

Adriatic Moto Tours

Where in the world is 'Ljubljana'?

By Rita and Tom Hassall # 81657 and #55637

In the ongoing quest to find new riding venues, we were intrigued by a flier at the 2006 Vermont National promoting tours based out of Slovenia. In the months following, we looked at the company Web site, corresponded with the tour operator, and determined that it was reasonably easy to fly to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia.

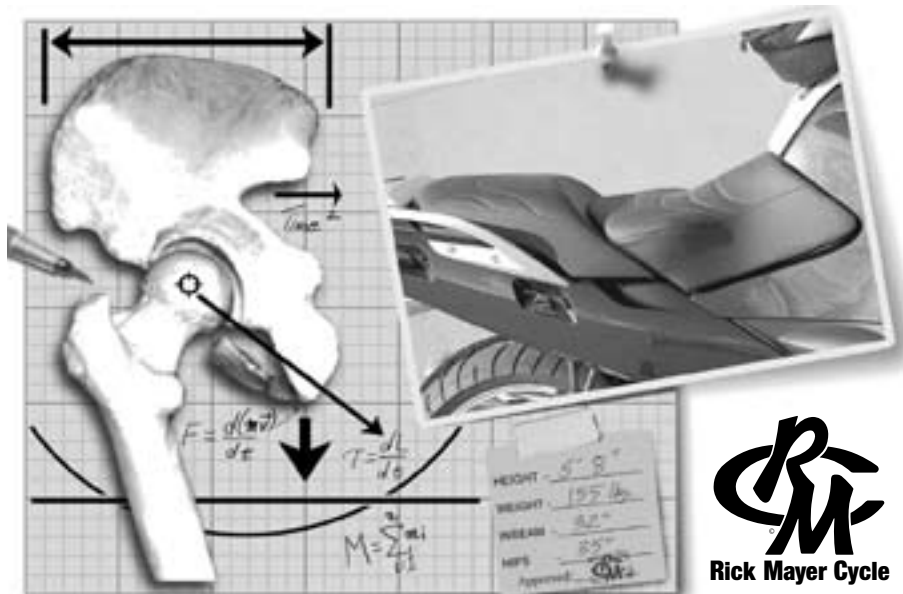
Adriatic Moto Tours provides an interesting selection of tours to unique and fascinating destinations. We selected the new Czech – Hungary Scouting Tour. Our group was only the second group to enjoy this varied, interesting route. Other guided tours go to the Adriatic Riviera, the Balkans, and the Adriatic and Alps. The firm can also rent motorcycles for approximately \$100 per day. The young entrepreneur, Matej (Ma –tay) and his wife, Martina, provide excellent personal



service and have put together well-planned, enjoyable tours (you may have seen them at their booth in West Bend). We heard firsthand about the Beautiful Balkans Tour from four couples from the UK who had ridden that tour last year and opted for this second tour. Pre-marked maps and detailed route slips for each day's ride are provided. Choosing to ride on our own and not with the larger group, we found the routes easy to follow. Only one day with unforeseen detours and some difficult-to-find route markings was confusing. The riding is varied, from roads similar to U.S. state highways to "roads less traveled."

Each of us rode an F650GS and we found varied scenery, roads, and cultures. A highlight was the city of Ljubljana itself. With Slovenia being the first country to exit the Yugoslavia group, it has reclaimed the heritage that had been lost. Ljubljana has become a delightful jewel of a city. Riding out of Slovenia sent us through a series of small, tidy and very alive villages. The change when we crossed the border into Hungary was striking with everything looking just a bit scruffy. However, we enjoyed the stay on Balaton Lake and the visit to Budapest on a scheduled rest day. A popular ski area, High Tatras, Slovakia was the next stop. The forested

Left: Picturesque village on the way through Slovakia. **Below left:** Prague's Old Town Square with St. Nicholas Church. **Below:** Chain bridge over Danube River and Royal palace in Budapest.



