



NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

TRAVELER

All Travel, All the Time

SLOVENIA PORTFOLIO

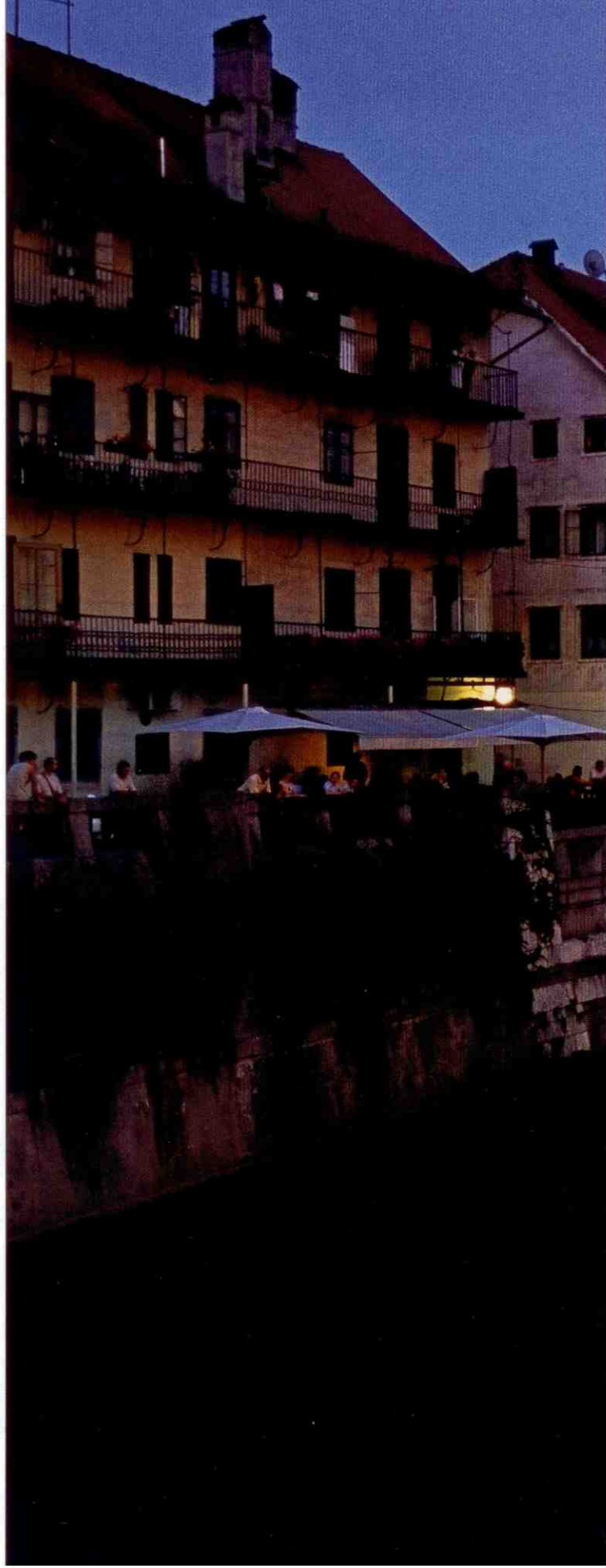
Picture-book scenes—like mountain-cupped Lake Bled—appear everywhere in this newly emerging European nation.

SLOVENIA IS THE

ultimate example of overlooked Europe.

A country about the size of New Jersey (“hardly bigger than an Australian sheep farm, with two million people,” says a local), it blends emerging modernity with time-honored traditions, haute-palate food with farmer’s fare, bucolic landscapes with villages that seem to have changed little in 100 years. Once part of Yugoslavia, but independent since 1991, this country in the middle of Europe reveals a remarkable diversity even during a two-hour helicopter ride: a rumpiled rug of Alpine peaks, soft green valleys, a sliver of Adriatic coast. You can zigzag along Slovenia’s borders with Austria, Hungary, Croatia, and Italy. You can view 9,396-foot Mount Triglav, which is climbed by most natives at least once as a matter of national pride. You can tour a bevy of medieval castles; descend into one of the world’s largest mercury mines; enjoy Lake Bled, where, on the nation’s only island, you’ll find a baroque church and a centuries-old “wishing bell”; ride Lipizzaner horses, a famed breed that has roots in present-day Slovenia; explore networks of caves; and search out isolated monasteries, like the medieval-era Carthusian monastery at Pleterje. And for those despairing that Europe’s ancient cities are giving way to skyscrapers there is cobblestoned Ljubljana, where on a market morning one can sample cheeses and meats that challenge the best fare of top restaurants. This is a country that honors its past and accommodates the future. These pages will give you a sense of the place. But—just go.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY VILIUS KIRVAITIS



LJUBLJANA

With a tip of the hat to pagan times, residents of Ljubljana, Slovenia's cosmopolitan capital, celebrate the summer solstice with a traditional Midsummer Night boat parade and bonfire on the city's Ljubljanica River. This area in the old town is known for its artsy ambience, alfresco restaurants, and bars specializing in local wines. For a relatively small nation—7,827 square miles—Slovenia boasts a disproportionate number of wineries: More than 400 dot its green hills and valleys. *Vinotekas*—wine bars—such as *Vinoteka Movia* (opposite, lower), showcase top Slovenian wine labels, which tend toward peppery reds and aromatic whites.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARLY CALHOUN/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX (OPPOSITE, LOWER), ARNE HODALIC





