

TOURS

Southeast Europe
Edelweiss Adriatic Rollercoaster Tour

Great Roads, Great People, Great Fun!

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Europe is a fantastic venue for motorcycle touring, thanks to its astounding variety of terrain and gorgeous scenery, ability to visit several countries and cultures within a short time and distance, and its long and fascinating history.



The waterfront at Poreč, Croatia.

The tour went through many rural areas, and we passed many old buildings like these that may have been destroyed in the region's civil war.

The Edelweiss Adriatic Rollercoaster tour promises “motorcycling at its best combined with spectacular scenery and Mediterranean flair.” And it certainly lives up to its name!

My friend Rosaly and I join the tour at the starting point in Klagenfurt, Austria, a provincial capital in the south near the Slovenian border. From there we go south for a loop through Slovenia and Croatia, which offers a wide variety of scenery, climate and culture. Our group of 20 riders is also quite diverse, with folks from their 30s through 70s, including several solo female riders and even a septuagenarian mother riding pillion with her son. Nationalities included U.S., French Canadian, German, Italian and Brazilian, yet everyone speaks English well enough to converse freely, and soon we get along like a big family.

Day 1: Meet in Klagenfurt, Austria

Everyone on the tour meets up at the Dermuth hotel, which is on a hill at the edge of town. It's a clean, cozy place with a friendly staff that speaks English well and makes us feel welcome. Before supper, tour participants and staff gather in a meeting room for orientation, followed by a meet and greet. Afterward, we walk down the hill to the on-site restaurant, where we chat and begin to learn more about each other over an authentic and tasty Austrian dinner.

Day 2: Klagenfurt–Opatija, Croatia

After breakfast and a briefing, everyone checks out their motorcycles from the staff and gets them loaded. We ride out about 10 a.m. in two groups and head for the first mountain pass. Starting in Klagenfurt, we're right near the border, and before

long we're in a long tunnel that pops us out in Slovenia.

The scenery is breathtaking as our ride takes us through the Karawanken and Julian Alps. Roads are steep and twisty, and most of the morning we follow beautiful streams and then rivers as they flow to the ocean, carrying snow melt from the mountains. It's very scenic, and there's so much to see that it's difficult to watch the road. Logging is a main source of income here. Many towns have sawmills and barns where they dry the fresh-hewn lumber, and the scent of cut wood wafts through the air.

Tidy villages with chalets graced by window boxes full of colorful flowers line the roads, and cows graze serenely in the peaceful fields. We stop briefly at a rural

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World War II memorial where we are grimly reminded of the fighting that went on in this now placid region.

After lunch, we visit the vast Postojnska Jama limestone caves. This side excursion is optional, takes one and a half hours, costs 22 euros and is well worth the price. The tour starts with a long tram ride deep into the cave complex, which is a chilly 48 degrees, so bring a jacket. In 1819, the caves were opened to the public, and electric lighting was added in 1884. In 1872, rails were laid in the cave, which was the first cave train for tourists anywhere. After 1945, the gas locomotives were replaced by clean, quiet electric ones. With 3.3 miles of the caves open to the public, it's said to be the longest publicly accessible length of any cave system in the world. Everything in the caves is on a grand scale, with huge stalactites and stalagmites and other beautiful and otherworldly formations. The vast underground Concert Hall room, known for its exceptional acoustics, has space for 10,000 people and hosts leading symphony orchestras.



We ride down to the ferry as we depart the lovely island of Rab.

The view of Opatija harbor from our Hotel Ambassador balcony.

A typical scene with snow-capped mountains in the distance.

Roadside kiosks offer all sorts of local foods and drinks.



Later in the afternoon, we leave the European Union and cross the border into Croatia, with a cursory stop at a check-point. Here they use the kuna as currency instead of the euro, so we change some money to have cash for drinks, snacks, etc. The group arrives in Opatija, a pleasant, small resort city on the Adriatic Sea, just in time to watch the sunset over the water. It's a marvelous way to finish the day's ride. The Hotel Ambassador, a tall, modern facility with commanding views of the coastline and a small yacht harbor, will be our home for the next two nights.

Day 3: Opatija

Today is a rest day, which gives riders enough time to explore the area and perhaps take a dip in the warm, aqua-blue sea. Midmorning we take an optional day ride for several hours. As we head west, it becomes quite rural along the serpentine coastline, with many overlooks. We stop at a nice café strategically positioned for excellent views of the water.

