

## Q AND EAT

Before you indulge, a summertime food-safety quiz  
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The Sharknado series mines our obsession with stupidity  
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# Globe Life & Arts

## TRAVEL



The town of Piran – home to a lively piazza and a 17th-century church – is considered the pearl of Slovenia’s coast. AMANDA RUGGERI

# The Mediterranean you don’t know

Slovenian Istria – a 46-kilometre stretch of coast between Italy and Croatia – is an odd yet delightful mash-up of the best the Adriatic has to offer. Sometimes it’s hard to tell which country you’re in, **Amanda Ruggeri** writes

IZOLA, SLOVENIA

Weather-beaten fishermen called to one another across equally weather-beaten boats, their Italian tinged with salt and laughter. Behind them rose a clutter of red-roofed restaurants and shops in saffron and persimmon, aqua and mint, their façades punctuated with signs such as PESCHERIA and GELATERIA. Water lapped at the dock. In the distance, green hills rippled with vineyards.

But I wasn’t in Italy. Although – if I squinted – I could probably see it from where I stood.

Instead, I was in one of the least-known stretches of coast along the Mediterranean: Slovenian Istria. Until a few weeks before, I hadn’t even known the area existed. When I thought of Slovenia, a former Yugoslav republic, I thought of forest and mountains. But despite being less than half the size of Nova Scotia, the country takes in a sweep of geological diversity, from Alps to Adriatic.

That isn’t to say that Slovenia’s only outlet to the sea is a large one. From top to bottom, it measures 46 kilometres. It’s squeezed between Italy, to the north, and Croatia, to the south. And, unsurprisingly, it has often been dominated by its neighbours. From the late 13th century through 1797, when Slovenian Istria passed to Austria, it was a part of the Republic of Venice.

Even today, Italian and Slovenian are the

area’s official languages; on the highway, signs list town names in both. In Koper, where the Italian border lies just 10 kilometres away, I wandered a tangle of stone streets, their windows strewn with laundry lines, that looked like a corner of Sicily – and then had an espresso beneath the pointed arches of the Loggia Palace, a 15th-century Venetian Gothic town hall that could have been dropped into Venice without a wrinkle of architectural disturbance.

And yet, at one point out on the water in the coast’s southern section, my phone beeped. “Welcome to Croatia!” the message said.

Part of the Slovenian coastline’s biggest draw is soaking up that cultural mish-mash. For me, at least, there’s a particular pleasure in finding places, and people, that don’t neatly belong, and from top to bottom, Slovenia offers that in spades: the history of a former Yugoslav republic unmarred by the ethnic tensions of its neighbours, the architecture of a central European capital city that’s primarily Italian Baroque, the wine connoisseurs who knock back liquor like residents farther east, even the local officials whose approach blends Mediterranean hospitality, Austrian efficiency and Eastern Bloc bureaucracy.

Even so, the real reasons to come to Slovenian Istria are those that draw visitors to the rest of the Mediterranean.

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