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Cooperation, Creativity and Sustainability:
European Capital of Culture 2025

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Head of the Division for the Promotion of Slovenia
Špela Vovk

Editor-in-Chief
Tanja Glogovčan Belančič

Editorial Board
Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Irena Kogoj, Polona Prešeren, Špela Vovk,
Vesna Žarkovič

Design
Irena Kogoj

Photo Editor
Anja Zupančič

Photo on the front page
Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info

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Secretariat-General of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia,
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EDITORIAL



Photo: Bruno Toič

COOPERATION, CREATIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2025

In the year when the spotlight is on the European Capital of Culture, GO 2025 inspires us with a power that transcends borders. This prestigious event is more than just an artistic showcase – it is a platform for reflecting on some of the most pressing issues of our time: war and peace, post-disaster recovery, life along borders and the urgent need for sustainable action to secure the future of our planet. The twin cities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia, with their distinct yet intertwined histories, are shining examples of cross-border cooperation, which is a core value of the European Capital of Culture. Cooperation is the foundation of success and reminds us that together we can achieve much more than we can on our own.

The event reflects Slovenia's identity, embodied in the national brand I Feel Slovenia. Renowned for its economic achievements, sporting excellence and green ethos, Slovenia is showcasing its innovative and sustainable character through the European Capital of Culture. The partnership between Nova Gorica and Gorizia reinforces the power of cooperation, proving that barriers can be overcome when people work together.

The European Capital of Culture is an opportunity for dialogue, exchanging ideas and for creating something truly new. Working together strengthens each individual through the contributions of others. Culture connects, inspires and transcends borders, reminding us that everything we achieve is greater when we achieve it together.

Tanja Glogovčan Belančič, Editor-in-Chief



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Photo: Jurij Paljk/STA

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IN FOCUS

Photo: UKOM archive

ADDRESS

European Capital of Culture draws inspiration for the future from the lessons of the past

With the European Capital of Culture, the twin cities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia have established themselves as an international example of coexistence, peace and unity. This achievement is not only a significant success, but also a tribute to the many Gorizians on both sides of the border who have long believed – and continue to believe – in the great European idea. As a child, I always looked forward to the March of Friendship through the streets of both cities. It was a rare opportunity to cross the border freely without showing any documents, even at a time of great tension between East and West. For me, the European Capital of Culture is a project that draws inspiration for the future from the lessons of the past. Finding new solutions, overcoming conventional thinking, and transcending borders – not only national borders, but also those between generations, social groups, and scientific and creative disciplines – is precisely what Europe needs to achieve a global development breakthrough. It is also what the world needs for a green breakthrough. If we can succeed in transcending these borders, there will be a Friendship March everywhere, every day.

Dr Robert Golob, Prime Minister

GO! 2025
NOVA GORICA - GORIZIA



Photo: go2025.eu

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2025

Selection from the Official Programme of the European Capital of Culture 2025 Nova Gorica - Gorizia

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

8 February *From Station to Station*. The opening ceremony of the European Capital of Culture will symbolically unite the two cities with a procession from Gorizia to Nova Gorica railway stations.

1–9 May *March for Europe*. A simultaneous march in several European cities divided by national borders and projects that turn border crossings into art.

26–28 September *Tastes without Borders*. One of the most popular food and wine festivals expands to the Slovenian side! Gourmet delights seasoned with art.

1–3 December *Enlightened Closing Ceremony*. With light installations we festively decorate Nova Gorica and Gorizia - closing the European Capital of Culture on *This Merry Day of Culture*.

I. WAR AND PEACE

7 February Dobrovo, **15 March** Štanjel, **30 April** Gorizia: *Mušič - Landscapes of the Body*. A unique insight into the life of Zoran Mušič, from the earliest images of his childhood, through his terrifying memories of the concentration camp, to his last self-portraits.

9 May *EPIC*. Opening of the *European Platform for Interpretation of the 20th Century*, a permanent exhibition of testimonies and memories of people from the Goriška region.

9 May *Memory Ambulance & Archive Brigades*. The premiere of the feature-length documentary by Anja Medved, which brings together the memories of those who experienced the Second World War through the eyes of children.

16 August Javorca, **22 August** Sabotin, **29 August** Cerje: **Art against Guns**. This project explores the deep traces of the First World War through three musical-theatrical performances.

II. CREATION OF THE NEW

Dodecalogy 1972–1983. Premieres 1972: 10 January, SNG Nova Gorica; 1973: 1 February, SNG Nova Gorica; 1974: 22 March SMG Ljubljana; 1975: 30 April hosting of the Ukrainian Theatre in SNG Nova Gorica; 1976: 24 May, Stadium Nova Gorica; 1977: 28 June, SNG Nova Gorica; 1978: 7 July, hosting of the Hungarian Theatre from Timișoara in Nova Gorica; 1979: 30 August, Krušče; 1980: 26 September, SMG Ljubljana; 1981: 25 October, hosting of the theatre from Novi Sad in Nova Gorica; 1982: 28 November, SNG Nova Gorica; 1983: 19 December, SNG Nova Gorica. Transgenerational documentary fiction by director Tomi Janežič about Nova Gorica as a city connected to other cities in surprising ways.

from spring 2025 *Basaglia – the Fatal Clash*. We will travel around Slovenia on the blue horse, open a cinema in the Basaglia Park in Gorizia – and write letters. A tribute to the intellectual who de-institutionalised the treatment of madness.

24 May 2025 *Shining Invisible City*. What would Nova Gorica look like if the original design by architect Edvard Ravnikar had not been thwarted by political and ideological changes? The project maps this shadowy but shining invisible city.

31 May–30 June 2025 *Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean*. Held every two years since 1985 in the Mediterranean region, this biennial focuses on artists and creators under the age of 35.

17 July 2025 *Meeting Point*. Piano virtuoso Alexander Gadjiev presents a unique open-air concert under the Solkan bridges.

III. SMUGGLERS

from January 2025 *PostMobility*. A series of media art interventions, productions and research on the re-use and rethinking of transport and mobility in both physical and digital space.

from January 2025 *Complexity Festival*. A cycle of conversations with leading writers and thinkers of our time: Didier Eribon, Aleksandar Hemon, Miljenko Jergović, Slavoj Žižek are just some of the guests and interlocutors.

from 12 March 2025 *Museum on the Border*. Presentation of a guidebook along the route connecting the museum collections of Nova Gorica Train Station, Pristava, the military watchtower in Vrtojba and the Miren Cemetery. We invite you to a journey along the border, between memory and oblivion, division, resourcefulness and connectedness.

From April 2025 *Think Tank Train*. Literary residencies and events addressing the relations between centre and periphery, rural and urban, man and nature.

12 June 2024 *Artists out of residence*. Barbara Pia Jenič's cross-cultural sensory project interweaves multi-sensory atmospheres and testimonies of those who have arrived and those who are still on the way.

3 July 2025 *Borderless Body*. MN Dance Company will discover the limits of the body and the thrill of transcending its existential limits in the magnificent setting of the Solkan quarry.

From August 2025 *Your Border is My Border*. A series of plays and performances highlighting the plight of contemporary migrants and calling for a united Europe.

IV. VERY GREEN

from January 2025 *Seed Library*. The conservation of biotic biodiversity is based on the free exchange of seeds. The France Bevk Public Library in Nova Gorica promotes the protection and conservation of home-grown seeds and plant species.

9 February 2025 *Food of the Future Lab*. Under the watchful eye of Jurij Krpan, situations related to the concept of the future of food will be created through workshops and art projects in the fields of precision gardening and remote sensing.

from March 2025 *The Other Radio*. An internet-based sound and curatorial project by the Robida Collective dedicated to exploring the conceptual and physical spaces of the margins.

16 April 2025 *No Time to Waste*. A series of workshops for event and festival organisers working towards ecological event delivery. A space for sharing best practice within the zero waste philosophy.

