

**AUGUST
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Special Report

Slovenia

Slovenia emerges as Europe's innovation incubator

Photo: Shutterstock

Slovenia is redefining its economic model around science, skills, and strategic partnerships. With strong institutions, rising investment, and a skilled workforce, the country is ready to capitalize on its ambition to be Europe's next innovation hub.

With a population of just over two million people, Slovenia is leveraging its scientific heritage, strategic location, and innovation agenda to shape a growth-led national strategy. In advance of September's 20th annual Bled Strategic Forum, the country is spotlighting an economy that is shifting to one led by intellectual capital, research excellence, and international engagement, bolstered by deep European and transatlantic ties.

"Slovenia is a community that invests in science, education, culture, and sport," President Nataša Pirc Musar said in her Statehood Day address, highlighting the pillars upon which the country is building its future. This guiding vision articulates Slovenia's positioning as a knowledge-driven economy defined by its advanced capabilities in science, research and development, and technology. Around 4% of Slovenia's population holds a PhD, the highest rate in Europe, reflecting both

the nation's highly skilled workforce and the strength of its wider ecosystem.

That backbone supports the country's robust economic performance. The European Commission forecasts GDP growth of 2% in 2025, outpacing that of the wider European Union, while per-capita GDP now stands at 91% of the bloc's average. Rising levels of foreign investment are backed by strong credit ratings from international agencies, with advanced sectors attracting particular interest.

Anchoring much of this progress is Slovenia's research and education infrastructure, such as the Jožef Stefan Institute, the country's largest research facility and home to UNESCO's International Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence. The Secondary Technical and Vocational School Trbovlje, meanwhile, provides programs in disciplines from metalworking to computer science, working closely with regional businesses to ensure that the economic transformation taking place is both broad-based and sustainable. On a national level, Slovenia's participation in EU green and digital transformation programs has seen investment channeled into renewable energy and digitalization. "We always think about making things more efficient and sustainable, with lower energy and material use," says Matevž Frangež, State Secretary at the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism, and Sport.

Beyond the EU, Slovenia prioritizes its relationship with the United States. The U.S.-Slovenia Strategic Dialogues, established in 2020, provide a forum for bilateral engagement in areas of national and global importance. At the 2024

meeting, Slovenia signed the Artemis Accords, creating new opportunities for domestic research and collaboration in emerging sectors, including space technologies. The 2025 conference is due to be held in Washington, D.C. later this year.

With a similar focus on international challenges, the Bled Strategic Forum encapsulates Slovenia's national ethos, emphasizing the power of multilateralism and diverse perspectives to offer strategic solutions to pressing global problems. The 2025 edition, scheduled for September, is titled 'A Runaway World', focusing on Europe's role in the evolving global order.

With European identity a key element of the national character, this year also sees Slovenia play host to one of the continent's most high-profile cultural initiatives. Under the theme of 'GO! Borderless', Nova Gorica is one of two European Capitals of Culture for 2025. Selected for its cross-border links and historical ties, the town symbolizes a commitment to shared identity and cultural engagement. "European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica looks beyond borders, aiming to heal, envision, and inspire a shared future," says Minister of Culture Asta Vrečko.

Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital, reflects the wider national vision. Under Mayor Zoran Janković, the city is pursuing a 2045 vision grounded in inclusivity and livability. Already, 75% of the capital is made up of green spaces, with 20 hectares of pedestrian zones, making Ljubljana one of Europe's greenest cities. "We are interested in investments that improve our citizens' quality of life," says Janković. "I want Ljubljana to continue being a clean, safe, green, and friendly city." ●

INSIGHTS



"We are moving towards becoming one of the next European hubs for innovation."

Matevž Frangež,
State Secretary, Ministry of the
Economy, Tourism, and Sport



"Culture plays a vital role in creating dialogue and bringing people together."

Dr. Asta Vrečko,
Minister of Culture



"We are working on becoming a European logistics center."

