

Prekmurje



The head of the 'chicken' that is (almost) the shape of Slovenia, Prekmurje is a region apart. Neither mountainous nor bordering the sea, it consists largely of a broad plain extending for some 25km beyond the Mura River. Winters can be very cold on the Prekmurje plain, and summers extremely hot.

Prekmurje is marked by wide fields – it is the country's largest agricultural region – and rounded hills, floating watermills, hearty cuisine, a somewhat fiery-tempered people and very distinct dialects, which emerged and thrived due to the region's isolation. But most tourists are attracted to this forgotten corner of Slovenia by its thermal health resorts, especially the ones at Radenci, Moravske Toplice and Banovci.

The province's isolation is rooted in history – until 1924 not a single bridge spanned the sluggish Mura. As a result, Prekmurje retains much of its traditional folklore and distinctive architecture, which you can't help noticing as you travel around. The province's farmhouses are very similar to the *kerített házak* (fenced-in houses) found in Transdanubia across the border in Hungary; given the history of the area, this is not at all surprising. Until the end of WWI most of Prekmurje was ruled by Austria-Hungary, and a sizeable Magyar minority still lives here. In fact, in some ways Prekmurje looks and feels more like Hungary than Slovenia, emphasised by the abundance of white storks (p270), a relatively large Roma (Gypsy) population and the occasional Hungarian-style *čarda* (inn).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Take the waters *au naturel* at the **spa resort** (p267) of Banovci
- Visit Prekmurje's remaining **floating mill** (p267) on the Mura River near Verzej
- Admire the wonderful 14th-century **frescoes** (p267) at the Church of St Martin in Martjanci
- Satisfy that sweet tooth with a plate of **gibanica**, pastry with poppy seeds, walnuts, fruit, cheese and cream



MURSKA SOBOTA

☎ 02 / pop 12,400 / elev 189m

Slovenia's northernmost city, Murska Sobota is unusual in mostly alpine Slovenia because it is situated on a plain flatter than a *palačinka*, a pancake filled with jam or nuts and topped with chocolate that is so popular here. Today, the capital and administrative centre of Prekmurje has little to recommend it except for its odd architectural mix of neoclassical, Secessionist and 'socialist baroque' buildings. But it is an excellent base for day trips to the nearby potters' villages and thermal spas.