24 April 2025 *Bat Symphony*. An intimate spatial sound experience at Rihemberk Castle - listen to bats and other nocturnal sounds played at a human audible frequency.

23 June 2025 *Green Points*. A series of lectures and workshops on green regeneration - the project is led by architect Dr. Saša Dobričić.

from July 2025 *ISOLABS*. Marko Peljhan is preparing a series of situations exploring the complex interplay of art, science, technology, language and environment from the source to the mouth of the Soča River.

4 July 2025 *Atlas of Forgotten Orchards*. Opening of the Kojsko orchard, the largest gene bank of old fruit varieties in the region. The botanical and artistic project is signed by film director and director of photography Gregor Božič.



IN FOCUS

MIJA LORBEK AND STOJAN PELKO

European Capital of Culture (ECOC): A light that shines on the selected city for one year and continues to illuminate long after the candidacy is over

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO BY JERNEJ HUMAR

When asked, "Where to in 2025?" Mija Lorbek, Director of GO! 2025, and Stojan Pelko, ECOC programme manager, responded, "To Nova Gorica and Gorizia – the European Capital of Culture, of course." But above all, they invite everyone to visit Nova Gorica and Gorizia on 8 February, the Slovenian Cultural Holiday, when the two cities will embark on a new, borderless journey. This marks the official opening of the European Capital of Culture. For the first time in history, two cities in two countries will share the same ECOC title. The aim is to transcend borders, embodied in the slogan GO! Borderless. On this occasion, the Slovenian Cultural Holiday takes on a European dimension.

The cross-border nature of the project is what makes it so special. This is the first ECOC in which two cities in two countries will share the same title. It is a unique occasion, representing a novel approach and featuring a single cross-border narrative of the two Gorica cities. What message does it send to Europe, the fact that in history a place that was once united, then divided by the two wars, is now being shared again?

Lorbek: The idea of a cross-border story is indeed unique and also very necessary at this time, given the number of conflicts around the world. Rarely do we encounter two cities that were created because of each other, situated so close to one

another that they are practically touching, even though their cultures differ a lot and so does a large part of their history. For a long time, this border was a source of pain, a source of division, but now it is precisely through culture that it is brought together again. Personally, what resonates the most to me is the unifying power of culture. Culture, which unfortunately does not carry enough weight in society, plays a visible and constructive role here. The official programme includes many different events, not all of which are artistic in the traditional sense, but culture also opens doors to other areas, such as tourism and natural attractions, gastronomy, sport, science and more.

Pelko: When Nova Gorica was still planning its candidacy for the European Capital of Culture, its bold decision to reach across the border and invite Gorizia in Italy to apply was what secured its victory – over tough competition from Ljubljana, Piran, Kranj and Ptuj. Since then, the cross-border nature or the conurbation of the two Goricas has indeed been the defining characteristic of this capital – and the interest shown by many European media and colleagues testifies to the Europe-wide relevance of this core message. But as both mayors are keen to point out: cooperation did not begin with the candidacy, the candidacy was born out of cooperation. Many artists and cultural actors from both sides of the border have been working together successfully for decades – and that is why the candidacy was successful.

When planning the programme, you clearly took into account all the authentic features of the local environment and gave creative opportunities to both well-known and lesser-known artists, who will present themselves in next year's events.

Lorbek: On the one hand, the ECOC project has helped to advance previously lesser-known local artists. On the other hand, world-famous artists who were born here are coming back to celebrate the ECOC. A good example is Marko Peljhan, an artist and researcher who returned from California and is now working here, and he has contributed all the knowledge that he has offered to the world to Nova Gorica. Likewise, the world-famous director Tomi Janežič, who will direct a theatre dodecalogy capturing the zeitgeist of his childhood in Nova Gorica, and the world-famous pianist Alexander Gadjihev from Gorizia. It is definitely a challenge for all ECOC creators, those who are still less well-known have to gain recognition and those who are world famous have to adapt to the relatively small cities.

Pelko: As an example, I like to highlight the contemporary dance group MN Dance Company. M and N is no longer just Michal and Nastja; their

names – and years of working together – are now embedded in the name of an international dance company that attracts five hundred young dancers from all over Europe to audition, ultimately selecting no more than the four or five very best ones. And because we have this company, the cross-border contemporary dance festival Visavi, which brings the two Goricas together, is enriched every year with a local premiere or two. This is our formula: local artists are so good that their work transcends borders and attracts the attention of the whole of Europe!

The programme is built around four main thematic clusters: GO! Europe with the subtitle War and Peace, Go! Share or Smugglers, GO! Green (Very Green) and Epicentre or Creation of the New. What are the messages behind these themes?

Lorbek: The thematic clusters relate to the four pillars set by the ECOC: the first one is about spreading the European values of cooperation, respect and unity; the green pillar is about how to organise cultural events with minimal impact on the environment, which includes Peljhan's project of exploring the Soča River in a scientific and artistic way. GO! Share emphasises the exchange of ideas and goods, and the last cluster is Epicentre, a brand new cultural hub that is being created on the border with projects such as EPIC, Super8 and BulevAR. They focus on personal stories, understanding and connecting people. Of course, there is much more to each project.

Pelko: That through its experience of the past, Nova Gorica has a lot to say to the modern world about our common future – if we want it to be common, and if we want it to be a future at all. If any region can speak to the devastation of wars, it is the Soča Valley, bearing witness to the horrors of the First World War and fascism long before the Second World War. But Nova Gorica is also the most beautiful example of how to rebuild afterwards – when you are faced with ruins and the emptiness of a green meadow. At



such moments, it is important to have educated people with vision – and the architect Edvard Ravnikar was exactly that – but also have a strong collective ready to take action – and the Youth Work Brigades were exactly that. And once a city is built to “shine across the border,” a fate assigned to Nova Gorica, all sorts of practices of smuggling across that border naturally open up. Not only goods and people, jeans and petrol, but also ideas, films, books, records – in short, creative inspirations. Finally, our fourth pillar, Very Green,

reminds us that the future must be green, or there will be no future at all.

Given that it is a fusion of two nations and two cultures, there are probably differences in the organisation approach?

Lorbek: Of course. In Italy there are more levels in decision-making than here, as in addition to the municipality, there is also the region. This sometimes makes procedures take longer. Differences in legislation, business practices and

standards further prolong matters.

Pelko: The most interesting thing is really the interplay of languages. It's no secret that we have an advantage here – and this sometimes compensates for other weaknesses or simply for our smaller scale (not smallness, but rather smallness – because we are smaller than our large western neighbour). Since the programme as a whole rejects stereotypes, we do not let ourselves be confined by stereotypes in the relationship between the two nations. Instead, we focus on much more specific, project-based alliances.

You seem very calm, even though the opening event is fast approaching. You and your team must be incredibly busy right now. What are your days like in the lead-up to the big event – the opening of the ECOC?

Lorbek: I am happy, we are a good team and we work well together. Sometimes we feel more tired than worried. It's definitely a lot of pressure and a demanding project to organise. We have to constantly coordinate both municipalities and both mayors, as well as the region and the state. Different legislation and regulations take their toll, the central opening venue is located right on the border, and there are rules and regulations to be harmonised. The renovation of Europe Square and the Epicentre area by the border will bring a big change to the city, and we are renovating a lot of abandoned spaces because we want to preserve the authenticity of the area, rather than building from scratch. A number of new venues, which we are currently missing in both cities, will be set up in this area. There will be so much going on that you will not only find it in museums, concert halls and theatres, but in particular outdoor and often in places where you would not expect it at all. For example, the railway station will be transformed into a spa hotel, the melodies of virtuoso pianist Alexander Gadjiev will echo under the arches of the Solkan Bridge, the Solkan quarry will host the performance by the MN Dance Company dancers,

theatre lovers will enjoy Tomi Janežič's dodecalogy at the Sports Stadium and the Dresden symphony orchestra will perform at Rafut Park. Over the course of the year, there will be more than 400 events on the official programme and at least as many more supporting events.

