

BIOSPHERE RESERVES OF SLOVENIA

INSPIRING THE FUTURE



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Biosphere Reserve



UNESCO
BIOSFERNA
OBMOČJA
SLOVENIJE

WHERE I BELONG

MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE

The nature conservation areas included in UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme are paving the way for the realisation that building the future can only be achieved through **harmony between people and their environment**. Establishing an equal partnership between humans and nature is our highest priority, and it is within our power as humans to make this vision a reality.

Thus, the biosphere reserves have made it their mission to carefully preserve **natural values**, conserve the diversity of fauna and flora, and champion the sustainable use of natural resources. The same determination is applied toward preserving **folk traditions and cultural landscapes**. By prioritizing **knowledge**, we support research and foster innovation. We cultivate **sustainable agriculture** and make **future plans** geared toward **balanced economic development**.

The change starts with us: by promoting the quality of living and dwelling and sharing values of respect and integrity, we seek to become beacons of sustainability.

The UNESCO Biosphere Reserves of Slovenia inspire the future.

FOUR RESERVES SHARING THE SAME VALUES

Slovenia is home to four biosphere reserves included in UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme: **Julian Alps, Karst, Kozjansko and Obsotelje, and Mura**. These regions, diverse in geology, climate, and culture, are united by their rich biodiversity and the seamless blend of natural values and cultural heritage. Here, man plays an **active role in shaping his surroundings**, proudly declaring, "this is where I belong".



JULIAN ALPS



KARST



MURA

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, first launched the interdisciplinary Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) in 1971. It is an intergovernmental research programme that establishes a global network of biosphere reserves.



KOZJANSKO AND OBSOTELJE



BIOSPHERE RESERVE JULIAN ALPS

THE FIRST AND LARGEST BIOSPHERE RESERVE IN SLOVENIA

Triglav National Park, which is Slovenia's only national park, lies in the heart of the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve that was designated in 2003. Spanning nearly 200,000 hectares, including its transition area with the wider part of the Julian Alps, this reserve accounts for almost a tenth of Slovenia's territory.

In 2024, UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme declared the **Transboundary Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve**, merging the existing reserves on the Slovenian and Italian sides of the border to facilitate co-operation and management of this unique heritage. Tourism is a **key economic driver** in the Julian Alps, making the management of visitors and the implementation of sustainable development a shared cross-border challenge.

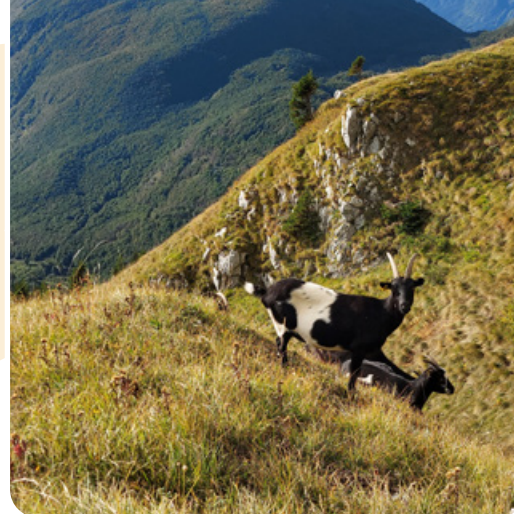
TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK

A protected area for well over 100 years, the park's main objective is to **preserve nature and its rich cultural heritage**, along with its historical roots within the broader Alpine region. The park performs a delicate balancing act between environmental conservation and human activity, underpinned by cultural values. **Here, cherished mountain traditions are not only upheld but actively lived.**

The park's striking landmarks, including the majestic Triglav and other Julian peaks, the edelweiss (planika in Slovenian), iconic lakes, gorges, and waterfalls, alongside its esteemed mountaineering history, are **integral to Slovenia's national identity.**



Therefore, preserving these national gems is a significant responsibility to shoulder, and ensuring local satisfaction remains the ultimate goal in the context of sustainability.



INSPIRING FACTS

Outstanding natural beauty and signature natural landmarks such as the Triglav Mountains, Alpine lakes, the charming island on Lake Bled, and the emerald-green Soča River, as well as a diverse range of flora and fauna, including the Zois' bellflower, the golden eagle, and the Alpine ibex.

Historical and cultural highlights evidenced by archaeological findings connect this place to the broader Alpine area and traditional practices like mining, pastoral livestock farming, and mountain cheese-making.

The cradle of mountaineering, the Julian Alps are known for their long-standing tradition in mountaineering of more than a century, and ongoing efforts to promote a culture of mountain exploration.

