20, mains €8.35-18.80; ☎ 7am-11pm) restaurant is a gorgeous venue with fancy game and fish dishes, and classical music. The cellar has dozens of different Slovenian wines available by the glass or bottle. Try some *viljamovka*, Mokrice's famous pear brandy.

You can reach Mokrice from Čatež ob Savi on the infrequent bus to Obrežje (€1.30, 10 minutes, 5km) – though some Zagreb-bound buses stop here too – but the ideal way to go would be

by bicycle from Čatež, following the secondary road running parallel to route No 1 (E70).

Bizeljsko-Sremič Wine District

☎ 07 / elev to 175m

Cycling the 18km from Brežice to **Bizeljsko** (population 670) is a great way to see the Bizeljsko-Sremič wine country, but there are buses, allowing you to get off whenever you see a *gostilna*, *vinška klet* (wine cellar) or *repnica* (flint-stone cave for storing wine) that takes your fancy. In Bizeljsko, try some of the local medium-dry whites and reds at the **Vinska Klet Pinterič** (☎ 495 12 66, 041-520 481; Bizeljska cesta 115; ☎ 10am-7pm) or at **Gostilna Šekoranja** (☎ 495 13 10; Bizeljska cesta 72; ☎ 8am-11pm Tue-Sun). In the nearby village of **Stara Vas** visit the **Vinoteka Pri Peču** (☎ 452 01 03; ☎ 10am-midnight Wed-Mon) or **Repnica Pudvoji** (☎ 495 12 28, 031-484 003; ☎ 11am-7pm Sat & by appointment) cellars at house No 58 and No 89 respectively.

From Bizeljsko you can either return to Brežice or continue north for 7km past Bizeljska Vas and the ruins of the 15th-century **Bizeljsko Castle** to Bistrica ob Sotli. From here, buses head northwest to Kozje via the village of Podsreda, the site of the oldest castle in Slovenia (p228).

BELA KRAJINA

Bela Krajina has countless opportunities for active pursuits and relaxing stops along the heritage trails and wine roads. Ask the tourist office in Metlika or Črnomelj for the brochure packet *S Kolesom po Beli Krajini* (By Bike in Bela Krajina), with cycling trails – many of them circular – outlined on 10 separate maps. Bela Krajina contains two important parks: the 275-hectare Lahinja Country Park and a large part of the 6500-hectare Kolpa Country Park.

METLIKA

☎ 07 / pop 3245 / elev 167m

One of Bela Krajina's two most important towns, Metlika lies in a valley at the foot of the Gorjanci range of hills. It is surrounded by Croatia on three sides, and the Kolpa River lies about 1km to the south. There was a major Hallstatt settlement here during the early Iron Age, and the Romans established an outpost in Metlika on the road leading to the important river port of Sisak in Croatia. During the Turkish onslaught of the 15th and 16th



centuries, Metlika was attacked 17 times and occupied in 1578.

Orientation

Metlika's Old Town, consisting of three main squares, stands on a ridge between a small stream called the Obrh and the main street, Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti (Avenue of Fraternity and Unity). The modern bus station is 650m south of the Old Town on Cesta XV Brigade opposite the large shopping centre (Naselje Borisa Kidriča; NBK). The train station is on Kolodvorska ulica, another 600m southeast along Cesta XV Brigade.

Information

Metlika Public Library (Ljudska knjižnica Metlika; ☎ 369 15 20, 305 83 70; Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti 23; 10am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-3pm Tue & Thu, 9-11am Sat) Free internet access on three terminals.

Nova Ljubljanska Banka Trg Svobode (Trg Svobode 7; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri); shopping centre (NBK 2; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