Our route takes us past ancient fortresses and cathedrals to the quaint historic port town of Poreč, where we have lunch at an open-air café in the central square. As luck would have it, the locals are having their annual historic festival. Celebrated with period costumes, music and reverie, it offers many photo ops!

Back at the hotel, we find a walkway that follows the shoreline and leads to the yacht harbor, which accesses some nice waterfront bistros. It's a great place for a sunset stroll and to watch boats return for the night.

Day 4: Opatija–Plitvice Lakes

Saying farewell to Opatija, our route leads



us along the coast road to a ferry that takes us to the island of Rab. Passage costs about \$28 for the bike and two riders and takes about 90 minutes. We park our bikes on deck and clamber up to the observation area for a lovely ride across the azure waters. Our lunch stop in Lopar is right near the landing, and we dine on local seafood and other delights. From there the ride follows the backbone of the island through some quaint villages and scenic overlooks that have us snapping photos continuously.

We leave the island on the Rapska Plovidba ferry, which takes us to the main-

land. It costs about \$8.50 for the bike and two riders and takes around 15 minutes on the water. Rugged mountains lie ahead for us, and the blue waters and fresh sea breezes add to the pleasure of the view. After reaching shore, we ride briefly along the coast road and begin to climb through the northern Balkan Mountains to one of the highlights of this tour: Plitvička Jezera (Plitvice Lakes) National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The group is split between Hotel Bellevue and the nearby Hotel Jezero, both within the park. They are clean and comfortable but swarming with busloads of tourists.

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Tonight we dine on local food and beer at the Lika Cuca restaurant, about a mile away by van ride.

Day 5: Plitvice Lakes National Park

This is the oldest national park in south-eastern Europe, and the largest national park in Croatia. Founded in 1949, the park is situated in the mountainous karst region of Croatia, near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The park was added to the UNESCO World Heritage register in 1979, covers more than 73,350 acres and each year hosts more than 900,000 visitors. Entry costs about \$20 per adult.

This morning we hike around the national park, taking in miles of beautiful shoreline and following babbling brooks that connect them. With its amazing lakes and waterfalls, this lovely park is worth a visit to Croatia by itself!

The whole Plitvice area was formed over untold millions of years, as ancient karst and limestone deposited on uplifted sea beds was eroded by ground water. Huge sinkholes formed as underground caves collapsed, forming the lakes and deep, forested craters.

Water literally comes out of the hillsides and cascades down hundreds of feet, showering the rocks below and creating rainbows in the sunlight. The highest waterfalls are the Large Waterfall (Veliki Slap in Croatian), over which the Plitvica River drops 256 feet at the end of the lower lakes, and Galovački Buk at the upper lakes, which falls 82 feet. Ecologically friendly electric ferryboats carry tourists across Lake Kozjak, and wooden pathways allow visitors to walk over the swampy areas. There are also many caves in the area, some of which are open to the public. After lunch in the park, we

take an optional ride exploring the local area, covering about 120 miles to end the day.

Day 6: Plitvice Lakes–Otočec

On the last two riding days we'll make our way back through the mountains of Croatia and Slovenia with their countless sweepers, dozens of switchbacks, beautiful valleys and lush scenery. For much of the day we explore backroads through rural farming areas and cross several verdant valleys. Some villages still bear scars from the recent war. We roll into the quaint village of Otočec in Slovenia and check into the cozy Vila Otočec for the night. The hilltop hotel has a 360-degree view of the surrounding countryside, and we lounge on the patio watching the sunset.

Day 7: Otočec–Klagenfurt

Climbing the steep, rugged Seebergsattel pass, we ascend into a dense pine forest.

Edelweiss Bike Travel



Since the recession, the dollar has lost value against the euro; along with other factors, travel to Europe has become cost-prohibitive for many Americans. To address this, Edelweiss Bike Travel offers lower-cost "Ride for Fun Tours" that save money by eliminating frills such as a chase vehicle and by visiting regions that aren't as pricey, yet retain-

ing the first-rate organization the company is known for.

Edelweiss tours are fully led by experienced, patient and mellow guides, but participants can also break away from the group to do and see what they want, as long as they have a minimum of two bikes. All they ask is that you let your

guide know beforehand so they can keep track of their flock. Each evening you'll arrive at a prebooked hotel; if you don't ride with the group, you can follow the map or your GPS to lead you there.

