**Slovenia is Bee Land**

**The love of bees in green, active and healthy Slovenia dates far back into the past and this passion has been passed from generation to generation for decades. Slovenia was also the homeland of Anton Janša (1734–1773), a pioneer of modern beekeeping. Slovenian beekeepers celebrate the day of his birth, 20 May, and the Slovenian Beekeeper's Association submitted an initiative for this day to be proclaimed as World Bee Day. The country bearing the word love in its name became a home to the native Carniolan honey bee (*Apis mellifera carnica*), which is the second most widespread bee species in the world. Their beehives are genuine treasure houses of health – offering benefits ranging from sweet honey to the healthful products used in apitherapy treatments.**

**Rich beekeeping heritage**

Old records show that beekeeping has been practised for centuries in the area of present day Slovenia. The first records of Slovenian beekeeping can be found in The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola by Janez Vajkard Valvasor, dating from 1689. In his work, Valvasor discusses the prevalence of beekeeping and the use of mead in Slovenia. In the Middle Ages and during the time of the Empress Maria Theresa, the beekeepers paid their taxes in honey and also wax, which they used to produce candles. Maria Theresa was very fond of beekeeping and she issued a decree on the establishment of a beekeeping school in Vienna and a Slovenian, **Anton Janša**, was recognised as the first teacher of beekeeping. In Slovenia, he was the pioneer of modern beekeeping and he also wrote two important works, i.e. "*Razprava o rojenju čebel*" (1771) (Discussion on Beekeeping) and "*Popolni nauk o čebelarstvu*" (A Full guide to Beekeeping) (1775), which represented the very apex of professional expertise at the time. On 20 May, we celebrate the anniversary of his birth and the Slovenian Beekeeper's Association has launched a proposal that the United Nations Organisation proclaim this date World Bee Day.

**An apiary of monumental value**

In Breznica near Bled you can visit **Janša's apiary**. It is unique for its large hives with honeycomb frames which can be pulled out and transferred to another location. Such hives were an important development in the field of apiculture and were invented by Janša. The apiary contains 78 hives, which was a lot for that time. Made of wood and covered with spruce shingles, it is very spacious inside and has a room designed for the disassembling, cleaning and maintenance of the various components of the hives.

**Unique painted bee-hive panels**

A peculiarity of the Slovenian Alpine region and an indispensable part of its cultural heritage are the paintings rendered on beehive panels. At first, the beekeepers placed these on hives to distinguish them, but nowadays they are mostly intended to make the apiaries more attractive. Many are painted with simple motifs from everyday life, but often you can find paintings of saints, who supposedly protect the bees. You can visit the largest exhibition of such beehive panels in the **Apicultural Museum in Radovljica**, where you can become familiar with the tradition and heritage of beekeeping in green, active and healthy Slovenia.

**Urban beekeeping**

Visit Slovenia and meet the hard-working Carniolan honey bee. Beekeepers greatly value this bee species because it is known for its zeal in collecting nectar, which enables it to produce larger quantities of honey than other species. The symbol of a bee represents frugality and it can thus be found on numerous banks and on the oldest City Savings Bank sign in the centre of Ljubljana. In the capital of Slovenia great care is taken to enable **urban beekeeping**, so don’t be surprised to find that you can encounter bees in the city centre and have a look at their hives on the roof of the Cankarjev Dom or the Park Hotel where, naturally, fresh honey is served for breakfast.

**Flower, forest or fir honey – simply delicious**

The honey produced in the Ljubljana area is of a very high quality. Together with the beekeepers, the municipality also takes care of the bees by planting perennials and many honey bearing plants in public spaces. The whole territory of **Slovenia boasts a high quality of honey**, among which **Kočevje forest honey** and **Karst honey** have a protected geographical origin. The various varieties of Slovenian honey include: flower, forest, acacia, linden, oilseed rape, chestnut and fir honey. Honey is an ideal nutrient, an excellent stimulant and a cure for various illnesses. The sugars it contains make it sweet and other ingredients provide it with a wholesomeness that has led to it being referred to as the "elixir of life". Therefore it is not surprising that it was also called the "food for the gods".

**For beauty and health**

Honey is a true treasury of health. Experts recommend a spoon of honey twice a day as a preventative. You can scoop it directly from the pot or melt it in tea, water or milk. It improves and maintains immunity and thus prevents the occurrence of various illnesses, such as viral infections, respiratory infections, gastrointestinal diseases, atherosclerosis and other cardiovascular diseases. Its beneficial effects on the body are also exploited in the **honey wellness programmes of Thermana Laško**, where the tradition of beekeeping has been present for a long time.

**Apitherapy**

Treat yourself to an **apitherapy**. This is a branch of alternative medicine that uses bee products for prevention, treatment or recuperation. Other bee products include propolis, pollen, royal jelly, beeswax and also bee venom. You enter a wooden room in the apiary that is separated from the bees to avoid the possibility of stings. Then you lie down on a comfortable bed or sit in an armchair, surrender to the sound of bees and deeply inhale the air from the beehives and enjoy its completely natural healthfulness. This is of benefit to the respiratory organs and promotes a sense of general well-being. After a few minutes you will already feel fresh and energised. With the help of a therapist you will be able to take advantage of the benefits of apitherapy.

In Slovenia, the **Apirutes** is a tourist agency specialising in themed excursions related to beekeeping and apitourism. They will be glad to take you on the **beekeeping routes in Žirovnica**, which is the cradle of beekeeping and is located near Janša's apiary on the **Bela Krajina educational trail**, located in the area of the Kolpa Natural Park, or on the **Beekeeping educational trail on Lake Cerknica**. The mysteries of the bees will be revealed to you, including why honey tastes so good, why it is so healthy, and why apitourism is so beneficial.

**Visit Slovenia, the land of bees, honey and health.**

**Additional information**

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