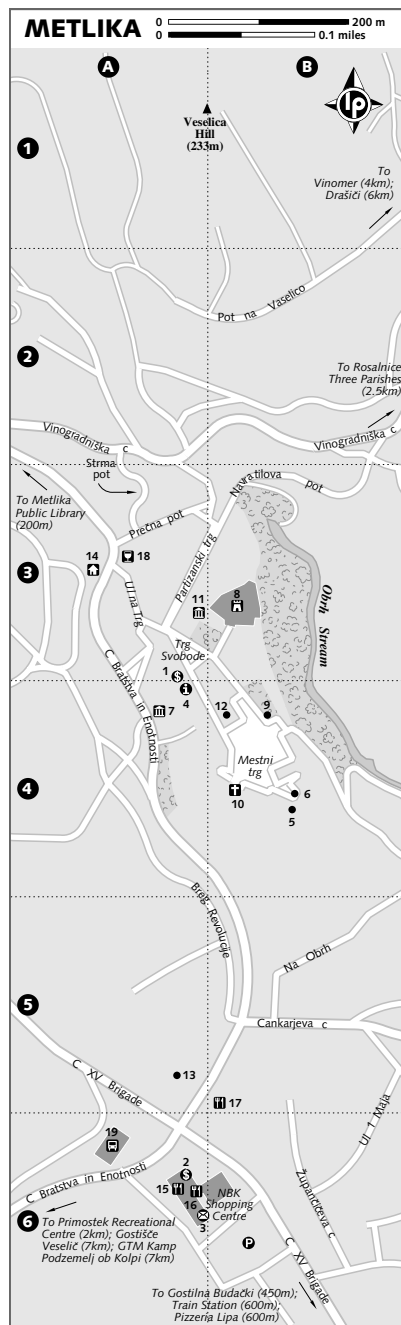
Post office (NBK 2) In the same shopping centre as the bank branch.

Tourist Information Centre Metlika (TIC; ☎ 363 54 70; www.metlika.si; Mestni trg 1; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Jun-Oct; 8am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Nov-May)

Sights

TRG SVOBODE

Housed in **Metlika Castle** (Metliški Grad; Trg Svobode 4) with its splendid arcaded courtyard, the **Bela Krajina Museum** (Belokranjski Muzej; ☎ 306 33 70; adult/



student & child €2.50/1.70; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun) houses a permanent collection of archaeological finds taken from the area. There are Hallstatt buckles, bracelets and amulets from Pusti Gradac (p221) south of Črnomelj, and an early plaster cast of the Mithraic relief from the Roman period found at Rožanec (p221) near Črnomelj, as well as items relating to the area's ethnology and agriculture: beekeeping, fruit cultivation, viniculture, fishing and animal husbandry. The artist and sculptor Alojzij Gangl (1859–1935), who was born in Metlika, is given pride of place.

Metlika was the first town in Slovenia to have its own fire brigade, and the small building west of the castle entrance contains the **Slovenian Fire Brigades Museum** (Slovenski Gasilski Muzej; ☎ 305 86 97; Trg Svobode 5; admission free; ☎ 9am–1pm). There are old fire trucks with enormous wheels, ladders and buckets.

MESTNI TRG

This colourful, leafy square of 18th- and 19th-century buildings, includes the neo-Gothic **town hall** (Mestni trg 24) dating from 1869 and **old cottages** at Nos 20 and 21. At the southern end of the square is the so-called **Commandery** (Komenda; Mestni trg 14), which once belonged to the

INFORMATION	
Nova Ljubljanska Banka.....	1 A3
Nova Ljubljanska Banka.....	2 A6
Post Office.....	3 A6
Tourist Information Centre Metlika.....	4 A4
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Bela Krajina Museum.....	(see 8)
Commandery.....	5 B4
Defence Tower.....	6 B4
Kambič Gallery.....	7 A4
Metlika Castle.....	8 B3
Old Cottages.....	9 B4
Parish Church of St Nicholas.....	10 B4
Slovenian Fire Brigades Museum.....	11 A3
Town Hall.....	12 B4
Vinska Klet.....	13 A5
SLEEPING	
Bela Krajina Hotel.....	14 A3
EATING	
Bacchus.....	(see 15)
Julija Pizzeria.....	15 A6
Mercator Supermarket.....	16 A6
Pizzeria Lipa.....	17 B5
DRINKING	
Bar Salon 1.....	18 A3
Grajska Točilnica.....	(see 8)
TRANSPORT	
Bus Station.....	19 A6

Knights of the Teutonic Order (note the stone relief of a Maltese cross above the entrance). Its **defence tower** dates from the 16th century. To the northwest the **Parish Church of St Nicholas** (Fama Cerkev Sv Nikolaja; Mestni trg 14) was built in 1759 and modelled on the Križanke's Church of the Virgin Mary in Ljubljana. On the ceiling are sobering frescoes of the Day of Judgment by Domenico Fabris, with some satyrlike devils leading sinners to damnation.