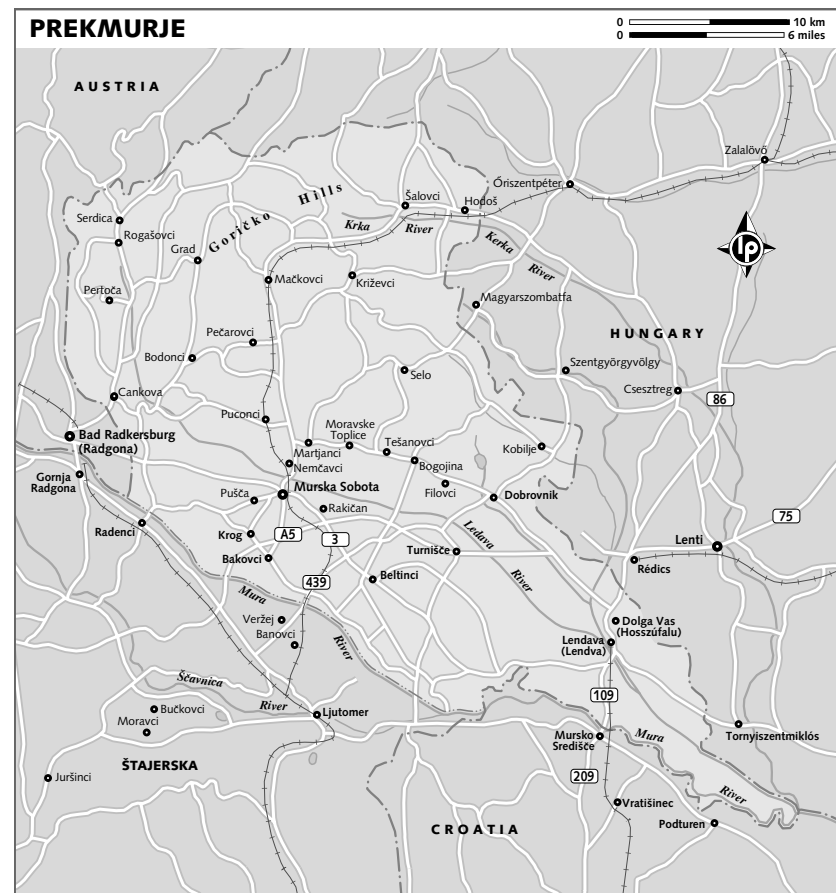
History

Murska Sobota was little more than a Hungarian market town – its name in both Slovene

and Hungarian (Muraszombat) means 'Mura Saturday', indicating when the market took place – until two pivotal events last century. The first was the opening of the railway in 1907, which linked it with Hungary proper via Šalovci to the north. The second event was ultimately even more significant for the city. With the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 and the transfer of territory, Murska Sobota found itself more or less in the centre of Prekmurje and development really took off. The area was occupied by Hungary during WWII.

Orientation

Trg Zmage (Victory Square), the centre of Murska Sobota, lies southeast of large, shady



Mestni Park (City Park). The bus station is 400m to the south on Slomškova ulica next to the Hotel Diana. The train station is 700m southeast of Trg Zmage at the eastern end of Ulica Arhitekta Novaka.

Information

Dobra Knjiga (☎ 522 37 24; Slovenska ulica 9; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Central bookshop with regional maps for hiking in Prekmurje.

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Trg Zmage 7; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Post office (Trg Zmage 6)

SKB Banka (Kodjeva ulica 14; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri)

Tourist Information Centre Murska Sobota

(☎ 534 11 30; tic.ms@siol.net; Slovenska ulica; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In a pavement kiosk southeast of Trg Zmage.

Sights

SOBOTA CASTLE

This sprawling manor house in the centre of Mestni Park dates from the mid-16th century. It houses the renovated **Murska Sobota Regional Museum** (Pokrajinski Muzej Murska Sobota; ☎ 527 17 06;

www.pok-muzej-ms.si; Trubarjev drevored 4; adult/student/child €2.50/2.10/1.70; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun), which tells the story of life along the Mura River from prehistoric to present times in 15 rooms. The ethnographic section will look familiar to anyone who has visited such collections in southern Transdanubia just over the border; the farm implements, painted jugs, costumes and woodcarvings displayed in the vaulted rooms are almost identical to their Hungarian counterparts.

OTHER SIGHTS

At the eastern entrance to Mestni Park the **Victory Monument** is an impressive (if anachronistic) grouping of heavy artillery and Yugoslav and Soviet soldiers in stone that somehow remained while the rest of Slovenia was 'spring cleaning' after independence. Opposite the park is the neo-Gothic **Evangelical Church** (1910), the main Lutheran seat in Slovenia (the majority of Slovenian Protestants, who number about 16,000, live in Prekmurje). The interior, painted with geometric shapes and floral motifs in muted shades of blue and green, is a welcome change from the

MILLS & THRILLS

Floating mills, which date back to Roman times, were very popular on rivers that changed their course abruptly or swelled rapidly after rainfall, as they allowed millers to move to the best possible spots for milling. In Slovenia, floating mills were largely built on the Mura River; there were dozens of them in operation up to WWII. Today, the only one left is the Babič Mill at Veržej, and even it cannot be classified as a fully 'floating mill' as only the mill wheel is in the water. The rest of it is firmly tethered to the riverbank.

overwrought baroque gold and marble decor found in most Catholic churches here.