Pelko: We often remind the team that these weeks and days are probably the most challenging period of the whole journey, as multi-year processes are coming to a climax, while the rhythm of the budgetary years is undermining the calendar rhythm with "surges" that a relatively small team can barely handle. In reality, administering a project as complex as the ECOC is comparable to managing an entire government department, which is a serious challenge for municipal administrations and municipal public institutions. That is why the Kennedy-esque statement of the Mayor of Nova Gorica at a recent meeting of the City Council is so important: the time has come to ask what each of us can do for the ECOC, not what the ECOC can do for us. Such joint efforts can then overcome even the biggest obstacles. It was therefore touching to see how the councillors of the three municipalities, Nova Gorica, Gorizia and Šempeter-Vrtojba, unanimously adopted the decision on taking note of the ECOC programme. My colleague, Neda Rusjan Bric, who introduced the idea of the candidacy eight years ago to the then-mayors, Arčon and Romolli, stressed this dimension in her address to the councillors: by working together, things happen that you once only dreamed of. When you see those proud faces, you believe that next time they will be able to adopt, for example, a common cultural strategy with the same unanimity.

How is the local population reacting to the project?

Lorbek: Reactions vary. We are aware that it is difficult to imagine the project's ultimate impact, not least because there has been one big construction site around here for a long time. Sometimes we feel impatient ourselves, we would

like to see the results as soon as possible, we would all like to see the finished look. I am sure that in the end we will all be satisfied. The ECOC is also about the organic transformation of cities, it is not just a short-lasting event like the Olympics, but changes the city permanently, sometimes in the long term. I am aware that it is a demanding process and understand the occasional concerns.

Pelko: There are different reactions during different phases, a common feature of most capitals to date. The initial scepticism – "We, the capital?" – is dispelled for the first time by the excitement of victory: "We, the capital!" Then comes a phase of much dissatisfaction and eager anticipation, which usually breaks into collective pride with the opening ceremony. There is already so much tangible evidence that this is indeed a process of transformation that we are no longer afraid of that crucial question: and what will happen on 1 January 2026? Not only will many valuable new spaces and unforgettable artistic events remain, but above all, many skills and processes will remain in place, as well as systemic guarantees to sustain the most successful initiatives.

About eight years ago, when you submitted the candidacy, were there many competing applications?

Lorbek: There were, of course. Some of the applications came from very well-established cities with long traditions and a well-developed infrastructure, but it is not usually the size and tradition that prevails in the decision-making process, but rather the power of the transformation effect and the authenticity of the message. In our case, this was precisely the borderless nature of both cities.

Pelko: Of course, I agree.

You emphasise that the programme will offer something for everyone.

Lorbek: We expect the widest audience for the Stop the City! events, such as the opening of the



March for Europe, and we expect a great response for the Tastes Without Borders event, which will showcase the cuisine of other European capitals and from around the world. More artistically sophisticated programmes such as Alexander Gadjiev's concert near the three bridges over the turquoise Soča River, the Tree Orchestra in the Rafut Park, Smugglers' Tours and the Future Food Laboratory are also interesting.

Pelko: A European Capital of Culture is “cultural” insofar as it recognises and acknowledges the many dimensions of creation and consumption – from design to gastronomy, from architecture to sport. And of course, the co-creation of local people is one of the keys by which the success of a capital is judged. But this does not mean offering “something for everyone.” The capital is also there to set some new, unseen or unknown standards. This is not about elitism, but about quality: the standard is also about the quality of sound at an amateur choir performance, the standard is about



carrying out a call for cultural activities in a small municipality, the standard is about providing translation and thus the accessibility of certain content.

What is the cross-border relationship between the two cities today?

Lorbek: You know, this cross-border dynamic has existed here for a long time – it’s nothing new, it’s just become more intense. The creators of the application book recognised it and developed it through cultural projects into the whole story of the ECOC. Many of the stories existed before, but now they have been built on and complemented.

Pelko: The relationship is characterised by friendliness, cooperation and healthy competition. If at some point Gorizia can “afford” a more expensive concert, Nova Gorica responds with a world-class theatre director. If Nova Gorica moves the tracks, Gorizia welcomes the Red Arrow train. The outcome is always in favour of the listeners, the passengers, the visitors – this is the foundation of healthy, cultured rivalry. When asked how we will judge the real results of the ECOC, we usually respond with one word: conurbation. The conurbation we have created means not only that the border will not be a barrier, but also that we will have common bus routes, a single season ticket, active bilingualism – and a shared vision of the future.

You’ve also announced a critical dialogue on the new borderless identity.

Lorbek: Yes, the so-called EPIC platform will feature the stories of people on both sides of the border, exploring the concept of the borderless identity that has been created through the relationship with the changing border. It is jokingly said that everyone who has had five minutes in history has passed through this area, by which we mean that the city has a rich history; it used to be part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and over time, many ideologies and regimes have changed here, so the city has a really complex identity. Many

nationalities have lived in this area, both world wars have also left their mark, and today many young people identify themselves as Europeans, while some prefer to go back to their ancestral origins. The dialogue on identity will focus on the personal stories of individuals who once suffered from the injustices and wrongs that took place here. In this way, the ECOC offers an opportunity to build a different future through understanding and insight into the stories of others. This mutual understanding and the future of cooperation is what the ECOC is all about.

Pelko: Critical because it is precisely identity dialogues that are difficult to steer towards a productive, let alone consensual, conclusion. I would rather say that our EPIC – because that is what it is, the European Platform for the Interpretation of the 20th Century – will serve as a space and time to expose the pitfalls and catastrophes of identity interpretations and replace them with historical, economic, class, emancipatory and other ones.

What advice have you received from the organisers of previous European Capitals of Culture?

Lorbek: All the ECOCs are part of the ECOC family, and we are constantly exchanging experiences, but most of all, we are reminded to take care of our health because of the immense workload, and also because the project involves a lot of different opinions and wishes that have to be coordinated. This is often not the easiest thing to do.