CESTA BRATSTVA IN ENOTNOSTI

Along this busy main street is the **Kambič Gallery** (Galerija Kambič; ☎ 305 83 32; Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti 51; admission free; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun), which shows some 200 artworks donated by a university professor and stages cutting-edge temporary exhibits.

Activities

The Kolpa River is clean and very warm (up to 28°C to 30°C in summer), so you might want to go **swimming** at the Primostek or Podzemelj camping grounds.

The Kolpa is known for its grayling, carp and brown trout, but the area around Vinica, further south, is richer for **fishing**. You can purchase daily fishing licences at all camping grounds.

There are a lot of **hikes** and **walks** in the surrounding areas, including the 6.5km-long **St Urban's Trail** (Urbanova Pot) to Grabovec and back via **Veselica**, a 233m-high small hill less than 1km north of Metlika, with great views over the town. Another is the Učna Pot Zdenca Vidovec from the village of Božakovo just east of Rosalnice (below) to the Zdenca and Vidovec karst caves. Ask the TIC for brochures outlining the walks. They also have pamphlets outlining **bike trails**.

Ask the tourist information centre about organised wine tastings at the **Vinska Klet** (☎ 363 70 52; www.kz-metlika.si; Cesta XV Brigade 2; per person €2.50–8.35; ☎ by appointment), the 'Wine Cellar' run by the local wine cooperative.

Festivals & Events

Metlika's main event is the **Vinska Vigred** (www.metlika.si) wine festival held the third weekend of May.

Sleeping

Primostek Recreational Centre (Rekreacijski Centre Primostek; ☎ 384 92 88, 305 81 23; camping adult/child €5/3.35, bungalow per person from €9.50; ☎ May–Sep; P) This

camping ground 2km southwest of Metlika has sites for tents and caravans as well as five bungalows with eight beds each.

GTM Kamp Podzemelj ob Kolpi (☎ 305 81 23, 363 52 80; gostinstvo-turizem@gtm-metlika.si; Podzemelj 16b; camping adult/child €6.25/5; ☎ May–mid-Sep; P) A larger and better-equipped camping ground on the Kolpa 7km southwest of Metlika measures 2.5 hectares in size and can accommodate 50 tents and 200 guests. Without wheels the only way to reach here is by train from Metlika. It's a 2km walk from the station at Gradac.

Gostišče Veselič (☎ 306 91 56; veselic1966@hotmail.com; per person €17; P) This *gostilna* in Podzemelj (house No 17), not far from the camping ground, has four rooms. Its restaurant is a favourite of locals.

Bela Krajina Hotel (☎ 363 52 80, 305 81 23; Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti 28; s/d without bathroom €15.30/29, with bathroom €22.80/37.20; P) The Bela Krajina has 24 fairly shabby rooms but is as central as you are going to get – it's the only hotel in town.

Eating

Julija Pizzeria (☎ 305 9487; NBK 9; pizza from €4.50; ☎ 7am–midnight Sun–Thu, 7am–1am Fri & Sat Jun–Aug; 7am–11pm Sun–Thu, 7am–midnight Fri & Sat Oct–May) This pizzeria with a popular bar (open from 9am to 11pm daily) is in the large shopping centre opposite the bus station.

Pizzeria Lipa (☎ 363 51 30; Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti 83; pizza from €5; ☎ 7am–10pm Mon–Wed, 7am–11pm Fri–Sun) If you want something lighter, head for this decent pizzeria southeast of the bus station.

Gostilna Budački (☎ 363 52 00; Ulica Belokranjskega Odreda 14; meals from €10; ☎ 8am–10pm Mon–Thu, 8am–midnight Fri & Sat, noon–3pm Sun) One of the very few 'real' places to eat in Metlika, this *gostilna* 450m south of the centre gets good reviews for its home-style cooking.

Gostišče Veselič (meals from €10; Podzemelj; ☎ 8am–10pm Thu–Tue) This B&B has an excellent restaurant and is well worth the 7km trip down from Metlika.

There's a large **Mercator** (NBK 2; ☎ 6.30am–7pm Mon–Fri, 6.30am–3pm Sat, 8–11am Sun) supermarket branch in the shopping centre opposite the bus station.

Drinking

Bar Salon 1 (☎ 040-309 970; Cesta Bratstva in Enotnosti 45; ☎ 6am–11pm Mon–Thu, 6am–1am Fri, 7am–1am Sat, 8am–11pm Sun) Opposite the Bela Krajina Hotel, this enormous place is popular among Metlika's young bloods.

