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# WHERE TO FISH THIS MONTH

Spotlight on 12 top overseas and UK fisheries to visit



## THE SLOVENIA you haven't heard of...

Step away from the Balkan nation's 'flagship' rivers, and you'll find that being the world's sinkhole capital is not entirely without its benefits...





Good size and good scrappers: don't go much lighter than 4lb with your tippets.



The writer, nymphing in front of an old mill on Slovenia's Krka river.

**W**HAT comes to mind when you think of Slovenia? Marble trout or wild rainbows in blue alpine streams, surrounded by forested mountains, maybe? World-renowned rivers such as the Soca, Idrijca, or Sava Bohinjka?

Undoubtedly, there is excellent fishing in Slovenia's alpine watersheds but delve deeper and you'll find rivers so unique, so under-fished and so full of wild fish that you may find yourself foregoing the mountain streams for something a little different.

It's tempting to assume that the chalkstream is a uniquely British ecosystem, such is the reverence in which we hold our southern rivers, yet the phenomenon of naturally-filtered aquifers rising through the ground and forming rivers exists worldwide. »

*"...you'll find rivers so unique, so under-fished and so full of wild fish, you may find yourself foregoing the mountain streams..."*



Andy and Will set about the Unica's gloriously clear water.



The après-fish is none too shabby, either...



Unica grayling think nothing of rising 6ft for a dry.



Urban fishing, Slovenian style, on the Krka.

### The Karst chalkstreams

There are broad geological differences between many of these watersheds and each can be seen as unique but Slovenia's 'Karst' system of chalkstreams is the most unusual of them all.

Much of lowland Slovenia sits on a precariously thin layer of non-permeable rock, under which flow huge amounts of water. The Karst system filters ground water into huge underground caverns, many extending hundreds of miles. Like our own chalkstreams, this water is often forced back onto land, through springs which source many of the rivers that flow over the Slovenian pasture lands. However, unlike UK rivers, which flow over a solid limestone base, the Slovenian Karst waters flow over heavily eroded hard rock and frequently vanish back down into the caverns as fast as they appeared. Slovenia has the highest risk of sinkholes of any country on the planet.

*"The potential for large brownies on the Unica is largely untapped and they're becoming plentiful."*

On the bright side, however, this mixture of pure, cold and filtered water makes for some of the finest game fish habitat in Europe. The rich waters of the Pivka, Unica and Krka may not be on the flyfishing radar right now but such is the quality of their grayling and brown trout, they warrant comparison with Slovenia's alpine streams. My second trip to what was once Yugoslavia's north-western corner was made specifically to explore the potential of these crystal-clear jewels.

The Unica might be Europe's finest grayling river. It springs from the ground

near Planina as a fully-formed classic chalkstream but one with a bizarre background. Viewed on a topographical map, the river appears as a short blue squiggle that ends abruptly. In fact the Unica isn't really a river at all, more an area of Karst water flow, which cuts across the country as seven different rivers both over- and underground. The rivers Pivka, Unica, Ljubija and Ljubljanica are among those that all flow from the same source and are in fact the same watershed.

### The Unica river

The Unica is the second incarnation of the original Karst spring and meanders gently for around 8km before going to ground. Its upper reaches are home to some of the country's finest game fishing. Ticketing is state-controlled and at €99 per rod the Unica is definitely a premium river by Slovenian standards.





Will admires another Unica grayling



"Please tell me we're not expecting a spate..."



You could still be in England...

The number of large grayling in its crystal clear water must be seen to be believed and their willingness to rise six feet to take a dry fly astonished me every time. On my recent trip with England Junior team captain Will Robins, the pair of us lost count of how many 40cm grayling we caught before the sun had properly risen.

**Flies with a dash of colour**

Dries and nymphs fish well here but you should always cover likely areas with a small Pink Tag CdC dry before changing to Plan

B. Red and pink tagged flies work well on the Unica, as our guides' fly box testified – there really is something about a dash of colour. In summer, an excellent day-long caddis hatch reaches an evening crescendo, when the angler can be baffled by the choice of fish at which to cast. Abundant caddis also make for good sight-fishing with slightly-weighted bugs, such as the deadly KJ Green Caddis.