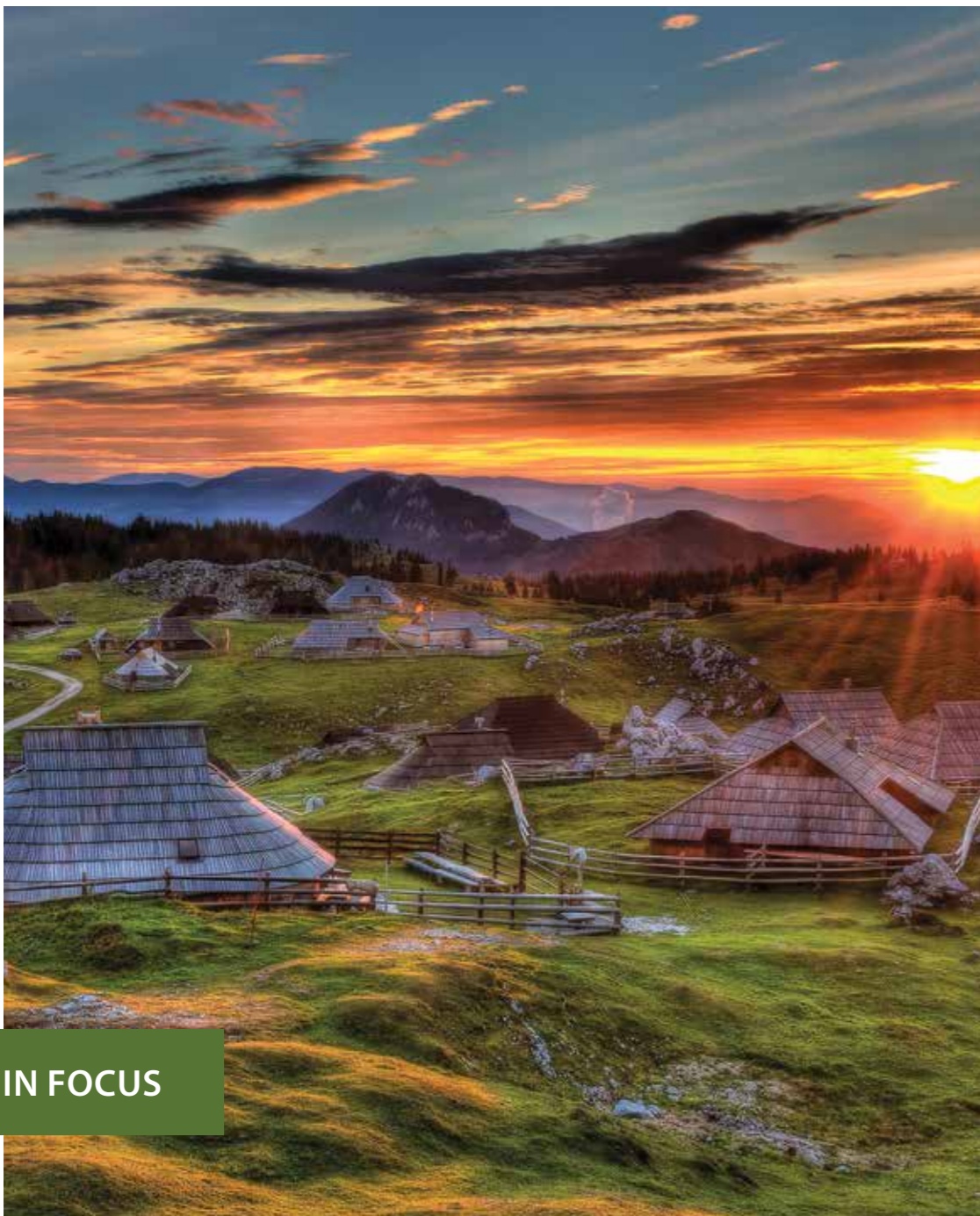
Pelko: We should not be afraid of challenges, turn a blind eye to mistakes or lose sight of the year after the ECOC year – because it is by these outcomes and legacies that true success will be measured. In addition, the individual subject matter experts meet or connect on a practically weekly basis to exchange knowledge and experience in organisation, production, communication, evaluation and more. We also share a very special informal group, the “ECOC Family,” which we had the honour to host in Nova

Gorica and Gorizia this October. Chemnitz agreed to do it once, but not twice – a testament to the distinctive attractiveness of our region.

What will you leave behind for your successors in the white book of lessons?

Lorbek: The most important aspect is the legacy of the ECOC year, and we have prepared a number of strategic documents on what should remain sustainable after 2025. This is because there is a high level of investment in both infrastructure and the programme, and the aim is to leave as much of that as possible to the area. On the infrastructure side, we have implemented over 90% of what was planned, with a total cross-border investment exceeding EUR 200 million in cultural spaces and the green connections linking them. I will write that I am delighted to see a new cultural area of the city coming to life with new programmes and that our unique borderless story will continue to grow. In some past capitals of culture, the legacy has unfortunately not been sufficiently expressed. That is why we see 2025 not as the conclusion but as the beginning—a starting point to keep the content alive even after the spotlight fades. I want as many people as possible to visit us and enjoy our events, because it is culture that reaches to the heart and captures all our senses. It is through culture that we can understand things better and more deeply.

Pelko: That even more attention should be paid to the organisation of governance in the design and application phase, as this is where bottlenecks most frequently occur. And that European capitals should be a touchstone in any national legislation of the need to occasionally modernise many ossified procedural and organisational forms. If the European Capital of Culture is to be a true transformation agent, then it should first and every time transform its own conditions of creation and development – serving as a laboratory for future practices. It is not easy, but it is possible – provided it is addressed early enough. And this is what we have a duty to communicate to our successors in Europe.



IN FOCUS

Velika Planina is a picturesque high-mountain pasture in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, famous for its traditional shepherds huts and beautiful panoramic views. Photo: Aleš Frelih/www.slovenia.info

TREASURES OF SLOVENIA

Visit the gem in the heart of Europe

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIĆ

Want to take the perfect selfie? Want to relax, learn something new and enjoy culinary delights at the same time? Then come to Slovenia. Everyone who comes for the first time never visits for their last – they always return. In Slovenia, you can do it all.

A green oasis in the heart of Europe, Slovenia will delight you with a diversity rarely found in such a small space. Here, you can conquer Alpine peaks, explore mysterious karst caves and enjoy the Adriatic Sea – all in one day.

A treasure trove of natural wonders

Reigning supreme in the north-west are the Julian Alps, with Triglav National Park named after Slovenia's highest mountain. The area is a treasure trove of natural wonders, such as the Soča Valley, Lake Bled with its famous islet and Lake Bohinj, all awe-inspiring in their beauty. Visitors can go hiking, climbing or skiing in winter, which makes the area particularly popular.

To the east lie wine-growing landscapes such as Haloze, Slovenske gorice and Prekmurje, where green hills mingle with vineyards and the warmth of the local people. The Mura River, which flows through Pomurje, is an important natural and cultural feature of the region. There are also a

number of spas offering visitors relaxation in natural thermal springs.

In the south of the country, in Dolenjska and Bela krajina, gentle hills rich in forests and karst features dominate. Rivers such as the Kolpa and Krka provide many water activities, from swimming to kayaking. The karst world of Notranjska hides underground wonders such as Postojna Cave and Škocjan Caves. This area is also home to the town of Cerknica with its intermittent lake.

Primorska, in the west of Slovenia, charms visitors with its Mediterranean flavour.

Though Slovenia's coastline is short, it boasts beautiful spots such as Piran, Portorož and the Sečovelje Salt Pans. In the hinterland, the Karst region impresses with its unique karst phenomena, such as the Škocjan Caves and the world-famous prosciutto and Teran wine.



Lake Bled, with its islet and the Church of the Mother of God, is one of Slovenia's most recognisable symbols. In addition to its natural beauty, Bled offers many opportunities for recreation and relaxation. Photo: JoštGantar/www.slovenia.info



The Piran Salt Pans are famous for their traditional salt extraction, which has been carried out by hand for more than 700 years. They are part of the Sečovlje Salt Pans Landscape Park, where salt panning is preserved as an important part of cultural heritage. Photo: Arne Hodalič

Slovenian stories through time

Slovenia's cultural diversity is reflected in its many architectural, ethnological and culinary features. Ljubljana, the capital, is the heart of Slovenian culture with its architecture, which bears the mark of Jože Plečnik, and its relaxed urban atmosphere. Numerous museums, galleries and events contribute to the city's dynamic pulse.

In Gorenjska, many examples of Alpine architecture have been preserved, such as the traditional houses found in Rateče and Planica. The region is also known for its cultural events, such as the Bohinj International Wild Flower Festival and the Kranj carnival celebration.

In Prekmurje and Prlekija, visitors can learn about old traditions and traditional crafts, such as baking *prekmurska gibanica*, basket weaving or making pottery.

It is also home to rich folklore traditions reflected in songs, dances and costumes.

Notranjska and the Karst are regions where culture and nature closely coexist. Here, visitors can explore castles such as Predjama Castle and Snežnik Castle, which bear witness to the area's turbulent past. In the Karst, visitors can explore ancient villages where typical stone houses and wine presses are still preserved.

The coast, with its Venetian-inspired towns such as Piran and Koper, tells stories from the time when they were under Venetians rule. Each of these towns features unique landmarks, such as Tartini Square in Piran or the Praetorian Palace in Koper.



Kurent is a carnival traditional character. He chases away everything bad and brings fortune and happiness. Photo: Marko Pigac/www.slovenia.info



Ivana Kobilica, one of the most famous Slovenian painters, worked in the 19th century and laid the foundations of Slovenian painting. Her works are recognised for their realistic depiction of motifs, often involving nature and everyday life. Photo: National Gallery archive



Zelenci natural reserve. Photo: Boris Pretnar/www.slovenia.info

History has also left its mark on Dolenjska and Bela krajina.