Grajska Točilnica (☎ 305 89 99; 🕒 7am–11pm Mon–Thu, 7am–midnight Fri, 8am–midnight Sat, 8am–noon Sun) If you want to try some Bela Krajina wine but don't have the time to get out into the country, head for this café-bar in the castle courtyard. You can sample Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, the Rieslings and sweet Gold Muscatel.

Bacchus (☎ 041-346 291; NBK 2; 🕒 10pm–5am Thu–Sat) This club on the 1st floor of the shopping centre opposite the bus station is patronised by people from around the region.

Getting There & Away

Destinations served by bus from Metlika include Črnomelj (€2.60, 30 minutes, 16km, three a day, with more during school term), Novo Mesto (€3.50, one hour, 30km, six daily) and Vinica (€5.50, 1½ hours, 46km, two to three a day).

Metlika is served by up to eight trains daily from Ljubljana (€6.50, 2¾ hours, 122km) via Novo Mesto and Črnomelj (€1.45, 20 minutes, 15km). Three trains a day head for Karlovac, 33km to the south in Croatia.

AROUND METLIKA

Rosalnice

☎ 07 / pop 365 / elev 138m

The **Three Parishes** (Tri Fare) in Rosalnice, 2.5km east of Metlika, is a row of three graceful little Gothic churches that have been important pilgrimage sites for seven centuries. Although they were originally built in the late 12th century by the Knights Templar, today's churches date from the 14th and 16th centuries. The one to the north – the largest and oldest of the three – is the **Church of Our Lady of Sorrows** and has a Gothic presbytery. The church in the middle, **Ecce Homo**, has a large tower rising above its porch. The one on the south with the buttresses and another Gothic presbytery is the **Church of Our Lady of Lourdes**. The churches do not keep fixed opening hours. Seek the key from **house No 44** (☎ 306 00 51).

There is a train from Metlika to Rosalnice (€1, two minutes, 1km, daily at 3.21pm) south of the Three Parishes, but it is just as easy to walk from Metlika; begin in the Old Town, head northeast along Navratilova pot and follow Ulica Janka Brodarica eastward for 600m, then turn south. After 200m turn east and continue straight on to the churches.

Metlika Wine District

☎ 07 / elev to 235m

The hills to the north and northeast of Metlika are one of Bela Krajina's most important wine-producing areas and produce such distinctive wines as Metliška Črnina, a very dark – almost black – red wine and a late-maturing sweet 'ice wine' called Kolednik Ledeno Vino. They are also superb areas for easy walking.

On the way to **Vinomer** and **Draščiči**, two important wine towns about 4km and 6km respectively from Metlika, you'll walk through *steljniki*, stands of birch trees growing among ferns in clay soil. They are the very symbol of Bela Krajina.

Draščiči is famous for its folk architecture, and you can sample local wines at several places, including the **Kostelec farmhouse** (☎ 305 90 93, 041 788 938; Draščiči 13) and the **Simonič farmhouse** (☎ 305 81 85, 041-572 596; Draščiči 56). Be sure to phone ahead. Ask the tourist office in Metlika about wine tastings at the 250-year-old **Soseska Zidanica** (☎ 041-788 938; 🕒 by appointment), a vineyard cottage next to the Church of St Peter in the centre of Draščiči.

ČRNOMELJ

☎ 07 / pop 5850 / elev 156m

The capital of Bela Krajina and its largest town, Črnomelj (pronounced cher-no-mel) is situated on a promontory in a loop where the Lahinja and Dobljčica Rivers meet. The town is not overly endowed with important sights, but it is Bela Krajina's folk 'heart', and its popular Jurjevanje festival attracts hundreds of dancers and singers from around the region.

Legend has it that Črnomelj (a corruption of the words for 'black mill') got its name when a beggar, dissatisfied with the quality of the flour he'd been given, put a curse on the local miller.

Črnomelj was settled very early on, and the Roman presence is evident from the Mithraic shrine at Rožanec (p221), about 4km northwest of the town. During the Turkish invasions in the 15th and 16th centuries, the town was attacked incessantly, but due to its strong fortifications and excellent hilltop lookouts at Stražnji Vrh and Dobljčica Gora to the west, it was never taken. Črnomelj played an important role during WWII. After Italy's surrender in 1943, the town functioned for a time as Slovenia's capital and was the centre

of the Slovenian National Liberation Council and of Partisan activity.