The **Murska Sobota Gallery** (☎ 522 38 34; Kodjeva ulica 7; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), the best gallery in Prekmurje, has rotating exhibits (admission varies).

The **Parish Church of St Martin in Martjanci** (population 490), 4km north of Murska Sobota on the road to Moravske Toplice, contains wonderful 14th-century frescoes by Johannes Aquila of Radgona, painted on the sanctuary's ceiling and walls. They depict angels bearing inscriptions, the Apostles, scenes from the life of St Martin and even a self-portrait of Master Johannes himself. Not to be outdone by the artist, the church's benefactor had his likeness appear in several scenes on the north arch and west wall.

Sleeping

The closest camping ground is at Camp Terme at Moravske Toplice (p269), 7km to the northeast.

Terme Banovci (☎ 513 14 00; www.terme-banovci.si; campsites €12-13; ☎ late Mar-Oct; P) A quarter of the 210 sites at this small spa near Veržej, 13km south of Murska Sobota, are reserved for naturists. The price includes entry to the spa's thermal and swimming pools.

Dijaški Dom Murska Sobota (☎ 530 03 10; info@d-dom.ms.edus.si; Tomšičeva ulica 15; per person €16; ☎ late Jul-Aug; ☎) This 60-bed student dormitory southwest of the centre accepts travellers in summer only, although there is usually a handful of rooms available at other times as well. It has laundry facilities.

Hotel Diana (☎ 514 12 00; www.zvezda-diana.si in Slovene; Slovenska ulica 52; s/d/ste €43/71/79; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎)

The 95 rooms in Murska Sobota's only hotel are bright and airy but get no points for decor; they're in a garishly painted concrete block in the centre of town. It has a glassed-in swimming pool, sauna and fitness room as well as a decent pizzeria (pizzas €4.20 to €6.20) open seven days of the week.

Eating

City (Slovenska ulica 27; sandwiches from €1.50; ☎ 6am-9pm Mon-Fri, 6am-3pm Sat, 7am-1pm Sun) Essentially a stylish café with drinks, City also serves snacks and sandwiches and is a convenient distance to the museum.

Okrepčevalnica Grill (☎ 524 18 50; Kodjeva ulica 5; dishes from €2.50; ☎ 6am-6pm Mon-Fri, 6.30am-1pm Sat) This inexpensive *bife* (snack bar) in the market south of Trg Zmage serves fish dishes as well as Balkan-style grilled meats.

Mini Restavracija Rajh (☎ 523 12 38; Cvetkova ulica 21; starters €3.70-6.25, pizza & pasta €4.10-5.50; ☎ 10am-10pm Tue-Sun) A self-styled 'mini-restaurant' on the corner of Lendavska ulica, Rajh is an upmarket *špagetarija* and *picerija*.

Kitajska Restavracija Zlati Petelin (☎ 523 17 90; Lendavska ulica 39e; starters €3.55-4.10, mains €5-8.70) As its name indicates, the 'Golden Cock' is a Chinese restaurant serving up the usual range of rather toned-down Chinese dishes.

Gostilna Rajh (☎ 543 90 98; Soboška ulica 32; meals from €10.50; ☎ 10am-11pm Tue-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) In Bakovci, a village 5km to the southwest, this *gostilna* (innlike restaurant) specialises in local dishes and boasts a large cellar of regional wines.

Restavracija Zvezda (☎ 514 18 61; Trg Zmage 8; meals €12.50; ☎ 6.30am-11pm Mon-Thu, 6.30am-1am Fri, 7am-1am Sat, 7am-10pm Sun) This renovated pub restaurant is very central, and in the warmer months

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Lovenjak (☎ 525 21 53; Polana 40; starters €6.25-8.35, mains €7.50-10.80; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) This excellent, very atmospheric *gostilna* in the tiny village of Polana, 4km northwest of Murska Sobota, serves such local favourites as *bograč golaž* (Hungarian-style goulash soup), roast suckling pig served with noodles, Gypsy-style pork with garlic, Prekmurje ham and, for dessert, the indecently rich *gibanica*. Be sure to book for Sunday lunch.



the outside terrace under the chestnut trees becomes the town's focal point. At weekends there always seems to be a function on.