Here, visitors can find the remains of Roman roads, medieval churches and ancient mansions that are now museums or cultural centres.

Wine growing is very much part of the daily life of the people here, as reflected in the many wine cellars and wine routes that attract wine lovers.

A land of surprises

If you just give Slovenia a chance, you will realise that special, surprising and delightful experiences await around every corner. Explore, discover, enjoy – Slovenia is sure to enchant you.



When is cloudless, a view of the Julian Alps with Triglav can be seen above Piran, which is approximately 100 km away from Piran. Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



A magic corner of the Karst world - Postojna Cave. Photo: Miha Krivic

IN FOCUS



The Soča River, one of Europe's most beautiful rivers, originates below Jalovec in Trenta and flows into the Adriatic Sea. Its distinctive emerald green colour is due to its limestone riverbed and the pristine, mineral-rich water that shimmers brilliantly in the sunlight. Photo: Boris Pretnar/www.slovenia.info

GORIŠKA REGION

Slovenia's jewel by the Soča River

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

The Goriška region lies in the west of Slovenia, along the Italian border. The Julian Alps, the Soča River and the fertile Vipava Valley are the region's most distinctive natural features. At its heart are the twin cities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia, deeply intertwined in history, culture and economy, though now divided by the Slovenian-Italian border.

In addition to its urban centres, the region is renowned for its stunning natural beauty,

Cities of friendship and culture

Nova Gorica, also known as the City of Roses, is a modern city built after World War II in response to the loss of Gorizia to Italy. Today, the two cities are reunited through cross-border projects and cooperation, a bond beautifully symbolised by their shared title of European Capital of Culture 2025.

The spirit of unity is palpable in Europe Square, a space that seamlessly links the two cities and their people.

On the Italian side, Gorizia captivates visitors with its historic architecture, charming squares and vibrant urban life. One of its highlights is the medieval castle, perched on a hill and offering stunning panoramic views of both cities and the picturesque surrounding countryside.

The Italian city of Gorizia is rich in cultural and historical attractions closely linked to the Slovenian community. Piazza Vittoria, the city's central square, has long been an important meeting place for Slovenians. Nearby landmarks connected to the Slovenian community include the Duomo of Gorizia, which preserves historical documents and works of art that reflect the deep Slovenian cultural roots of the area, and the cemetery of Sant'Andrea, the final resting place of many important Slovenians, including the esteemed poet and writer Simon Gregorčič, who lived and worked in the area.

The urban ensemble of Nova Gorica and Gorizia, divided by a state border, is a unique phenomenon.

They are not two separate cities, but essentially one city spanning two nations.

This area reflects a rich tapestry of influences from the Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of Italy, the Republic of Venice, and the Slavic world.



Nova Gorica is a fascinating example of architectural experimentation, combining modernism, functionality and harmony with nature. Its architecture reflects both the historical context of its creation and the enduring spirit of openness and cross-border integration that the city continues to uphold today. Photo: David Verlič

The master plan for Nova Gorica, designed by the architect Edvard Ravnikar, is rooted in a grid system of streets and open spaces, fostering a sense of openness, transparency and greenery. Ravnikar, a student of the renowned Le Corbusier, incorporated modernist principles into the city's design, while thoughtfully adapting them to local cultural and practical needs.

Although architect Jože Plečnik, who significantly shaped the architectural character of Ljubljana, did not directly design Nova Gorica,

his influence is evident in the urban planning of the city and its surroundings. Built after World War II in response to the loss of the Gorizia area to Italy, Nova Gorica was conceived as a modern city reflecting contemporary European architectural trends. Plečnik's architectural philosophy, which emphasises the harmony between nature, religion and humanity, is reflected in the design of Nova Gorica. The city prioritises open public spaces and lush greenery, embodying his urban ideals with seamless integration.

An emerald beauty

The Soča River, one of Europe's most beautiful rivers, is the heart of the Goriška region. Its distinctive emerald colour and crystal-clear waters captivate both nature enthusiasts and adrenaline seekers alike. This stretch of the river

offers a wide range of activities ranging from peaceful fishing and riverside walks to thrilling sports such as rafting, kayaking and canyoning. The famous Soča Trail follows the river, guiding visitors through pristine nature and remnants of World War I history.

As Simon Gregorčič wrote in his poem "To the River Soča":

*You are splendid, limpid daughter of the heights,
You are graceful in your natural beauty,
When your transparent depths,
Are not disturbed by the wrath of darksome storms,
You are splendid, limpid daughter of the heights!*



Simon Gregorčič's birthplace in the village of Vrsno. Photo: Boris Pretnar/www.slovenia.info

A paradise for food and wine lovers

Often referred to as the Tuscany of Slovenia, the Brda Hills are a stunning wine region of rolling hills, lush vineyards, olive groves, and charming villages. The region's vineyards produce world-class wines such as Rebula, Merlot and Sauvignon. Renowned for their expertise, dedication and innovative techniques, Brda's winemakers have placed the region firmly on the global wine map.

In addition to its exceptional wines, Brda is celebrated for its authentic cuisine.

Visitors can indulge in homemade meats, cheeses, olive oils and traditional desserts such as briška gibanica (a layered strudel-like cake). A leisurely stroll through the medieval village



Vineyards in village Šmartno, Goriška Brda. Photo: kasto/depositphotos.com

of Šmartno is both a visual delight and a soul-nourishing experience.

The Adriatic Sea, only 20 kilometres away, has a strong influence on Brda's climate. The cherry tree holds a special place in the region, symbolising the first harvest of the year. Brda cherries were once renowned in Vienna and sold by local women across Carniola, Carinthia, Styria and Salzburg. Summers bring the ripening of peaches, while the region's plums are equally celebrated.

Brda is rich in cultural landmarks, including the Gonjače lookout tower, the Renaissance Dobrovo Castle, the Church of Saint Cross, a hunting mansion of the Gorizia Counts, and the Mediterranean village of Šmartno. The beauty of the Brda hills has inspired countless artists over the years.



This majestic fort Kluže above the Koritnica gorge is one of the most visited cultural sights in the Soča valley. It is an important monument to the defence against Turkish invasions, Napoleon's army and attacks during World War I. Photo: wikipedia

Nature and heritage of the Goriška region

The Goriška region is a treasure trove of natural beauty and cultural heritage. Hikers can explore Sabotin, a hill above Nova Gorica that witnessed fierce battles during World War I. Today, Sabotin is a popular destination for nature and history lovers, and is home to the Peace Park, which, with its museums and cave

remains, serves as a poignant reminder of the area's turbulent past.

Although Triglav National Park lies in the neighbouring region, its influence stretches into Goriška, particularly through the Soča Valley. This area is a paradise for cycling enthusiasts, with numerous cycling routes of varying levels of difficulty.

Friendly people and rich culture

The Goriška region is known for its warm and welcoming people, who take great pride in preserving local customs and traditions. The region hosts a variety of festivals, including the

Rebula and Olive Oil Festival in Brda, the Soča Outdoor Festival, and many events in both Nova Gorica and Gorizia, which attract visitors from near and far. The region also offers a vibrant cultural scene with a rich programme of concerts, theatre performances and exhibitions.



Famous for its living traditions, Goriška Brda comes alive every year with its famous Cherry Festival. Photo: Andrej Tarfila/www.slovenia.info



A Renaissance masterpiece, Dobrovo Castle is fortified with walls and two oval towers. Today, it houses a prestigious restaurant and wine cellar. Photo: ZTKMŠ Brdaarchive/www.slovenia.info

A treasure waiting to be discovered

The Goriška region is a hidden gem that seamlessly blends natural beauty, rich history, excellent cuisine and warm-hearted people.

With Nova Gorica and Gorizia as symbols of cross-border cooperation, the emerald green Soča River, the picturesque Brda

wine region and many other captivating attractions, this area offers an unforgettable experience to all who visit.