Orientation

Buses stop on Trg Svobode in the heart of the Old Town, in front of Črnomelj Castle and near the Posojilnica, the old savings and loan bank building. The train station is about 200m north of the Hotel Bojana at Kolodvorska cesta 1.

Information

Nova Ljubljanska Banka Kolodvorska cesta (Kolodvorska cesta 32b; 🕒 8.30am–noon & 2.30–4.30pm Mon–Fri); **Posojilnica** (Trg Svobode 2; 🕒 8am–noon & 2.30–4.30pm Mon–Fri)

Post office (Kolodvorska cesta 30; 🕒 7am–7pm Mon–Fri, 7am–noon Sat)

Tourist Information Centre Črnomelj (☎ 305 65 30, 040-726 014; tic-crnomelj@ric-belajrajina.si; Trg Svobode 3; 🕒 8am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) On the ground floor of Črnomelj Castle.

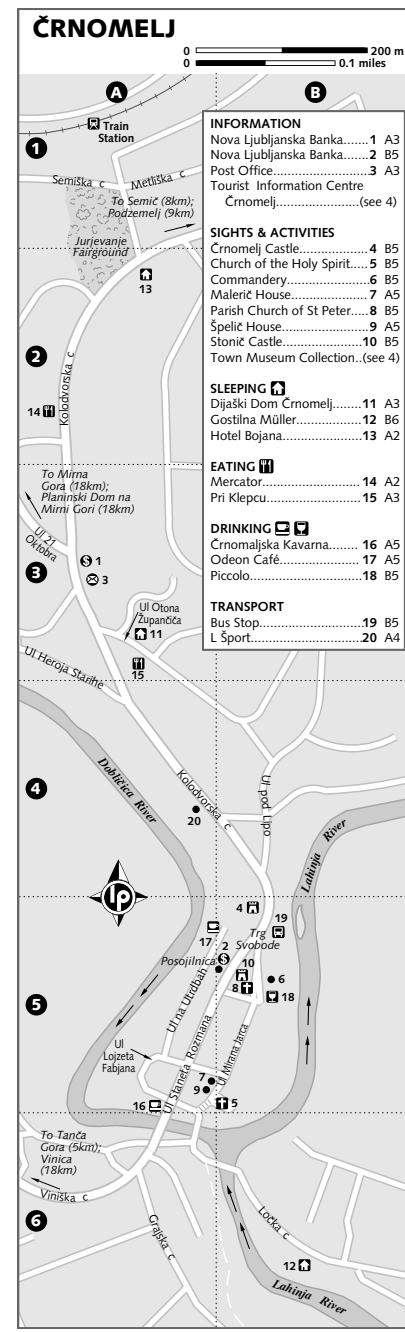
Sights & Activities

Črnomelj Castle (Črnomeljski Grad; Trg Svobode 3), parts of which date from the mid-12th century, houses the **Town Museum Collection** (Mestna Muzejska Zbirka; ☎ 305 65 30, 306 11 00; adult/child €0.80/0.40; 🕒 8am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) on the 1st floor, with items and documents related to the history of Črnomelj and Bela Krajina from the 5th century AD.

The foundations of **Stonič Castle** (Stoničev Grad; Ulica Staneta Rozmana 4) to the south also go back nine centuries; this is where the town's original castle stood. The **Commandery** (Komenda; Trg Svobode 1) of the Teutonic Knights, the grey building across the square to the southeast, is a more recent structure, originally built in 1655 and altered 200 years later. On it is a stone relief of two knights and an inscription in German.

The history of the **Parish Church of St Peter** (Cerkev Sv Petra; Ulica Staneta Rozmana), almost opposite Stonič Castle, also goes back more than seven centuries, but what you'll see today is a standard-issue baroque structure with a single spire. You can still see Roman tombstones built into the walls, and on the western exterior above the main entrance is a fresco of St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers.

The deceitful **Church of the Holy Spirit** (Cerkev Sv Duha; Ulica Mirana Jarca) at the southeastern end of the Old Town was built in 1487 and is still undergoing extensive renovations. Opposite,



in **Špelič House** (Špeličeva Hiša; ☎ 306 11 90; Ulica Mirana Jarca 20; admission free; ☎ 9am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat), there is a gallery of Bela Krajina art, and next door **Malerič House** (Maleričeva Hiša; Ulica Mirana Jarca 18; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has local arts and crafts on display and for sale; contact the tourist office if it is shut.