Mercator (Lendavska ulica 21; ☎ 7am-9pm) This supermarket northeast of the centre is open daily.

Drinking

You'll find a couple of bars along Lendavska ulica, including the convivial **Fado Irish Pub** (☎ 523 14 11; Lendavska ulica 39a; ☎ 7am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7am-midnight Fri, 9am-midnight Sat, 8am-10pm Sun) and further west **Bar Sukič** (☎ 523 12 58; Lendavska ulica 14; ☎ 5.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 5.30am-11pm Fri, 6am-3pm Sat) with a large open terrace.

Getting There & Around

Buses leave six to eight times a day for Dobrovnik (€2.60, 30 minutes, 18km), Gornja Radgona via Radenci (€2.15, 15 minutes, 13km), Maribor (€6.15, 1¼ hours, 60km), Lendava (€3.50, 30 minutes, 29km, half-hourly) and Moravske Toplice (€1.70, 15 minutes, 10km). Other destinations include Hodoš (€3.50, 45 minutes, 27km, five a day on weekdays) and Ljubljana (€15.70, 4¼ hours, 187km, one or two a day) via Maribor. Departures for the capital are at 4.38am Monday to Saturday and 5.45am daily.

Murska Sobota is on a rail link that connects it with Ormož (€2.65 to €4, 45 minutes, 39km) on the main line to Ljubljana (€9.90 to €14.50, 4¼ hour, 216km) and Maribor (€5.50 to €7, 45 minutes, 98km) and Vienna. There are up to eight departures a day, and the train stops at Beltinci, Ljutomer and Veržej. From Murska Sobota the train carries on to Hodoš and Budapest.

Bikes can be rented from **Freerider** (☎ 524 15 66; Koroška ulica 41; regular/mountain bikes per hr €2.10/4.20, per day €8.35-16.70; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sat), which is 500km southwest of the centre.

RADENCI

☎ 02 / pop 2145 / elev 200m

Radenci is best known for its health resort, parts of which still feel like a full-of-itself 19th-century spa town. Indeed, as one Slovenian friend once said: 'Radenci remains the preserve of highbrow intellectuals and rumble-tumble chamber music'. But the town is equally celebrated for its Radenska Tri Srca – the Radenci Three Hearts mineral water that is bottled here and consumed throughout the land.

Strictly speaking, Radenci is not part of Prekmurje province as such because it is not 'beyond the Mura'. In fact, it lies about 1km from the river's right bank and is thus really 'on the Mura' (Pomurje). But let's not get technical... Radenci has always been closely tied historically and geographically with Prekmurje, and it is easily accessible from Murska Sobota, 13km to the east.

Information

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Panonska cesta 7;

☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) Opposite the main entrance to the spa.

Post office (Panonska cesta 5; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Next door to the bank.

Activities

TERME RADENCI

The **Radenci Thermal Spa** (☎ 520 10 00; www.terme-radenci.si; Zdraviliško naselje 12) has three claims to fame: water rich in carbon dioxide for drinking; mineral-laden thermal water (41°C) for bathing; and sulphurous mud from Lake Negova for therapeutic and beauty treatments.

Springs of mineral water were discovered in the early 19th century by an Austrian medical student, and the bottling of Radenska began in 1869. The spa itself opened in 1882.

