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Green, clean and beautiful

Ljubljana continues to grow and really lives up to its eco ethos

By Robin McKelvie

LHEAR a lot of hot air about the environment on my travels, but there is one city that really lives up to its eco ethos. Welcome to clean and green Ljubljana, where cars have been put in their place and real steps taken to work with nature rather than trample over it. Awarded the title of European Green Capital in 2016, Ljubljana makes for a refreshing city break.

The first time I visited the

Slovenian capital back in 1992, it had just emerged from the embers of the old Yugoslavia. In the 1990s, its old core became heavily congested with hulking buses trundling across the main square and much of it had degenerated into one giant car park.

The turnaround has been seismic and what is remarkable is that one man is behind much of it - dynamic local mayor Zoran Jankovic. He has vested interests like taxi firms, to pedestrianise much of the centre, putting people before vehicles.

I'm back now for over the 20th time and on every visit there are always more improvements and new attractions. I take in a sweeping view of the city from my 11th-floor room

at the brand new Intercontinental Ljubljana (www.ihg.com).

I wander down to the main square, Presernov trg. It's pedestrianised these days and in the place of buses are people from a myriad of countries enjoying ice cream in the sun. I cross the landmark Triple Bridge to visit the Central Market. It is very Ljubljana as you can buy ultra-fresh fruit and vegetables here that are grown in allotments that lie just a 10-minute walk away in the sleepy suburb of Krakovo. On Fridays, stalls conjure up delicious, healthy meals on "Open Kitchen" day.

I put a picnic together with the bountiful fresh local produce before walking across one of the new footbridges commissioned by the eco-friendly mayor. I remember

the first time I came to Slovenia I asked a waiter about "organic" food. I had to explain it to him and he replied: "We just call that food, everything else in cans we call chicken feed". I smile thinking of him as we cruise beneath the billowing willow trees that line the banks of the Ljubljana River. I'm aboard a graceful old wooden cruiser crafted here in Slovenia, called the Ljubljana too.

Back on dry land, I take in the architecture of a city that is like a greatest hits of European styles. There are the tight baroque and medieval buildings of the cobbled old town, the ornate art nouveau delights of Miklosiceva Street, the pastel pink Italianate Franciscan Church and the harsh beauty of the socialist era remnants around Republic Square.

I push on to another clean, green oasis. Tivoli Park is awash with gardens and fragrant flowers. Making sure to pop my rubbish in the recycling - Ljubljana is very serious about recycling - I head off for a trip on one of the public bikes that are available for riding around the city.

Back at the Intercontinental, I enjoy a dinner with a view from their rooftop B Restaurant. My waiter explains the "orange wine" which is made along organic principles rather than relying on pesticides. My salad is sourced locally and the fish hails from Slovenia's Adriatic coastline. I leave reassured that Ljubljana will continue to blossom as one of Europe's cleanest and greenest cities.



FACT BOX

easyJet easyjet.com fly from Edinburgh to Ljubljana via London Stansted with returns from £288. More tourist information from visitljubljana.com



▼ Attractions include, from top: Dragon Bridge (and main pic), Tivoli Park, art nouveau buildings and the Franciscan Church of the Annunciation.



10 Scenic treats in Slovenia

LAKE BLED
One of Europe's most picturesque glacial lakes lies just an hour by bus from Ljubljana. It beguiles with its mountain setting.

JULIAN ALPS NATIONAL PARK
World-class walking in this mountain oasis with trails to suit all levels of skill and experience.

LOGARSKA DOLINA
Arguably the finest mountain valley in the country. The Alpine peaks soar above a grassy meadow.

KRANJSKA GORA
This year-round resort specialises in winter sports when the snow hits, while in summer it's a base for adventure sports.

SOCA VALLEY
The milky blue Soca River surges through this pristine valley and the resort of Bovec is a handy base for accessing it's rafting trips.

KOBRARID WAR MUSEUM
One of the world's most dramatic and impressive war museums tells the story of the brutal fighting during WW2 in this inhospitable mountain terrain.

POSTOJNA CAVE
Hop on the cufe train and enter a subterranean wonderland in a country famous for its caves. The rock formations and massive caverns are breathtaking.

PIRAN
The undoubted star of Slovenia's bijou Adriatic coastline, Piran boasts an old town set on a promontory surrounded by sea on three sides.

MARIBOR
Slovenia's second largest city is a stately old dame that ripples along the River Drava in a swathe of historical buildings and walkways.

PREKMURJE
A little-explored eastern region where the influence of neighbouring Hungary comes across deliciously in its paprika-laden dishes.