Whether it's exploring historic towns, enjoying outdoor sports or savouring a glass of fine wine, Goriška has something for everyone. It is truly a treasure waiting to be discovered.



Photo: Jernej Humar

INSPIRING CITIES

Thoughts on the European Capital of Culture

TEXT BY VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

How do you assess the fact that the two Gorizia regions will be united in the European Capital of Culture and what does this mean for the Gorizia region and for you personally?



Photo: Jože Suhadolnik

Boštjan Vuga, Architect, Sadar+Vuga, author of the spatial design of the ECOC DISTRICT

During my childhood and adolescence I lived in a family house in Solkan, which is a suburb of both Old Gorizia and Nova Gorica. At the age of twelve, we children from the border area of western Slovenia were already issued with a small border pass, the first identity document that formalised our independence of movement across the national border. When I was asked where I was going after school, I always had at least two possible answers: to Nova or to Stara Gorica. Here I had Slovenian friends with whom I socialised and spent time, as if we were not living in another country, with another political and economic system. In fact, crossing the small border crossings with a pass seemed as easy as if the national border was almost non-existent. I went to high school in Nova Gorica and walked around the old town of Gorizia. Two cities, two different urban structures, offering two completely different experiences. That is the richness of this place. The national border between the two cities does not divide, but unites and promotes diversity and inclusion. I believe that after 2025, after the European Capital of Culture, the built and renovated infrastructure of the border area of the ECOC DISTRICT at the interface of the two cities will be the trigger for a new public urban life in both cities. This infrastructure will link the mobility of the railways with the science and life of the university. A new layer for Nova and Old Gorizia.



Photo: Ana Rojc

Samo Turel, Mayor of Nova Gorica

The European Capital of Culture 2025 of Nova Gorica in cooperation with Gorizia is the first cross-border European Capital of Culture in history; it is a symbol of cooperation, friendship, coexistence and transcending borders, it is a symbol of Europe.



Photo: arhiv Arctur

Martina Murovec, COO of innovative company Arctur d.o.o

GO! 2025 offers innovative businesses like ours a golden opportunity to expand our reach, showcase our expertise, and forge strategic partnerships within the European landscape. By leveraging the event's powerful network, we can accelerate the development and implementation of our groundbreaking projects.



Photo: Carolina e Rodrigo

Mojca Bavcon, creative industries student from Nova Gorica

GO! 2025 offers a wide range of opportunities for young people; from educational workshops and activities, that help us acquire diverse knowledge, to activities and projects that enable our participation in the European Capital of Culture itself. Moreover, we profit from numerous networking opportunities, as well as develop a new sense of pride in our borderless city.



Photo: arhiv Sinefinis

Robert Princic and Matjaz Cetrlic, Borderless winemakers

As Winemakers, one working on the Italian side of the border (Robert Princic - Gradis'ciutta) and one working on the Slovenian side (Matjaz Cetrlic - Ferdinand), that built a friendship and developed a crossborder project we can't be happier and more proud that our common territory had been chosen as European Capital of Culture for 2025. The choice of a city today without borders is an important signal in the building of a new idea of Europe.



Photo: Nataša Orel

Intermedia art BridA Collective

Through the partnership with the European Capital of Culture, we have gained invaluable support to initiate innovative artistic projects and elevate existing ones, providing a platform for internationally recognized creators. This collaboration has been instrumental in transforming our long-held aspirations into impactful realities, delivering meaningful contributions to both the cultural landscape and the vitality of the local community.

GO! 2025
NOVA GORICA - GORIZIA



Photo: Personal archive

Gianni Rijavec, singer and composer of entertainment music

This is certainly a great opportunity, perhaps the greatest ever, to finally break down the borders, even in our minds. For Nova Gorica and for Slovenia, the project is of great importance to present our culture to Europe and the world. Nova Gorica and Gorizia are physically practically one city. With the loss of Gorizia, Nova Gorica was built on the other side of the border - on our side. For a long time the two cities were separated by a political border and, with very few exceptions, there was very little cultural cooperation. Today, that is no longer the case, and it is culture that can unite us the most, because culture is above politics. I want to see ECOC 2025 in all its glory. My motto in life is to unite, not to divide, style is power. So it's time to let go of ideologies and breathe freely. There may never be another opportunity like this.



Photo: Personal archive

Tina Maze, Best Slovenian skier

The first time I visited Gorizia was around 2000, when we took part in conditioning drills there. We stayed at a hotel on the Italian side of Transalpina. From then on, my journey often brought me back to Gorizia, as my partner Andrea enjoyed training there. It also serves as an excellent base for summer training. When I speak about the town, I refer to both Nova Gorica and Gorizia. There are many aspects of this environment that inspire me, while there are also many elements that keep it rooted in historical times. The message of Nova Gorica and Gorizia coming together – complementing each other, and working as one – carries profound significance. It is the younger generations who will lead these towns forward, which remain, somewhat inexplicably, divided into two separate towns instead of one single town. The interconnectedness of these two towns allows Italians to embrace what is good in Slovenia and Slovenians to benefit from what is good in Italy. Living between two cultures simultaneously is a wonderful experience! I see only positive in it. I look forward to meaningful projects and, most of all, to fantastic concerts.



Photo: go2025.eu



The Monument of Peace at Cerje, located in the Kras region, offers a panoramic view from the Alps to the Adriatic. Photo: Jošt Gantar

WALK OF PEACE FROM THE ALPS TO THE ADRIATIC

A journey through history and nature

TEXT BY POLONA PREŠEREN

The Soča Valley, Gorica and the surrounding area bear the lasting scars of World War I, particularly the Isonzo Front, which left an indelible mark on the landscapes, communities and lives on both sides of today's Slovenian-Italian border.

More than a century later, the Walk of Peace from the Alps to the Adriatic unites over 300 monuments into a 500-kilometre-long hiking trail.

This enduring symbol of remembrance intertwines natural and cultural heritage, delivering a profound message of peace.

The Walk of Peace serves as a powerful testament to the immense suffering endured during World War I and stands as a crucial reminder of the importance of preventing future wars.

A unique hiking experience

The Walk of Peace is thoughtfully divided into 30 sections, beginning and ending in settlements where visitors can find accommodation and refreshments. Certain parts of the route are suitable for cycling, making it accessible to a wide range of travellers, from families with children to experienced hikers.

Along the way, visitors can marvel at unspoilt natural landscapes and immerse themselves in

historical landmarks that trace the legacy of the former western Slovenian border.

This long-distance trail offers exciting challenges that appeal to both beginners and experienced hikers, combining challenging physical activity with opportunities to explore the natural and cultural treasures along Slovenia's western border.

The southern section of the trail traverses the culturally significant sites of the Isonzo Front in the Goriška region, the rolling hills of Brda, and the Kras landscape. On Mt Sabotin, just above Nova Gorica, visitors will find the Park of Peace, an open-air museum with caves and trenches – silent witnesses to the battles fought by soldiers from 22 nations. This cross-border Park of Peace, along with a section of the Walk of Peace from the Alps to the Adriatic, raises awareness of the futility of war and promotes harmony among nations.

Highlights along the way

Europe Square is a symbolic link between Slovenia and Italy, making it a popular starting point for exploring the route. Along the way, you'll encounter Mt Sveta Gora, a revered pilgrimage site, accessible through a



The route connects monuments, open-air museums and natural sites, all unified by a message of cooperation, friendship and peace. Photo: The Kobarid Museum archive

tunnel built during World War I. Once one of the bloodiest battlefields on Slovenian soil, Mt Škabrijel now rewards visitors with breathtaking views of the Julian Alps, the Kras region and the Adriatic Sea. The Monument of Peace at Cerje, located in the Kras region, offers a panoramic view from the Alps to the Adriatic, a poignant reminder of the legacy of war and the importance of peace.

The Walk of Peace also includes military cemeteries, such as those in Solkan and Črnice, which are on the UNESCO Tentative List.