Today, unattractive modern blocks overlook the few remaining older Victorian-style buildings and a large wooded park with paths, a chapel and pavilions. The complex has 10 **pools** (☎ 9am-9pm) of varying sizes, including large indoor and outdoor thermal pools with a temperature of about 34°C, and glassed-in swimming pools with normal water. Guests can use the pools at will; outsiders pay €9.20 per day, €7.10 for three hours, and €5.85 after 6pm. There are also a half-dozen different types of **sauna** (per day/3hr €16.70/12.50; ☎ 9am-9pm).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The seven outdoor and indoor **tennis courts** just southeast of the hotel complex can be rented for €6.70/9.20 and €3.35/4.60 per hour during the day/night respectively. Rackets (€2) and balls are available from the **tennis school** (☎ 2.30-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

Excellent **cycling excursions** can be made into the surrounding wine country; head southwest along the *vinška cesta* ('wine road') for about 4km to Janžev Vrh and an old vineyard cottage called Janžev Hram or even further

south to Kapelski Vrh and Ivanjski Vrh. The region's most celebrated wine is a sparkling one: Zlata Radgonska Penina.

Sleeping

There are lots of private rooms available on Panonska cesta to the west and south of the spa's main entrance; **house No 23** (☎ 565 15 77) charges from about €18.

The cheapest of the four **spa hotels** (☎ 520 10 00; www.terme-radenci.si; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) is the two-star **Hotel Terapija** (s/d €74.50/100), a self-described 'old health resort-style hotel' that has seen better days. The other three have four stars and are much of a muchness. The **Hotel Radin Standard** (s/d €88/110), with 73 rooms, is the cheapest of the three whereas the smaller **Hotel Izvir** (s/d €110/138), with 60 rooms, and the 149-room **Hotel Radin Superior** (s/d €113/138) cost about 25% more.

Eating

Okrepčevalnica Zeton (☎ 524 18 50; Radgonska cesta 6; dishes from €3; ☎ 6am-8pm Mon-Thu, 6.30am-10pm Fri, noon-10pm Sat) This inexpensive *bife* is located in the small shopping centre, next to the bank and post office. It has simple dishes and grills.

Restavracija Park (☎ 520 10 00; meals from €16; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Sun) In the heart of the resort's large wooded park and serving local specialties, the aptly named Park is a pleasant place for a meal in summer.

You'll find a **Mercator** (Panonska cesta 145; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7am-noon Sat) supermarket on the main road near the bank and post office.

Getting There & Away

There are daily buses to Gornja Radgona (€1.70, 10 minutes, 9km, hourly), Ljubljana (€15, four hours, 176km, one a day at 5.58am) via Celje (€9.30, 1¼ hours, 103km) and Maribor (€5.50, one hour, 48km, up to six a day). Murska Sobota (€2.15, 15 minutes, 13km) is served by between six and eight buses a day.

MORAVSKE TOPLICE

☎ 02 / pop 720 / elev 201m

The thermal spa of Moravske Toplice, 7km northeast of Murska Sobota, boasts the hottest water in Slovenia: 72°C at its source but cooled to a body temperature of 38°C for use in its many pools and basins. It's one of the newest spas in the country – the spring was

only discovered in 1960 during exploratory oil drilling – and has enough upgraded recreational facilities to cater to all tastes.

Information

Nova Ljubljanska Banka (Kranjčeva ulica; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri) At the entrance to the spa.

Post office (Kranjčeva ulica 5; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Next to the tourist office.

Tourist Information Centre Moravske Toplice

(☎ 538 15 20; www.moravske-toplice.com; Kranjčeva ulica 3; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun Jun-Sep; 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun Oct-May) On the main road northwest of the entrance to the spa complex.

Activities

The renovated spa complex, **Terme 3000** (☎ 512 22 00; www.terme3000.si; Kranjčeva ulica 12; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-Sep, 9am-9pm Oct-May), has 22 indoor and outdoor pools filled with thermal water, and two large outdoor ones with ordinary heated water, four slides, a water tower and – wait for it – sound and light special effects. The thermal water is recommended for relief of rheumatism and certain minor skin problems, and there are enough therapies and beauty treatments available to keep you occupied for a week. Guests at the resort have free use of the pools; otherwise you'll have to pay €11 to €12.50 (depending on the season) for the privilege. The spa resort also has an 18-hole golf course, three tennis courts, a fitness room and saunas.

