



## HIDDEN TREASURES of the Istrian Peninsula

Traveling down the along the Croatian coast are many lovely small towns and scenic views. Inland a bit is Slovenia, a destination full of hidden treasures to be discovered. Located only a mile or two away from the hills of Italy, you can find caves, castles, waterfalls and a picturesque countryside. All await those who wander off the

routine tourist trails. While traveling south towards Croatia, we took an inland trip to the Lipica Stud Farm. Here one can see the training of the famous Lipizzaner stallions or watch a show, pet them and even ride in a carriage pulled by them. And at an affordable price too. These pure white horses are known world wide for their noble gait and regal beauty. Years and years of breeding have created this talented beauty and masterpiece of nature. The farm itself is picture perfect. White fenced trails lined with trees give way to open green pastures where the horses take charge and carriage rides gain speed. Awesome! The mares with their young are at nearby stables. They are born dark gray and most whiten as they mature. Taken care of with love and attention, these animals are a true treasure to see up close and personal. A bit future down the map we entered Croatia. Croatia is shaped like a backwards seven. On the upper edge is an area called Lake Plitvice. This relatively unknown wonder is all about another one of nature's masterpieces. Waterfalls of all shapes and sizes surround pools of teal blue water. Miles of trails and wooden walkways go over, under and in every direction alongside gorgeous scenic views. We hiked six miles in torrential rains and still found it to be breathtaking. Caves, crystal clear ponds and lush green foliage all seem designed for a perfect painting. Never have I even seen such natural beauty. It's definitely worth a visit and time to explore. And on the northern point of Croatia is the Istrian Peninsula. Here there are many small towns and seductive hillside resorts. The Italian influence and coastal beauty make this area a favorite vacation spot that offers a mix of elegant villas, scenic views and seaport villages. We first headed out to Pula. This is an archaeological delight with ancient arches, temples and a fully intact Coliseum. For the tourists they even have roaming "gladiators" in full costumes. It was wonderful exploring the whole area and walking within the ruins of the city. But I give you a word of caution. Don't drive in Old Town! Cars travel and park as close as one inch from the next. Watching this is routine entertainment and was an experience in itself. The next day we traveled to nearby Rovinj which rises dramatically from the edges of Adriatic Sea. It's known to be the "romantic" city of Istria. Tiny twisted streets and ancient houses are strikingly simple yet lure you into a sense of belonging. Yachts and small boats bob in turquoise blue water. Fresh fish is always on the menu. Local markets are filled with homemade olive oil, wine and a variety of homegrown produce. It's just a delight to wander around and mingle with the people in this small town; maybe relax at a harbor cafe and have a cappuccino. Or maybe just watch the sun set.