One of the most popular hikes in this part of Bela Krajina starts at the northern end of Ulica 21 Oktobra; it goes for 18km northwest to Mirna Gora (1047m), where you can stay 100m up at Category III **Planinski Dom na Mirni Gori** (☎ 306 85 73, 041-910 357; ☎ Wed-Sun), with 50 beds in nine rooms and three dorms.

A wine road (*vinška cesta*) runs from Tanča Gora, 5km southwest of Črnomelj, northward through Dobljučka Gora, Stražnji Vrh and Ručetna Vas to **Semič** (population 750). This attractive little town, 9km north of Črnomelj, has the ruins of a 13th-century castle and church, and to the southeast lies the source of the Krupa River.

Festivals & Events

Jurjevanje (www.jurjevanje.si in Slovene), a three-day festival of music, dance and bonfires held at the fairground near the train station in mid-June, is one of the most important and oldest celebrations of folklore in Slovenia. It is based on the **Zeleni Jurij** (Green George) celebration held on 23 April, when boys dressed in greenery go from house to house singing to welcome in spring.

Sleeping

The closest camping grounds to Črnomelj are at **Podzemelj** (p217), 9km northeast of Črnomelj, and at **Vinica** (p222), 18km to the south.

Dijaški Dom Črnomelj (☎ 306 21 60; www.d-crnomelj.nm.edus.si; Ulica Otona Župančiča 7; per person €12; ☎ year-round; Ⓟ) This HI-affiliated hostel has 50 beds in 10 doubles and as many triples open to visitors throughout the year.

Gostilna Müller (☎ 356 72 00, 041-689 056; Ločka cesta 6; per person €23; Ⓟ) With four rooms and a decent restaurant, this B&B is across the river to the south of the Old Town. The rooms are bright and attractive, and it's an easy walk into central Črnomelj.

Hotel Bojana (☎ 306 29 00, fax 306 29 03; info@redex.si; Kolodvorska cesta 60; s/d/tr €65/85/100; Ⓟ) The decrepit old Hotel Lahinja has undergone a major overhaul and has been transformed into a flashy, 10-room hotel that, while it has all the comforts, is a bit too gilded for our tastes. Still,

a place to stay in central Črnomelj is a rarely spotted species and very much welcome.

Eating

Pri Klepcu (☎ 356 74 70; Ulica Otona Župančiča 6; pizza €2-4.60; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Thu, 9am-11pm Fri, noon-11pm Sat, 4-10pm Sun) For pizza, try this place just southeast of the bank and post office. It's not the most authentic but it's cheap and central.

Gostilna Müller (starters €4.20-7, mains €4.60-10.85; ☎ 8am-11pm Tue-Fri, 9am-midnight Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) The restaurant at this B&B is among the best places to go for a meal in Črnomelj. Try one of the fish or traditional Slovenian dishes.

There is a branch of the **Mercator** (Kolodvorska cesta 53; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) supermarket 200m north of the post office.

Drinking

Odeon Café (Ulica na Utrdbah 2; ☎ 6am-11pm) This wonderful little place in a renovated old building just west of Črnomelj Castle overlooks the Dobljučka River and has outside seating in the warmer months. The music is very well chosen. The café is owned by one of Bela Krajina's most popular radio stations.

Črnomaljska Kavarna (☎ 305 36 06; Ulica Lojzeta Fabjana 7; ☎ 6.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 6.30am-11pm Fri & Sat, 7am-noon Sun) Known locally as 'the mayor's place' (now you know who's involved), the 'Črnomelj Café' is an upmarket pub-café serving hot and cold drinks just below the bridge spanning the Lahinja River.

Piccolo (☎ 305 32 96; Trg Svobode 1a; ☎ 7am-2am Mon-Thu, 10am-4am Fri & Sat, 10am-2am Sun) Below a small shopping centre, this bar, complete with pool table, is a popular place for a drink and becomes something of a club at the weekend.

Getting There & Around

Bus service is not very good to and from Črnomelj, although there are up to nine daily departures to Vinica (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) via Dragatuš depending on the season, two daily buses at 10.25am and 14.30pm to Adlešiči (€2.20, 30 minutes, 11km), two or three daily buses to Novo Mesto (€5.05, one hour, 43km) and a bus on Friday and Sunday to Ljubljana (€10, 2½ hours, 113km) via Muljava and Žužemberk.