Sleeping

The tourist office can organise private rooms for around €15 per person, while apartments for two work out to be between €34.50 and €41.50, depending on the length of stay (minimum three nights). If the office is closed you'll find rooms available nearby at Nos 3c, 13, 16 and 18 on Kranjčeva ulica.

All the accommodation at **Terme 3000** (☎ 512 22 00; www.terme3000.si; Kranjčeva ulica 12) shares the same contact numbers; prices vary according to the season. The spa's 5-hectare camping ground, **Camp Terme 3000** (per person €13-14), can accommodate 800 guests and is open year-round. Use of the swimming pool nearby is included in the price. The attractive **bungalows** (s €49-52, d €76-82; ☎ Mar-Oct; ☎ ☎ ☎) at the resort's Prekmurje Village (Premurska Vas) are done up to look like traditional peasant cottages, with thatched roofs and cool whitewashed walls. They have a total of 78

WHITE STORKS

The white stork (*bela štoklja*) is Prekmurje's most beloved symbol. Country people consider it an honour for a pair to nest on the rooftop, and the distinctive birds with black and white feathers and long bills and legs are thought to bring good luck (not to mention babies). The storks arrive in spring – usually April – and spend the warm summer months here. When mid-August arrives, instinct tells the birds – some of them just a few months old – to fly south for a two- or three-year, 12,000km trek to sub-Saharan Africa, from where they return to Prekmurje when they are ready to breed.

Storks build their nests on church steeples, rooftops or telephone poles, and normally return to the same one every year. The nest is repaired or rebuilt every year, and some can weigh as much as 500kg. Storks live on a diet of worms, grasshoppers, frogs and small rodents, which are most easily found in the region's meadows. If food is scarce, however, it is not unknown for parents to turf their fledglings out of the nest.

The number of storks in Slovenia – currently around 200 pairs with 40% (80) breeding in Prekmurje – has grown over the past two decades as it has throughout Europe. Nevertheless, the white stork remains a vulnerable species primarily because its hunting and breeding grounds – the meadows – are being destroyed, dried out and regulated.

double rooms but are open only in the warmer months. At the **Hotel Termal** (s €63-68, d €100-110;) about half of the 139 rooms have balconies. The 157-room **Hotel Ajda** (s €73-78, d €116-128;) is in a large, three-winged modern building of little interest but, with four stars, was the best the resort had to offer until the opening of the five-star 221-bed Hotel Livada Prestige next door, in September 2006.

Eating

Gostišče Kamin (548 18 54; Dolga ulica 61; pizzas from €5; 10am-11pm Thu-Tue) This spot northeast of the tourist office and spa is popular for its pizza and pasta.

Gostilna Kuhar (548 12 15; Kranjčeva 13; meals from €10.50; 9am-11pm Tue-Sun) Next to the Evangelical church on the main road, Kuhar is a decent and – being opposite the spa's main entrance –

convenient place in which to sample Prekmurje's cuisine. It also has rooms.

Dobrovnik (population 935), about 12km southeast of Moravske Toplice, has a couple of decent roadside *gostilna* where a meal should cost less than €10. This includes **Pri Lujzi** (579 90 06; Dobrovnik 273a; starters €3-3.50, mains €3.75-5.45; 7am-1am Mon, Wed & Thu, 7am-2am Fri & Sat, 8am-1am Sun), with a small terrace overlooking the main road, and the larger (and more welcoming) **Lipot** (579 11 47; starters €3.55-5, mains €5-8.20; Dobrovnik 277a; 7am-11pm Tue-Sun).

Getting There & Around

Buses leave from Kranjčeva ulica up to six times a day for Murska Sobota (€1.70, 10 minutes, 7km) and Dobrovnik (€1.70, 10 minutes, 19km).

The resort rents bicycles for €2.25 an hour.