Preserving local traditions is a top priority implemented through a combination of education and innovative approaches to support and drive sustainable tourism and other activities.



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The Julian Alps are **setting the standard for sustainable tourism**. The region adopted the 'living room' concept, thereby encouraging visitors to approach with respect for both the environment and the rules of conduct set by the hosts. This approach promotes **tourism that considers the local context and prioritizes the well-being of locals and nature**, while also offering a memorable experience for travellers.

In the Julian Alps Biosphere Reserve, this commitment to sustainability is further exemplified through a certification system for products and services. The **Triglav National Park's quality mark** is a way for the locals to attest that their efforts and approaches are indeed rooted in **sustainability, tradition, and environmental harmony**. For visitors, it's a guide for making transparent, informed choices and the chance to support local efforts by purchasing certified products and services.

DID YOU KNOW?

The wider area of the Julian Alps is the **origin area** for at least three autochthonous breeds of domestic animals recognised in Slovenia: the Drežnica goat, the Bovec sheep and Cika cattle.





BIOSPHERE RESERVE KARST

BIOSPHERE RESERVE INSCRIBED IN SEVERAL UNESCO HERITAGE LISTS

The core area of the Karst Biosphere Reserve, established in 2004, spans 401 hectares above the Škocjan Caves' extensive underground system. The transition zone covering the entire sub-basin of the sinking Reka River lies at the massive convergence of karst and non-karst landscapes on the southwestern slopes of the Dinaric Mountains.

The region's exceptional heritage is its greatest asset, with several features recognized by UNESCO. The Škocjan Caves in the core of the biosphere reserve and of the protected area, are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Meanwhile, the Snežnik area's beech forest reserve is inscribed on the UNESCO Natural Heritage List, and the traditional dry-stone walls of the Karst have been recognized on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

ŠKOCJAN CAVES – A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The Škocjan Caves were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List back in 1986. The status of World Heritage—i.e. heritage of significance for all humanity and all generations—was granted to the Škocjan Caves due to their unique combination of natural heritage along with its historical and cultural features.

As a notable example of contact karst, the Škocjan Caves feature a complex cave system and one of the world's largest underground canyons, standing out as a remarkable karst phenomenon. The area's rich history of cave exploration and its remarkable biodiversity further enhance its value. Additionally, the archaeological heritage adds a unique dimension, with discoveries in caves, burial mounds, and hillforts indicating that the region was a significant supra-regional centre and that the caves held ritual importance in ancient times.





CAVING AND CAVE TOURISM

Exploration of the underground course of the Reka River, stretching from the Škocjan Caves to the Timava River sources, has its roots in antiquity. Starting in the mid-19th century, systematic research into the caves and underground water systems has spanned an **impressive 200 years**. In fact, it was the region of Karst that has given its name to numerous geological phenomena of this type, and is touted as the **birthplace of karst studies**. Over the **past two centuries**, tourism in the **Škocjan Caves** has evolved alongside scientific exploration, with locals diligently making the caves suitable for visitors and prudently managing cave tours.

The region is committed to preserving its remarkable biodiversity. The area's natural highlights include its **vibrant cave ecosystem**, home to bats and cave-dwelling species, the **dry karstic grasslands** that are integral to the cultural landscape, and the **extensive Snežnik forests**, which shelter wild predators. **Beekeeping and pastoral livestock farming** play a crucial role in maintaining this natural richness.

DID YOU KNOW?

In a collaborative effort, the Karst Biosphere Reserve has teamed up with the regional power provider Elektro Primorska to protect the Eurasian eagle-owl by ensuring power lines are safe for the birds.



INSPIRING FACTS

- A remarkable karst landscape** characterized by distinctive features both above and below ground, including contact karst, an extensive cave system, and one of the world's largest underground canyons.
- A fascinating history of exploring the underground course of the Reka River**, marked by significant advances in cave and water exploration, as well as in show cave management and visitor management.
- A biodiversity hotspot**: the caves, dry karstic grasslands, and wetlands are home to several rare and endangered plant and animal species. The area also upholds a rich tradition of beekeeping and fosters sheep farming and pastoral livestock farming.
- A wealth of archaeological sites and finds** that illustrates continuous human settlement from prehistoric times, with notable finds including the largest prehistoric deposit and the oldest inscriptional artifact in Slovenia.