Črnomelj is served by up to nine trains a day from Ljubljana (€5.90, 2¼ hours, 107km) via Novo Mesto and Semič. Three to five daily trains also depart Črnomelj for Karlovac, 45km to the south in Croatia.

You can hire bicycles from **L Šport** (☎ 305 24 81, 040-657 657; Kolodvorska cesta 13; half-day €6.25-8.35; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat).

AROUND ČRNO MELJ Rožanec

☎ 07 / pop 60 / elev 195m

About 4km northwest of Črnomelj just off the old Roman road (now route No 216) is the little village of Rožanec; to reach it turn west just after Lokve. From a parking lot in the village centre, a sign points the way along a trail that leads about 400m to the **Mithraeum** (Mitrej), a temple dedicated to the god Mithra, dating from the 2nd century AD. At first it appears to be no more than a natural hollow in the limestone set on a wooded hillside. But on one of the exposed limestone faces is a 1.5m-high carved relief of Mithra sacrificing the sacred bull, watched by Sol (the sun, at top left) and Luna (the moon, at top right), with a dog, serpent and scorpion at his feet.

Lahinja Country Park

☎ 07 / elev to 242m

This 275-hectare park, about 9km south of Črnomelj, is a protected karst area and the source of the Lahinja River, with trails criss-crossing the area. Two small swamps are home to a number of endangered plants and animals, especially birds like orioles, nightingales and kingfishers. The area around **Pusti Gradac** is a treasure-trove of prehistoric finds and caves. The **park information centre** (☎ 305 74 28, 031-705 519) is in Veliki Nerajec at house No 18a.

MITHRA & THE GREAT SACRIFICE

Mithraism, the worship of the god Mithra, originated in Persia. As Roman rule extended into the west, the religion became extremely popular with traders, imperial slaves and mercenaries of the Roman army, and spread rapidly throughout the empire in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. In fact, Mithraism was the principal rival of Christianity until Constantine came to the throne in the 4th century.

Mithraism was a mysterious religion and its devotees (mostly male) were sworn to secrecy. What little is known of Mithra, the god of justice and social contract, has been deduced from reliefs and icons found in temples, such as the ones at Rožanec near Črnomelj and at Ptuj in Štajerska. Most of them portray Mithra clad in a Persian-style cap and tunic sacrificing a white bull in front of Sol, the sun god. From the bull's blood sprout grain and grapes and from its semen animals grow. Sol's wife Luna, the moon, begins her cycle and time is born.

Mithraism and Christianity competed strongly because of a striking similarity in many of their rituals. Both religions involved the birth of a deity on winter solstice (25 December), shepherds, death and resurrection and a form of baptism. Devotees of Mithraism knelt when they worshipped and a common meal – a 'communion' of bread and water – was a regular feature of the liturgy.

KOLPA VALLEY

☎ 07 / elev to 264m

The 113km-long Kolpa, which forms Slovenia's southeastern border with Croatia, is the warmest and one of the cleanest rivers in the country. As a result, it has become a popular recreational area for swimming, fishing and boating, especially around the village of **Vinica**. To the northeast (and downstream) is **Adlešiči**, known for its folk culture and easy walks.

Sights

In Vinica (population 210) the **Oton Župančič Memorial Collection** (Spomninska Zbirka Otona Župančiča; ☎ 364 61 14, 040-630 365; Vinica 9; adult/child €1.25/0.85; ☎ by arrangement), a branch of the Bela Krajina Museum in Metlika, is housed in the cottage where the celebrated Slovenian poet was born in 1878.

While passing through the village of **Purga** just north of Adlešiči (population 130), visit the **Čebelar Adlešič** (Adlešič Beekeepers; ☎ 307 02 37; Purga 5). The family will be happy to show you their hives, explain all things apiarian and sell you their honey. There's a tasting of their *domača medica* (homemade mead) for €2.50. The ruins of **Pobrežje Castle**, about 1km north-east of Purga, are worth exploring.