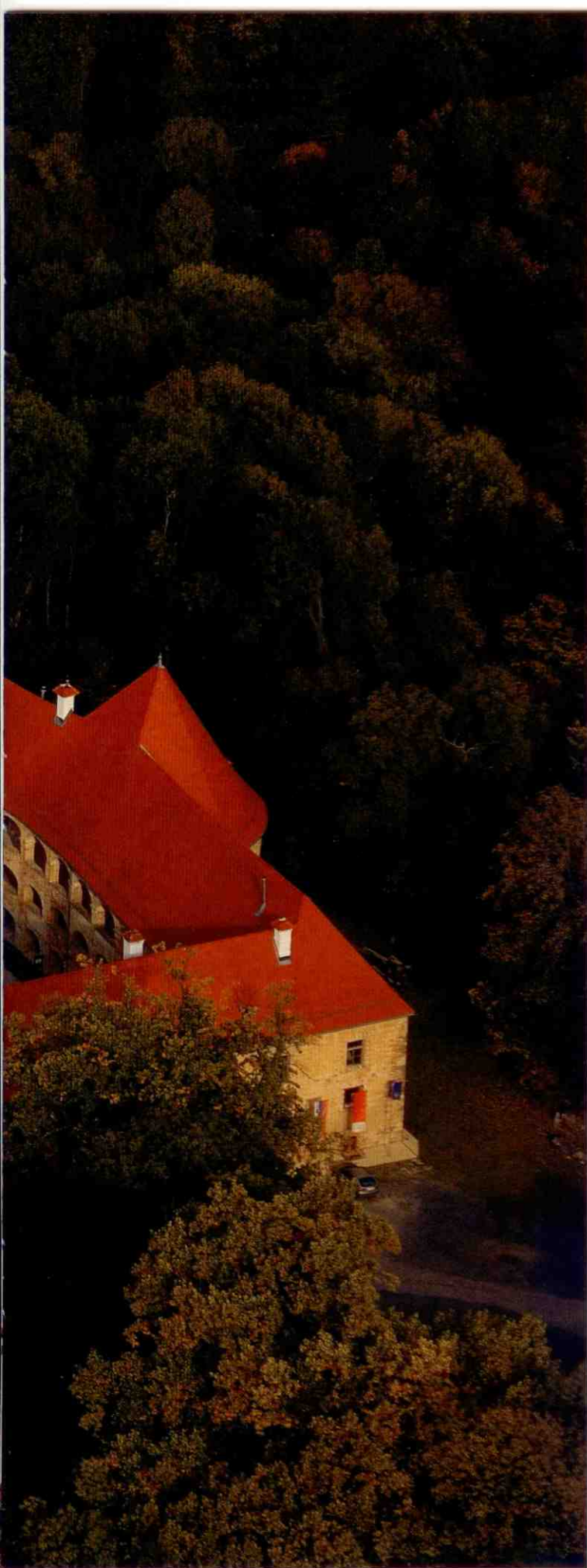
JULIAN ALPS

Marching to the far horizon, Slovenia's snow-frosted Julian Alps form the southeastern edge of Europe's Alps. At the center of this lofty landscape lies Slovenia's only national park, Triglav National Park, named for the nation's highest peak, 9,396-foot-high Mount Triglav. This rugged mountain kingdom of alpine villages, pastoral valleys, rushing rivers, and sapphire-blue lakes was a hotly contested front in World War I, when Italian and Austrian troops fought for control of the border region, and in Allied-Axis fighting during World War II. As yet a relatively unknown region to many Europeans, it's popular locally for hiking, rafting, skiing, and many other recreational activities.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATEVZ LENARCIC







GORICKO

Diamond in the rough: The irregularly shaped Grad (castle) in Slovenia's northeastern Goricko region is purported to be the largest such structure in the country. Thought to have been built as a stronghold for the Knights Templar along the route of the Crusades to the Holy Land, the building reflects later baroque-style renovations, especially notable in the inner-courtyard arcades. Among the interesting facets at this unusual castle, which today houses handicrafts workshops, are the alleged number of original rooms—365, one for each day of the year—and evidence of Christian symbolism in some architectural details. The region of Goricko lies just west of Slovenia's border with Hungary, in Prekmurje, an area known as Slovenia's "forgotten corner." Traditional ways of life still prevail here, including the selling of fresh peppers straight from farm baskets (*above*). Some observe that the area feels more Hungarian than Slovenian—a vestige of centuries of Hungarian rule, which ended with World War I.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATEVZ LENARCIC (LEFT),
CIRIL JAZBEC (ABOVE)

PLANINSKO POLJE

Snaking its way along fertile bottomland, the lazy Unica River shapes a sinuous route through the landscape of Planinsko Polje, a limestone-rich area in southwestern Slovenia. Fishermen flock to this scenic waterway to hook trout and grayling, while naturalists revel in the local flora—including such uncommon species as the marsh gentian and meadow squill—and abundant birdlife. Heavy rainfalls lead the Unica to overflow its shallow riverbed regularly, flooding the low-lying plain and creating a temporary lake. What underlies the river is equally striking: a karst landscape famous among international geologists and speleologists for its thousands of caverns and sinkholes.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATEVZ LENARCIC





LIPICA

Scions of equine aristocracy, a pair of Lipizzaner horses await riders at the Lipica Stud Farm in western Slovenia. Bred to be graceful carriage and saddle horses for the rarefied court of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and trained in classical dressage by the acclaimed Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Lipizzaners are known for their distinctive white coats, endurance, and tractability. The breed is named for Lipica (spelled Lipizza in Italian), its purported place of origin and site of one of six stud farms that continue the horse's lineage today. The Lipica farm offers tours and a variety of riding courses for visitors.

PHOTOGRAPH BY VILIUS KIRVAITIS

