

Slovenia – people, culture, language

A guide for businesses



The country



Piran, a Venetian port, now a popular tourist resort
Source: European Commission

Historical overview: the Republic of Slovenia lies at the heart of Europe where the Alps and the Mediterranean meet the Pannonian plains and the mysterious Karst. A country with spectacular mountains, thick forests and a short Adriatic coastline, Slovenia also enjoys substantial economic and political stability. Absorbed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – later Yugoslavia – after World War One, Slovenia was part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia under Marshall Tito.

Slovenia was the wealthiest and most liberal country in the federation and did not suffer from the ethnic divisions that would bring disaster when the federation broke up. The population was almost universally Slovene and their path to independence was uniquely short and peaceful.

Slovenia has a population of 2 million and its capital is Ljubljana, a lively city with pavement cafés, cultural events and Baroque buildings. The city is also home to 50,000 students – a young city with an ancient history.

People: The country is 90% Slovene and mainly Roman Catholic by religion. There are indigenous Hungarian and Italian minorities. It has a unique cultural and linguistic cohesiveness.

Cultural heritage: the earliest signs of the Slovenian spirit have surfaced in the field of culture. Ever since the poetry of France Prešeren, culture has formed the heart of Slovenia's national being. Urban culture has developed over the last two centuries, which have also seen the gradual evolution of fundamental institutions such as the National Museum and the Slovenian Philharmonics. Slovenian literature and poetry is mostly very traditional but has contributed to the most current global literary tendencies.

Key sectors: ferrous metallurgy and aluminium products, lead and zinc smelting, electronics (including military electronics), trucks, electric power equipment, wood products, textiles, chemicals, machine tools.

Business culture and etiquette

- **Initial contact:** it may take some time to be able to fix a meeting. Confirm in advance, before the meeting, by fax or letter, that the meeting will take place.
- **Meeting and greeting:** in general, business behaviour in Slovenia is similar to that in the rest of Europe; particularly to Germany and Austria. Business address is formal but the business style is outwardly informal. Socialising and hospitality are important to cultivate good business relations and business decisions may be taken outside the office in restaurants as much as in offices.
- **In meetings:** Meetings tend to be informal in style and focus on information gathering. You should not expect formal agendas, action points or follow-up. During a first meeting, be careful to observe the organisational status of all the Slovenians present. It is also the custom to use hosts' titles, such as "Doctor" or "Professor", before their names. A handshake before and after a meeting is customary and acceptable. Care should be taken to shake hands with everyone present at a meeting. It is customary to shake hands first with the women that are present immediately after shaking hands at the start of the meeting, it is customary to exchange business cards. See that you have a sufficient quantity of business cards.
- **Decision Making:** Leadership is exercised by keeping a dignified distance from employees. Decision making lies with senior management and delegation is limited. The fastest growing type of enterprise is family owned companies without employee participation. It is important to deal with the top person in the company for all major decisions.
- **Dress code:** the acceptable dress for a business meeting is a business suit for men. Women are recommended to dress fashionably, but not loudly.
- **New technologies:** there are around 1.8 million mobile phone users in Slovenia today – 90% of the population.
- **Gifts:** acceptable gifts for business meetings are items for the office, pens (including pens with your company logo) or selected wines.
- **Holidays:** you are recommended to avoid business meetings in the months of July and August or around the times of national holidays.

The Early Music Festival

Slovenia's annual Early Music Festival features music ranging from medieval to Beethoven, all performed on authentic instruments. It has consistently attracted top international artists since it began in 1983. Many of the concerts take place in the acoustically outstanding Knight's Hall in the town's Renaissance castle. Other venues include the 15th-century Mokrice Castle with its striking floor decorations, and the Kostanjevica monastery, which boasts one of the largest arcaded courtyards in central Europe.



Language

Official language: Slovene (Slovenian).

Other languages: most business people in large cities in Slovenia have a good command of English and some are fluent in German and Italian as well.

Finding translators/interpreters: in the UK, you can search for local, quality-assured providers on **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals). In Slovenia translators and interpreters are readily available – the best place to enquire is at the British Embassy.

Basic Slovene phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Slovene phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases – if you are interested in learning the Slovene language, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at www.blis.org.uk.

	Slovene	Pronunciation
Hello	Zdravo	Stravoh
Good day/ morning	Dobro jutro	Dobro yootro
Good evening	Dober dan	Dohber daan
Goodbye	Na svidenje	Na sveedenye
Yes / no	Ja / ne	Ya / ne
Please/Thank you	Prosim / Hvala	Prohseem / hvaala
Excuse me	Oprostite	Oprohsteeteh
My name is...	Ime mi je...	Imeh mi yeh
What's your name?	Kako vam je ime	Kakoh vam yeh imeh

Did you know..?

- The Slovene Philharmonic, one of the leading orchestras in Central Europe, celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2001.
- Slovene Bernarda Pulko is the first lady to have ever travelled the world on a motorbike.
- In 2000, extreme skier Davo Karnicar made the first uninterrupted ski descent of Mount Everest.
- Slovenia has over 200 kilometers of bike trails.
- The Slovenian Karst is an underground labyrinth of over 8,000 caves. The largest, the Postojna cave, can be reached by a small train.

Using an interpreter

Before the assignment: firstly, define the type of interpretation required (whispering or simultaneous). Fully explain the goals and objectives of the meeting or presentation. If you are making a speech or presentation, let your interpreter have a copy of the text in advance. Explain any important or difficult concepts and points. If you are part of a group, make sure they understand that only one person should speak at a time.

At the assignment: appreciate that interpretations may take much longer than the original speech. Speak clearly and slowly, and pause regularly – every minute; after a thought is complete; or after you have made a major point.

Make sure you avoid: long or complex sentences; slang, jargon, or colloquial expressions; jokes and humorous stories (humour seldom travels well and risks creating misunderstanding or causing offence); and interrupting the interpreter (unless it is really necessary, this can be confusing and appear rude).

Case Studies

"I found the Slovenes play their cards close to their chests. It is important to have good personal contacts to get things done. Geniality and politeness mask true feelings and business intentions". British Businessman.

Signposting and resources

- **BLIS Professionals** (www.blis.org.uk/professionals) – an on-line, quality-assured database of translators, interpreters, language trainers and cultural consultants in your area. You can search for BLIS providers offering Slovene language services in the East Midlands.

- **Resources** and organisations for more information:

Foreign Trade and Other Related Organisations

www.investslovenia.org

Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia

www.gzs.si/eng/

Foreign & Commonwealth Office www.fco.gov.uk

UK Trade & Investment www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk

Sources

Research and text: Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662
Euro Information Centre www.euro-info.org.uk
International House www.ihworld.com

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RLN East Midlands: promoting a greater capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment.

Tel: 0115 854 1399

Fax: 0115 854 1617

www.rln-eastmidlands.com