BIOSPHERE RESERVE

KOZJANSKO AND OBSOTELJE

BIOSPHERE RESERVE WITH AN OUTSTANDING CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

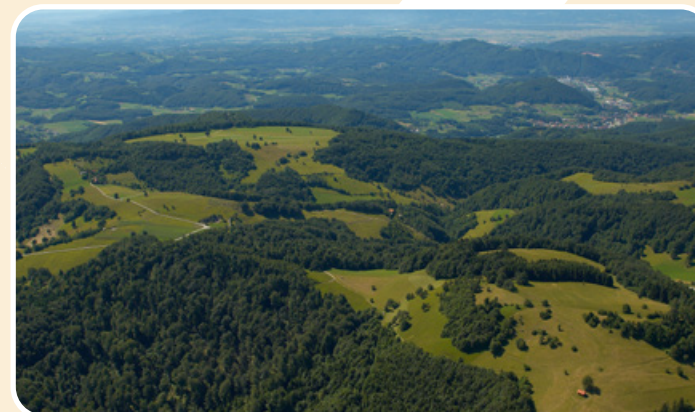
Kozjansko and Obsotelje, the region nestled between the Sava, Savinja, and Sotla River, has been designated as a biosphere reserve in 2010. Approximately half of the reserve's core area and buffer zone is covered by Kozjansko Regional Park. A large part of this picturesque region, where mountains, hills, and plains converge, falls under the Natura 2000 network.

The biosphere reserve boasts a distinctive mosaic of flowering meadows, ancient orchards, steep forest slopes, and clear streams. The natural features blend seamlessly with the cultural landscape that is peppered with castles, churches, and farmsteads. The scattered settlements and fragmented properties contribute to the region's unique character. Managed by the Kozjansko Regional Park, the biosphere reserve exemplifies the partnership principles of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme through innovative solutions in this interconnected landscape.

KOZJANSKO REGIONAL PARK – WHERE WORLDS CONVERGE

The diversity and variety of Kozjansko Regional Park, seen in its geological structure, geomorphological features, and flora and fauna, result from the unique convergence of two geotectonic units (the Dinarides and the Pannonides), two natural-geographical units (the Alpine and the Pannonian), and three distinct distribution areas for plants and animals. The level of biodiversity is simply astonishing!

The park embarked on its first nature conservation project two decades ago. Since then, protecting and preserving biodiversity has been a core focus, with tangible results visible throughout the park. Sustainable practices, including the maintenance of mountain dry grasslands and the protection of rare and endangered species, have seamlessly integrated into the daily life of the region.





INSPIRING FACTS

Enrichment of the cultural landscape through the exemplary coexistence between humans and nature is exemplified by revitalized meadow orchards, a nursery, and a collection orchard featuring autochthonous and traditional fruit varieties, and six tree-lined avenues with 420 trees, which were established through local initiative.

Biodiversity conservation is clearly reflected in the progress made: a one-third increase in bird populations over the past two decades, the preservation of over 100 hectares of dry meadows, and a remarkable diversity of orchid, butterfly, and amphibian species.

In terms of cultural heritage research and restoration, the restoration of Podsreda Castle and efforts to preserve intangible heritage mark a great achievement, and upholding traditional agricultural practices highlights the commitment to maintaining cultural heritage.

The collective brand "Sožitje" (meaning harmony), which represents local produce, products, and services, signifies a commitment to sustainable production and processing, and reflects strong community cohesion.



MEADOW ORCHARDS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The distinctive landscape of the Kozjansko and Obsotelje Biosphere Reserve is defined by its **high-stem meadow orchards**. This unique ecosystem is home to a **diverse array of birds and insects** and the environmentally sustainable food production practices used are touted as **best practices**. In fact, **the apple has become a symbol of life** in these parts, with the region's largest festival dedicated to the Kozjansko apple.

Restored to its former splendour, **Podsreda Castle** now serves as a **cultural hub for Kozjansko and Obsotelje**. The castle's impressive setting hosts both permanent and temporary exhibitions, as well as local culinary events. Some of the castle's outbuildings have been transformed into apartments, while others house the Visitor Centre for the Kozjansko Park and the Kozjansko and Obsotelje Biosphere Reserve.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Kozjanski Park Public Institute is the recipient of the UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes for its outstanding efforts.