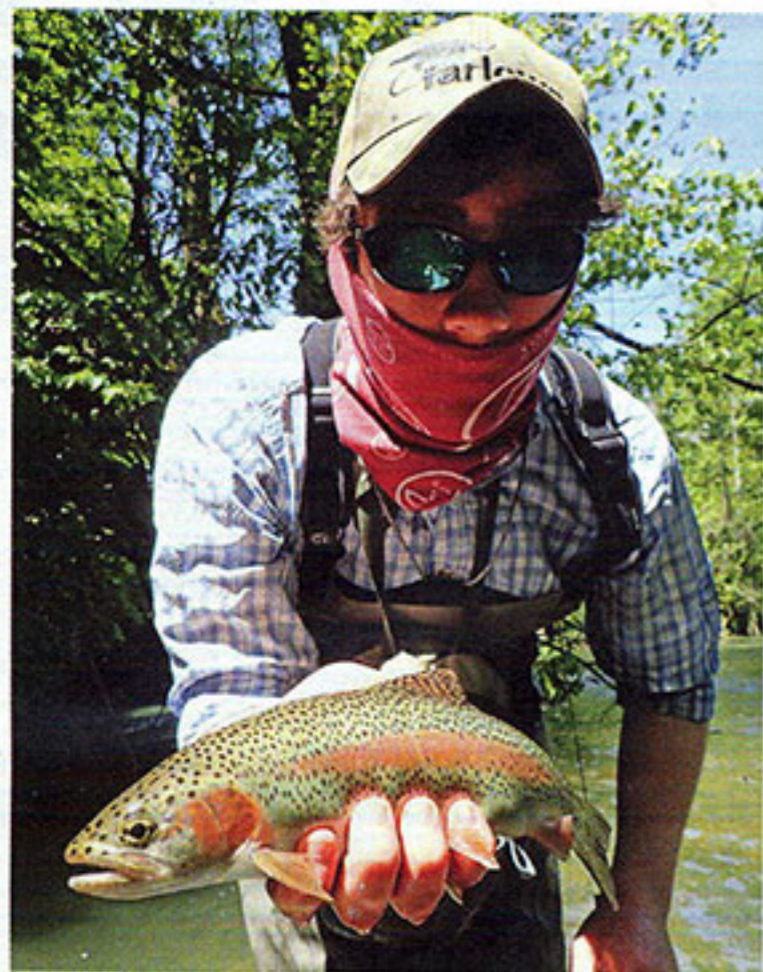
Alongside the excellent grayling fishing, there are also wild stocks of native Danube-strain brown trout. Both Will and I lost large brownies, hooked accidentally while we

were targeting grayling. Each fish was around 4lb and left us both with a sense of unfinished business. The potential for large brownies in the Unica is largely untapped and local anglers assure us that they are also becoming plentiful.

So it is in the Krka (pronounced "Ker-ka") river in south-east Slovenia. A genuine Karst river, largely unknown to anglers beyond the Balkan states, it can be fished right to its source, near the town that shares its name. Geologically different to the Unica, the Krka has the feel of a more gentle northern >>







Krka rainbows responded to caddis dries.

*“...the KJ Green Caddis nymph was deadly and I would recommend that any Slovenia-bound angler brings plenty of these...”*

freestone stream, which would ordinarily flow cool and clear. Heavy rain ahead of our visit, however, had tinged the water but it certainly didn't taint the fishing.

We landed a string of quality browns and rainbows on caddis dries from the upper reaches before re-locating to an area in Krka town. Within an hour, we banked two large brownies, each one boisterous and well over 45cm long. Once again the KJ Green Caddis nymph was deadly and I would recommend that any Slovenia-bound angler brings plenty of these. At just €39 per rod the Krka offers great value and diversity of fishing.

While neither river mentioned here boasts the coveted marble trout, they should be counted among Slovenia's finest flyfishing streams. The Unica has quality grayling and this most unique of ecosystems might not remain a secret for long.

The Krka, meanwhile, feels like home to a



Andy reflects on why the Unica may be Europe's finest grayling river...

Derbyshire angler like me and the numerous and large resident brownies make for an unforgettable experience.

Slovenia's path less trodden is one of amazing ecosystems, clear waters, deserted rivers and incredible fish and with flights from the UK costing as little as £150, a weekend's fishing here could be more cost effective than a weekend in Hampshire. ↩

### Slovenia factfile

**FLIGHTS:** Direct to Ljubljana from London and Manchester airports, the flight lasting less than 2 hours.

**ADVISED TACKLE:** Andy used an 8ft 4wt for fishing dries and a 10ft 3wt (with French leader) for nymphing. Tippets should be no lighter than 3lb 8oz for what are strong fish.

**SEASON:** March-November. Generally, the best months are May and June, and September and October for grayling.

**ACCOMMODATION:** The Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, can be your base for both rivers but if you prefer somewhere smaller, consider the villages of Bistra ([www.gostilna-bistra.com](http://www.gostilna-bistra.com)) or Vrhnika ([www.gostilna-bajc.si](http://www.gostilna-bajc.si))

**GUIDE:** Uroš Kristan can be reached at [info@urkofishingadventures.com](mailto:info@urkofishingadventures.com). His website at time of writing - [urkofishingadventures.weebly.com](http://urkofishingadventures.weebly.com) - is due to change to [www.urkofishingadventures.com](http://www.urkofishingadventures.com)

He can help you arrange accommodation at the Bistra and Vrhnika guesthouses.

**BACKGROUND:** Local tourist agencies are at [www.argonavt.si/en/](http://www.argonavt.si/en/) and [www.visitvrhnika.si/en/](http://www.visitvrhnika.si/en/)  
The Fisheries Research Institute of Slovenia can be found at [www.zzrs.si/en/index.php](http://www.zzrs.si/en/index.php)