Activities

Much of the Slovenian riverbank of the Kolpa from Fučkovci, just north of Adlešiči, as far southwest as Stari Trg ob Kolpi forms the 6500-hectare **Kolpa Country Park**, a protected area of natural wonders and cultural monu-

ments. **Žagar Zvonko** (☎ 306 44 41, 041-609 920), a company based in Damelj (house No 11), southwest of Vinica and in the heart of the park, rents canoes and rafts (€13 to €16 per day) and organises river excursions on water scooters. The ambitious, however, will look into the rapid-water kayak run from Stari Trg, 20km upriver (and still in the park), to Vinica costing about €20. Contact either **Grand Kolpa** (☎ 305 51 01, 041 740 798; www.grandkolpa-sp.si; Stari Trg ob Kolpi 15) in Stari Trg or **Dol** (☎ 01-894 36 77; 031-381 133; Dol 7) in Dol (house No 7) near Stari Trg. **Fishing** is especially good around Dol; you can buy a daily fishing licence at Camping Kolpa Vinica.

From Adlešiči, two easy **hikes** to nearby hills afford great views of the Kolpa, vineyards and surrounding towns. To get to Mala Plešivica (341m), walk south along a marked trail for about half an hour. A short distance to the west is a sinkhole with a water source called Vodenica; steps lead down to the source, where you'll find a large stone vault. Velika Plešivica (363m), topped with a 12th-century church dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, is about an hour's walk northwest of Adlešiči.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Kolpa Vinica (☎ 306 16 50, 041-615 560; Vinica 19; per adult/child €5/3.75; ☞ May-Sep; (P)) This camping ground hard by the Kolpa River and just metres from the Croatian border covers an area of about 1.5 hectares and has 150 tent and caravan sites.

Avtokamp Katra Vinica (☎ 364 60 34, 041-368 312; Vinica 33; per person €5; ☞ May-Sep; (P)) Next to Camping Kolpa Vinica on the river, this small camping ground has sites for 40 tents and caravans.

Grabrijanovi farmhouse (☎ 307 00 70, 040-391 286; Adlešiči 5; per person €14.60-17.50; ☞ Mar-mid-Jan; (P)) This farmhouse, with three rooms and four apartments on the main road 500m from the Kolpa in Adlešiči, is one of the better choices in the area and the food gets rave reviews. Bikes are available for guests.

Pri Štefaniču farmhouse (☎ 305 73 47; www.pri-stefanicu.com/; Dragatuš 22; per person €18-25; (P)) This farmhouse, with the popular Župančičev Hram restaurant (meals from €10), has ac-

commodation in eight rooms and is an excellent starting point for walks in Lahinja Country Park.

Raztresen farmhouse (☎ 307 05 16, 041-736 587; www.rim.si; Jankoviči-Rim 16-18; half-board €23-27; (P) ☞) Along with accommodation, this dynamic place 400m from the crossroads in Dolenjci, north of Adlešiči, offers courses in traditional crafts and trades (weaving, basketry, beekeeping), a shop and a gallery.

Gostilna Balkovec (☎ 305 76 32; starters €3.35-5.45, mains from €5; ☞ 8am-11pm) This little *gostilna* in Mali Nerajec (house No 3), on the edge of Lahinja Country Park, specialises in *pečenka* (roast meat), especially *jagenjček* (roast lamb), which costs €15 per person.

Gostilna Milič (☎ 307 00 19; Adlešiči 15; meals €8.50; ☞ 11am-midnight Tue-Thu, 11am-1am Fri & Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) In the centre of Adlešiči, Milič is one of the oldest eateries in Bela Krajina. Its drawcard is a large baker's oven that produces anything and everything from pizza to roast suckling pig.

Gostilna Kapušin (☎ 369 91 50; Krasinec 55; meals from €10; ☞ 8am-11pm Tue-Sun) This popular *gostilna*, about 6km north of Adlešiči, has excellent fish dishes and is highly recommended by locals.

Shopping

At the **Čebelar Adlešič** farmhouse (p221) you can buy honey, mead, beeswax, pollen and propolis, the sticky substance collected from certain trees by bees to cement their hives and considered an elixir.

The **Raztresen farmhouse** (above) contains a gallery of locally produced crafts for sale, including hand-woven linen from flax grown on the farm, painted Easter eggs, wicker baskets, even bee colonies. A visit to the gallery with demonstrations is €5.70 per person. It also has a range of local wines (including the sweet 'ice' variety) and brandies in beautifully crafted hand-blown bottles.

Getting There & Around

Depending on the season up to nine buses a day link Vinica with Črnomelj (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km) via Dragatuš. There are a couple of buses a day from Adlešiči to Črnomelj (€2.20, 30 minutes, 11km).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'