**BIOSPHERE
RESERVE
MURA**

THE SLOVENIAN RIVER WITH ONE OF THE LARGEST FLOODPLAINS

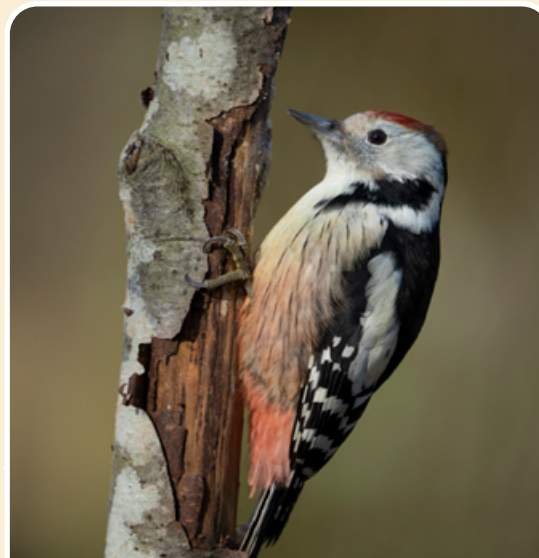
The Mura Biosphere Reserve in eastern Slovenia, spanning nearly 29,000 hectares, was established in 2018. Along the Mura River, you'll find Slovenia's **most extensive floodplain habitat**, where the interplay of natural processes and thousands of years of human influence has shaped a **stunning riparian cultural landscape**.

Here, the merging of river and floodplain habitats with lush floodplain forests and the traditional agricultural landscape further inland—featuring wet meadows, patchwork fields, and quaint villages on the floodplain's edge—gives rise to a truly **unique environment**. This rich tapestry supports numerous rare and endangered species, earning this Natura 2000 site multiple national and international conservation accolades.

A SANCTUARY FOR ENDANGERED FLORA AND FAUNA

The varied habitats along the Mura River foster an **exceptional diversity** of plant and animal species, many of which are endangered and protected. The **expansive unbroken lowland floodplain forests in Slovenia**, with their springtime carpets of delicate snowdrops and ancient, towering trees that shelter the middle spotted woodpecker and the majestic white-tailed eagle—the largest eagle in Europe—are particularly notable for their ecological significance. A unique feature of the region is the network of side streams that have evolved into **backwaters**, creating distinct habitats for various species.

The Mura River itself is renowned for its biodiversity, with its basin being one of the **most diverse and well-preserved in Slovenia, particularly in terms of fish species**. Moreover, researchers have documented a wide array of bird species, amphibians, beetles, dragonflies, and reptiles along the Mura.



INSPIRING FACTS

It is part of one of Europe's largest preserved floodplains, and the lower reaches of the Mura, Drava and Danube River have been designated as the world's first five-country biosphere reserve.

The distinctive natural and cultural landscape along the Mura River showcases a remarkable interplay between natural processes, such as flooding, and humans thriving in this challenging environment.

The area boasts an extraordinary variety of plant and animal species dwelling in diverse habitats including lush floodplain forests, murky backwaters and meandering riverbeds throughout the Mura basin.

The upholding of traditional būjraši practices highlights the region's unique heritage; these historical dam builders used ingenious methods to control flooding, safeguarding the surrounding areas.



DID YOU KNOW?

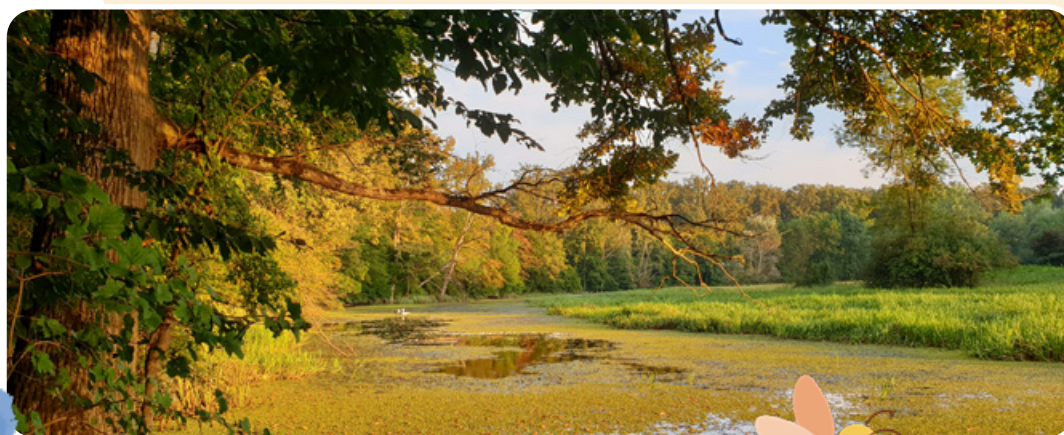
The lower reaches of the Mura, Drava and Danube River, which are together often referred to as the Amazon of Europe, are among the most ecologically vital river regions in Europe.