These landmarks are solemn reminders of the tragedies of war and its lasting impact on both people and landscapes, serving as places of remembrance and reverence for the victims.

Adding a literary dimension to the trail, part of the Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* is set on the Isonzo Front. The novel vividly describes the experiences of Henry Frederic, a military captain fighting for the Italian army near Kobarid.



Military cemeteries are solemn reminders of the tragedies of war and its lasting impact on both people and landscapes. Photo: Tanja Gorjan

Message of the Walk of Peace

The Walk of Peace tells not only a story of war, but also a profound narrative of peace and resilience along the Soča and Piave rivers, once scenes of tragic battles during World War I, peace now reigns, complemented by the stunning beauty of nature and a shared respect for history and harmony among nations. For hikers, this trail offers more than just breathtaking views – it evokes a deep sense of peace while serving as a poignant reminder of the devastating events that must never be forgotten.

Today, the route connects monuments, open-air museums and natural sites, all unified by a message of cooperation, friendship and peace.

Much more than a walking trail, the Walk of Peace is a living history lesson and a lasting invitation to promote coexistence and understanding between peoples.



Gorizia Castle. Photo: Marco Milani

CASTLES IN GORIŠKA

History and mystique rolled into one

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

Goriška, a picturesque region in western Slovenia, is steeped in history and cultures that have shaped its appearance over the centuries. Among the most fascinating relics of the past are the castles and manor houses scattered throughout the region.

Most have now been converted into museums or occasionally serve as backdrops for cultural events. In addition to their architectural and historical value, many of these castles hold interesting legends and stories that capture the imagination of locals and visitors alike.

Symbol of the County of Gorizia

Gorizia Castle, a magnificent medieval fortification, stands on a hill above the town of Gorizia in Italy, right on the border with Slovenia. Dating back to the 11th century, it served as the seat of the Counts of Gorizia, who had an important influence on the history of the area.

The castle's strategic control of the trade routes between the Alps and the Adriatic brought it economic and political prosperity.

Its architecture combines Romanesque and Gothic elements, as evidenced by the many renovations and additions over the centuries. During the Habsburg era, the castle lost its original function and eventually fell into ruin.

Following extensive restoration in the 20th century, it is now one of the most recognisable historical monuments in the region.

Legend has it that Count Henry locked himself in one of the castle's rooms with a treasure to avoid enemy attacks.

He is said to have cursed the room so that anyone who entered it would meet with disaster. To this day, some claim to hear mysterious footsteps and echoes of unseen visitors in the castle.

Dragons and hidden treasures

One of the most beautiful castles in Goriška is Rihemberk Castle, which towers over the village of Branik. Built in the 13th century, the castle features a magnificent tower and an idyllic location. Over the centuries, it has been owned by several noble families, most notably the Counts of Lanthieri. In the 17th century, the Lanthieri family renovated the castle, converting it into a Renaissance-Baroque residence while preserving its medieval features. Its hilltop location provided strategic control over the

Vipava Valley, which gave the castle an important military and economic role.

The building is architecturally remarkable for its combination of different styles, from Romanesque and Gothic to Baroque.

Its mighty fortifications include a large defensive wall, four corner towers and a central tower called the Bergfrid. Standing over 20 metres high, it rewards visitors with spectacular views of the surrounding landscape.

In the 20th century, the castle suffered a sad fate. Partially damaged during the Second World War,

it was later abandoned and left to decay. However, it has undergone extensive renovations in recent decades, which has restored much of its former glory.

Legend has it that a giant dragon once lived beneath the castle, guarding a hidden treasure.

Although some brave knights are said to have fought and defeated the dragon, the treasure was never found. According to locals, at night, you can still hear the rustling of the dragon's wings within the castle walls.



Rihemberk Castle. Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info



Štanjel Castle. Photo: Dejan Šuc/www.slovenia.info

Tragic love

Dobrovo Castle, built in the 16th century during the Renaissance, is an outstanding example of architecture from this era.

With its beautiful hilltop location, the castle is surrounded by vineyards, lending it a special magic.

It was built by the noble Savorgnan family. The castle changed hands several times over the centuries, until the 19th century when it became the property of the Habsburgs. During this period, it underwent major renovations, where Baroque elements were added, although it still retains its Renaissance structure.

The exterior features typical elements of Renaissance architecture, such as beautifully designed windows and a grand entrance portal. The castle also has a large courtyard surrounded

by arcades. Inside, there are many rooms furnished with historical objects and paintings, giving visitors an insight into the life of the nobility in centuries gone by.

Thanks to its beautiful location, rich history and cultural significance, Dobrovo Castle is a real treasure that transports visitors back in time, while at the same time offering the pleasure of beautiful nature and fine wines.

One of the most famous legends associated with the castle is that of a young castle lady who fell in love with a humble vine-grower.

As her family objected to the union, the lovers planned to elope. When her parents found out about their intentions, they imprisoned the vine-grower in the castle dungeon, where he perished. It is said that on foggy nights, his shadow appears in the vineyards, as if he were still searching for his beloved.

Mysterious underground passages

Vipava Castle, which today lies in ruins, was an strategic point for controlling trade routes in the Middle Ages. Situated in the centre of the Vipava Valley, on a hill overlooking the town of Vipava, the castle was built in the 12th century by counts who played an important role in the history of the area.

Although the castle changed hands several times over the centuries, it has retained its imposing presence.

Built by the noblemen of the Walsee family, it was later taken over by the Habsburgs. Designed as a fortress to withstand attacks, the castle features solid walls and a defence system. It was partially rebuilt in the 16th century, including the castle tower, which today offers a beautiful view of the surrounding area.

Inside the castle, many historical details have been preserved, testifying to life in past centuries. These include rooms with Baroque elements, which give visitors a glimpse into the historical life of the nobility. The castle has served various purposes throughout history – functioning as a military fortress as well as a residence of nobility.

Legend has it that there are underground passages under the castle, leading up to the nearby hills.

The locals believed that these passageways were built by mysterious little men who were said to have supernatural powers.

It is said that the adventurers who attempted to find the entrance to these passages were always stopped by strange accidents or noises that drove them away.

Lady of the Castle

Kromberk Castle is a historical gem situated near Nova Gorica, on a slightly elevated hill above the Vipava River. It was built in the 14th century, most probably as a small castle fortification, which served to protect and control the surrounding area. The castle changed hands several times over the centuries, belonging to noble families such as the Coceani, Lanthieri and Habsburgs.

It is a classic example of a medieval fortification that later took on a Renaissance appearance.

The castle is rectangular in shape, surrounded by walls and with towers at each corner. One of the most distinctive features of the castle is its central castle building and courtyard. The building retains elements of the early Renaissance, having been partially rebuilt and extended in the 16th century.

In the 19th century, it became the property of the Habsburgs and was used for various purposes. After the First World War, the castle lost its former importance and began to decay. However, extensive restoration work has been carried out in recent decades to preserve its cultural heritage.

Thanks to its strategic location, rich history and cultural significance, Kromberk Castle is a popular destination for those who want to learn about the history of the area and enjoy the beautiful views of Nova Gorica and the surrounding vineyards.

One legend tells of a mysterious white lady who is said to be the ghost of the unfortunate lady of the castle.

She appears to visitors who stay too long in the



Kromberk Castle. Photo: Jošt Gantar/www.slovenia.info

castle park at night, inviting them to follow her. Those who have seen her say that she vanishes like a mist the moment they approach.

Discover castle stories yet untold

The castles in Goriška are much more than just architectural masterpieces. In addition to the best known, there are several smaller ones, some of which are in ruins. Goriška could easily

be described as a landscape of mansions and castles. Each carries stories that intertwine historical facts and folk imagination. We invite you to discover them for yourself.

Their legends remind us of the area's rich past and invite us to explore with an open heart and a curious spirit. Goriška thus remains one of the most fascinating regions for those who appreciate history and mystique.