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roads getting to the accommodations were gorgeous but, alas, were wet enough to dictate a bit slower pace. This was a fact emphasized by the Renault sedan upside down in the ditch in one of the twisty bits.

Then it was into the Czech Republic with the first stop in Olomouc. This small Moravian town had a fantastic square with a town hall sporting an astronomical clock that did all kinds of things at certain hours of the day. We had a very nice “pivo” (beer) on the town square while watching the clock. As an aside, the Czech Republic is quite proud of their beer and it is plentiful, inexpensive, and widely consumed after vehicles are parked. All of the countries we visited have a zero blood alcohol content policy for operating a motor vehicle.

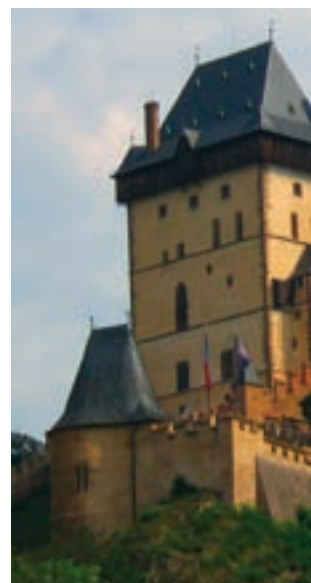
Prague lived up to its reputation. Our hotel was on the outskirts of the city, but the bus/subway system was easily navigated with a little coaching from

Martina (even without knowing any of the language). Around every corner was another lovely streetscape. There was even an opportunity to rent a paddle boat on the Vltava River. The ride out of Prague eventually took us through a huge national park, Sumava. It was a good ride, but the damp and misty weather again called for cautious use of the throttle. To be able to fully appreciate these roads on the dry, sunny rest day in Cesky Krumlov (another little city very high on the cute and quaint scale), we wended our way around and rode through the park again. It was an exhilarating ride when the road surface was dry.

The following day provided even more

spectacular riding into the Austrian Alps on the way to Salzburg. The roads were, at various times, twisty with easy curves that followed a mountain stream. It was really unbelievable to look into the distance and see more immediate mountains and then look further and see massive mountains looming. The downside entering into Austria was that prices for everything took a huge leap. Salzburg, of course, has much charm and history. It was a bit unfortunate that we were there on a Sunday with most shops shut.

The last day, as with many adventures, encompassed a host of superlatives – the wettest, the grandest views, the most challenging riding. During one stretch, the route kept us climbing and climbing. It



Top: Great riding on traffic-free roads through Czech countryside. **Top right:** Karlstejn Castle: Karlstejn is the true star in the constellation of castles in Czech. **Above:** A short stop among sunflowers in Hungary. **Right:** Guided sightseeing tour around Budapest.



was not clear how high we were going to go. Then, suddenly, there was a town set around a mirror-like Alpine lake. The route back into Slovenia went over the Ljubelj pass. The hairpins were made even more exhilarating with periodic rushes of water coming off the mountain side onto the road due to the heavy rain pouring down. The scenery would likely have been more breathtaking had the weather been clear and if one could even consider not concentrating on the road. In the pouring rain, the already challenging road demanded full attention. At the border, the guard actually motioned that we could park for a bit under the overhang for a temporary respite from the downpour.

This area of the world is, except for Prague, generally off the common touring radar screen, but it is well worth consid-



ering. Adriatic Moto Tours is the group to introduce you to the region. Matej and Martina's personal interest in each person's enjoyment make for a special trip. They assist with the various currencies, languages, and keep the F650, RT, R1200GS bikes, and a couple of Hondas all running well. This being their own business, they clearly care about the satisfaction of their guests. The hotels and guest houses are comfortable. With this being a scouting tour, some of our accommodations were chosen to try out the hotel for future tours. In Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, it was necessary to be prudent and select hotels with locked parking areas for bike security.

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