THE WORLD'S FIRST BIOSPHERE RESERVE STRETCHING ACROSS FIVE COUNTRIES

In 2021, the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme designated the lower reaches of the Mura, Drava and Danube River as the world's first five-country biosphere reserve. Spanning 930,000 hectares and extending from Austria through Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary to Serbia, this reserve is one of Europe's largest intact alluvial complexes. It features over 700 kilometres of free-flowing rivers, untouched by hydroelectric power plants or dams, and an exceptional natural and cultural heritage.

The Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve boasts a wealth of rare habitats, including expansive floodplain forests, river beds with natural steep sand walls and gravel banks, side-channels and backwater areas, as well traditional cultural landscapes in the hinterland. It supports Europe's largest population of white-tailed eagles and provides crucial breeding grounds for several endangered bird species, such as bank swallows, little terns, and black storks. Additionally, it is home to beavers, otters, and rare fish like the sterlet, making it a hotspot for biodiversity.



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

KNOWLEDGE AS A KEY VALUE OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

One of the key goals of the **UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme**, an interdisciplinary intergovernmental research initiative, is to **empower people to foster a creative and equitable coexistence with nature**. In Slovenia, all biosphere reserves are committed to sustaining environmental awareness and education, with a particular focus on young people.

Across Slovenia's biosphere reserves, a **network of schools** has been established to explore the interconnections between nature, culture, people. This early education provides students with essential knowledge and fosters a **respectful and collaborative attitude** towards their surroundings. Additionally, each biosphere reserve develops specialized and in-depth educational programs tailored for the youth.



JULIAN ALPS

All schools within the Julian Alps Biosphere Region Community of Schools have access to the professional online resource known as the **Triglav Treasury**. For students eager to deepen their knowledge and experience, there is also a specialized **Junior Ranger Program**, which includes a multi-day nature camp.

KARST

The Karst Biosphere Reserve has launched the **Škocjan Caves Park University Network**, connecting research initiatives from the University of Ljubljana, the University of Primorska, and the University of Nova Gorica. A key component of this network is its collaboration with the **UNESCO Chair on Karst Education**, the world's only program dedicated to the comprehensive study of karst phenomena.

KOZJANSKO AND OBSOTELJE

In the Kozjansko and Obsotelje Biosphere Reserve, school curricula are routinely enriched with lessons on **nature conservation and the area's cultural heritage**. During the summer holidays, there are nature camps for aspiring **junior nature conservators**, while Podsreda Castle becomes a vibrant hub for **music seminars**.

MURA

The River School Velika Polana holds natural science workshops and interactive learning opportunities in order to share knowledge about the Mura Biosphere Reserve, raise awareness about the importance of the river and its surroundings, as well as the flora and fauna of the area.



HONEY-SWEET EXPERIENCES



RESPECTFUL VISITS TO THE BIOSPHERE RESERVES

Slovenia's four biosphere reserves are charting their own unique course toward an inspiring future, where the harmony between people and nature takes centre stage. They are reigniting collaboration, revitalizing traditions, and paving the way for innovative approaches in sustainable food production and natural resource management, with people at the heart of it all.

As these biosphere reserves evolve, step by step, they are crafting a distinct world where visitors are warmly welcomed.

Step into this world with respect, and join the local communities in shaping a brighter tomorrow and inspire the future.



JULIAN ALPS

Explore the vibrant flora at the International Wild Flower Festival, head to the Soča Valley Hiking Festival, and savour the authentic flavours at food-related festivals in Radovljica and Kobarid.

KARST

Visit the jaw-dropping Škocjan Caves, explore the characteristic karst phenomena and museum exhibits in Škocjan, experience the magic of the homesteads and herb gardens.

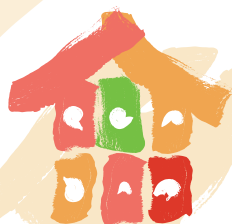
KOZJANSKO AND OBSOTELJE

Don't miss the Kozjansko Apple Festival, explore the captivating collections at Podsreda Castle, and take in the unique backdrop of Kozjansko along 100 km of scenic footpaths.

MURA

Hit the pedals down the Mura-Drava-Danube route set up along the Amazon of Europe, cross the Mura River via the old-school brod ferry, and savour the flavours at the Vinarium Festival in Lendava.





BIOSPHERE RESERVES OF SLOVENIA



INSPIRING THE FUTURE

BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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