GASTRONOMY

Photo: bit245/depositphotos.com

GORIŠKA GASTRONOMY

A Celebration of Flavours at the Crossroads of Cultures

TEXT BY ŠPELA VOVK

The Goriška region, stretching across the picturesque vineyards of Brda and the Vipava Valley and anchored by the twin cities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica, is a treasure trove of culinary delights.

As the European Capital of Culture in 2025, this region will showcase its exceptional flavours to the world, where Slovenian and Italian traditions meet in perfect harmony, inspired by its natural surroundings.

A Diverse Culinary Heritage

At the heart of Goriška's gastronomy lies its rich diversity. Unique dishes like *frtalja* with wild herbs, a simple yet flavourful omelette that celebrates the bounty of local nature, and *štruklji*, traditional rolled dumplings with fillings ranging from walnuts to seasonal fruits, highlight the region's culinary heritage. Meat lovers will delight in the renowned Šempas prosciutto, cured to perfection by the region's distinctive bora winds and a carefully curated blend of spices.

The proximity to Italy adds an additional layer of depth to Goriška's cuisine.

Handcrafted pastas, creamy risottos and exquisite pizzas often grace local menus, enhanced by fresh, sun-kissed vegetables and extra virgin olive oil from nearby groves. For those with a sweet tooth, Goriška rožata, a velvety custard dessert, is a must-try, blending Mediterranean influences with local traditions.

A Land of Exceptional Wines

Goriška's gastronomy is deeply intertwined with its winemaking heritage, as the region is home to some of Europe's most celebrated vineyards. The hills of Brda and the Vipava Valley produce indigenous varieties such as rebula, zelen and pinela, prized for their freshness, minerality and distinctive character. Among reds, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and the increasingly popular modra frankinja stand out. Wine enthusiasts can enjoy tastings at family-run wineries or explore charming wine cellars in villages like Šmartno, where each sip tells the story of the region's deep connection to the land.



Among white wines, Malvasia is characteristic of the Gorizia region. Photo: ZTKMŠ Brda/www.slovenia.info

Stop the City: A Celebration of Culture and Flavours

As part of the European Capital of Culture 2025 programme, Goriška will host Stop the City, one of the region's most popular food and wine festivals. This unique event will transform the streets of Nova Gorica and Gorizia into a vibrant celebration of local flavours. Visitors can savor the finest Goriška cuisine, meet top local winemakers and enjoy culinary masterpieces in an open-air setting brimming with culture, music and unforgettable experiences.



Frtalja. Photo: kuhnapato.si

More than just food and drink, Goriška's gastronomy is a way of life—a celebration of nature, tradition and contemporary creativity.

It embodies the values of the "I feel Slovenia" brand, emphasizing sustainability, authenticity and memorable encounters that leave a lasting impression on every guest.

Welcome to Goriška, where the Mediterranean meets the Alps, and where the past and future blend seamlessly into a land of unforgettable flavours and experiences, truly embodying the message of bringing people together.



Kobarid dumplings. Photo: kuhnapato.si



Šelinka is minestrone-style soup made of celery and celeriac, vegetables, spices and pork. Photo: Tomo Jeseničnik/www.slovenia.info



Photo: EdZbarzhyvetsby/depositphotos.com

A GOURMET ADVENTURE BETWEEN HILLS AND VALLEYS

Following the trail of local flavours

TEXT BY TANJA GLOGOVČAN BELANČIČ

Embark on a gourmet journey through the Goriška region, Posočje and Brda, where your taste buds will be treated to an unforgettable adventure of flavours. Have you ever thought: “What if, instead of going out to the pub, I tried cooking local dishes at home?” Well, now’s the time to pick up a wooden spoon, tie on your apron and showcase your skills!

Did you know that, alongside vegetables and fruit, a variety of herbs have always taken pride of place on local tables?

How to scare away horned vipers and satisfy hunger with herbs

Herbs are the star ingredient of one of the simplest but most characteristic dishes – *frtalja* (a herby omelette)! Yet eggs and flour play only a minor role in *frtalja*.

Instead, herbs like fennel, yarrow and feverfew take centre stage, and the eggs bring them together into a delicious harmony.

Fun fact: *Frthalja* was an indispensable dish on the table when celebrating May Day. The saying goes that the first *frtalja* of the season scares away horned vipers. So, if you spot something slithery in your garden, get in the kitchen and make your own *frtalja*!

Prestigious elegance on a plate

If *frtalja* is an early party of herbs to start the day, *gubanca* is the elegant evening gala. This is not just any *potica* – it’s a *potica* dressed to impress that has gone dancing with almonds from Bari, walnuts from Carnia and pine nuts from Greece. And guess what?

You can also find all these rich ingredients in the Goriška region.

It is said that *gubanca* used to grace the tables of rich families, while the poor had to make do with the more modest *potica*.



FRTALJA



Ingredients:

5 eggs (or more if desired)
3 tablespoons flour (just enough to bind, not add flavour)
100 ml milk (or to taste)
a handful of yarrow and wild fennel
2 slices of homemade pork salami
olive oil
a pinch of salt

Method:

1. In a bowl, whisk the eggs, flour and salt together (as if you were throwing a mini party). Add a little milk to taste.
2. Chop the herbs (this is where the artisanal touch comes in) and gently stir them into the olive oil.
3. Heat oil in a pan, pour in the egg mixture and flip it several times during cooking – no fear, it's just like flipping pancakes!
4. Drizzle some aromatic oil over the omelette and serve with salami. Congratulations – you've mastered the art of firtalja!

GUBANCA



First, prepare the butter pastry or filo pastry dough using your favourite recipe. Then pay attention to what matters most: the filling and the method.

Filling:

1 egg
165 g raisins (soaked in rum – why not?)
250 g ground walnuts
250 g ground almonds
100 g candied fruit
40 g ground pine nuts
150 g sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla paste
50 g chopped dark chocolate (because chocolate is always a good idea)
50 ml white wine
a pinch of nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon

Method:

1. Soak the raisins in rum – and if there's any left, you can toast with it!
2. Mix the walnuts, almonds, pine nuts and candied fruit into a harmonious mixture.
3. Complete the filling by adding the sugar, spices, chocolate and wine. Mix it all together. Resist the temptation to eat it right away!
4. Roll out the dough and fill it with the filling – then roll it up tightly as if guarding the world's best kept secret and shape it into a spiral.
5. Brush the spiral with beaten egg and bake at 180°C until the kitchen is filled with an aroma that will attract your neighbours.
6. Dust the gubanca with powdered sugar and get ready to impress your guests!

SPORTS



Solkan Bridge is the bridge with the biggest stone arch in the world. Take a bike and enjoy the view of this grand structure over the greenish-blue Soča River. Photo: Vid Ponikvar/www.slovenia.info

Sporting events to celebrate the European Capital of Culture

Highlighting the synergy between sport and culture, the European Capital of Culture will host a series of sporting events.

1 – 9 May 2025: The March for Europe

The march is a multi-sport and multi-cultural event that spans the European Capital of Culture area and transcends national borders. Combining elements of sport, street culture, high culture, and the arts, it will deliver a vibrant cultural and sporting experience for participants and spectators.

24 May 2025: Giro d'Italia – Stage 14

On 24 May 2025, the Giro d'Italia will bring its 14th stage to an exciting finish in Nova Gorica, with riders completing two laps through the city's streets. The event coincides with Nova Gorica's designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2025. The prestigious race last took place on Slovenian streets in 2022, when the caravan of cyclists traversed the scenic Soča Valley and tackled the challenging ascent of Kolovrat. Although Slovenian cycling stars Primož Roglič and Tadej Pogačar won the Giro in 2023 and 2024, the route did not include Slovenia in those years.

25 September 2025: Jungle Basketball

The event is an exciting and innovative initiative that combines the passion for basketball with the creativity and modernity of the urban environment. The project focuses on creating an urban basketball court in the border area, envisioned as a hub vibrant hub of activity and social interaction with inspiring cross-border basketball role models.

GO! 2025

NOVA GORICA - GORIZIA