The Adriatic Rollercoaster tour includes eight days total with six for riding. Seven nights of hotel-stay are included during the tour. Also included are seven breakfasts and five dinners. Other meals, drinks and snacks are up to the participant. There was a broad selection of motorcycles, and the bikes were in good mechanical condition with no breakdowns (a good thing, especially when there's no chase vehicle).

In 2012, two tours are slated for June and September. Airfare, airport transfers, luggage transport, gas, tolls and VIP insurance are not included in the tour price. For more information visit www.edelweissbike.com or contact worldtours@edelweissbike.com, Austria (011) 43-5264-5690, or USA Agent: Tri-Community Travel at (800) 507-4459.

An ancient stone church lies in ruins near Plitvice Lakes National Park.

A waterfall in Plitvice Lakes National Park.

Descending the Seebergsattel Pass on the last day.

There's a chill in the air, and at the summit everyone pauses for a short rest near the now abandoned border station and takes turns photographing each other by the sign marking the boundary between Slovenia and Austria. There are many switchbacks, and a passing shower has left the road slippery, so we take our time descending and enjoy the breathtaking views of the mountains and pastoral valleys below.

We take lunch in the town of Bad Eisenkappel and wind our way through several quaint villages. Soon the group is back at the Dermuth hotel, unloading the bikes for the last time. With a touch of sadness we share our final dinner together and swap impressions of our journey.

Day 8: Departure Day, Klagenfurt

Rising early, we pack our gear and head for home. This has been an enjoyable tour where you can relax and let the guides worry about the route, meals, rest stops and lodging. Edelweiss' staff was friendly, very helpful and cooperative, and the tour offers good value. My only frustration was that there were so many things to photograph that there wasn't enough time! **RR**



Facts & Information

Total Mileage
Approximately 940 miles.



In General

No visas are required, but be sure your passport is current. The best time for motorcycle touring is during the summer and early autumn. Plan on arriving early to adjust to the time difference, which is six hours later than Eastern Standard Time. Bring raingear and riding gear that are adaptable to a wide range of temperatures, as weather can be unpredictable, especially at high elevations. Austria and Slovenia use the euro, Croatia uses the kuna; check conversion values before changing money. All three countries use 240 volts AC, so bring adapters and make sure your electronic devices can run on the voltage.

How to Get There

Klagenfurt has a modest-sized airport, and the city can also be reached from Vienna, Innsbruck, Venice and Munich by train, bus or car.

Food & Lodging

A wide variety of local and international dishes are available. Most restaurants accept credit cards and have menus in English, and most waitstaff speak at least some English. Besides local fare, which includes a lot of chicken and pork, we found pizzas and pasta dishes.

Hotels tend to be expensive in Europe. All of our lodging was in comfortable middle-class hotels and reception staff spoke English, making it easy to communicate. Most hotels in Europe use separate single beds



Always consult more-detailed maps for touring purposes.

in each room, which are pushed together to form a double bed.

Roads & Biking

The tour runs completely on well-maintained paved roads. All areas use standardized European road signs and markings. Daily rides are approximately 160 miles (250 km) and take most of the day. There is a lot of mountainous terrain, and riders should have intermediate, or better, skills. If you plan to ride two-up, be sure to get a bike that has ample luggage capacity.

Books & Maps

- *Rick Steves' Croatia & Slovenia* by Rick Steves and Cameron Hewitt, Avalon Travel, ISBN 978-1598801064, \$19.95
- *Frommer's Croatia* by Karen Tormé Olson and Sanja Bažulić Olson, ISBN 978-0470541289, \$21.99

- *Lonely Planet Slovenia* by Steve Fallon, ISBN 978-1741048575, \$22.99
- Edelweiss provides an excellent free map of the region to each rider.

Contact Information

- Edelweiss Bike Travel
www.edelweissbike.com
- Croatian National Tourist Board
www.croatia.hr
- Slovenian Tourist Board
www.slovenia.info

Motorcycle & Gear

2011 BMW R 1200 GS
 Helmet: Arai Corsair-V
 Jackets: Tour Master Transition Series 2
 Pants: Tour Master Flex
 Boots: Tour Master Solution
 Gloves: BMW Pro Sport 2