Zoran Janković,
Mayor of Ljubljana

SLOVENIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH



Slovenian imports from the U.S. (2024)

\$2.05 billion

U.S. imports from Slovenia (2024)

\$6.33 billion



U.S. visitors to Slovenia (2024)

\$2.05 billion



Foreign direct investment (2024)

€23 billion
(+3.6% YoY)



2025 GDP growth forecast:

2%



Population:

2.1 million

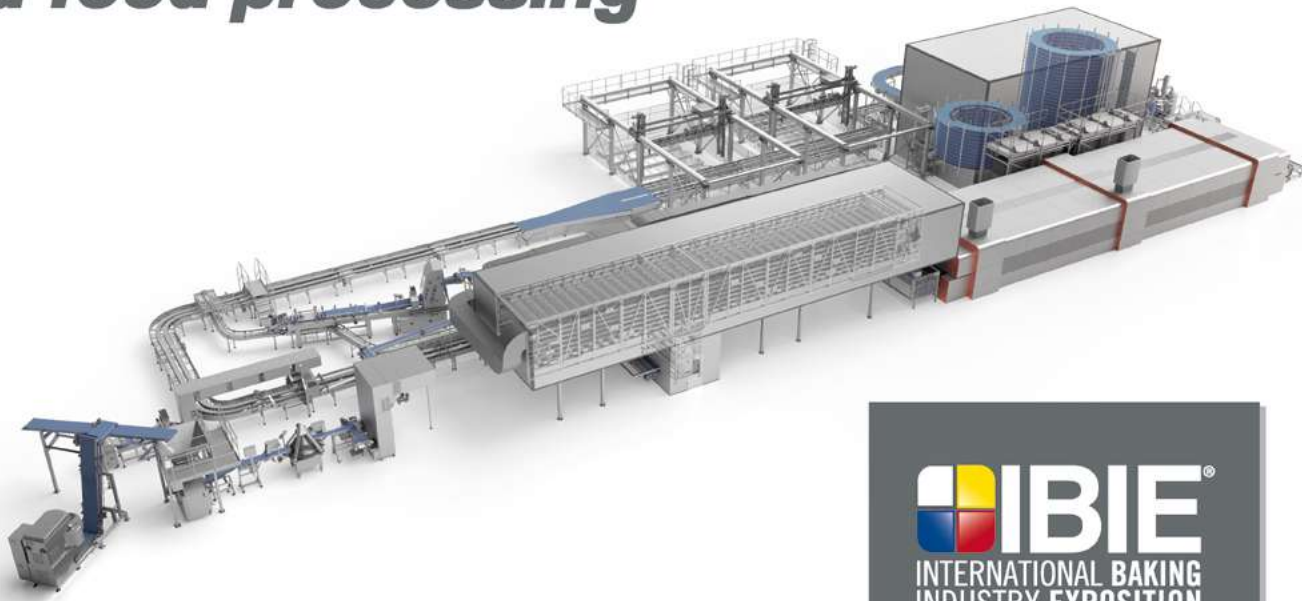


Population with PhDs:

4% highest in Europe



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ECONOMY AND INVESTMENT

Why invest in Slovenia?

For investors, Slovenia pairs EU stability with innovation capacity, strategic connectivity, and growing strength in emerging sectors.



Matevž Frangež, State Secretary, Ministry of the Economy, Tourism, and Sport

Slovenia’s dynamic economy is marked by an openness to trade and investment. World Bank data shows that total foreign trade in 2024 was equal to 156% of GDP, while foreign direct investment, which has been rising steadily over the past decade, increased 3.6% to €28 billion last year, according to the Bank of Slovenia.

A longstanding member of the European Union, the nation is today leveraging its highly educated workforce, advanced research and innovation ecosystem, and strategic location to drive economic diversification. “Our national industrial strategy focuses on promising new sectors such as AI, biotechnology, and net-zero technology,” says Matevž Frangež, State Secretary at the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism, and Sport. “We must learn from the best and focus on innovative technologies.”

In this interview, Frangež outlines Slovenia’s economic ambitions, startup strategy, and the powerhouse sectors providing the foundations for growth.

Q: What is your vision for Slovenia’s economy?
We are leaders in the manufacture of precise and reliable products. That is why we are tightly integrated into the European value chains. However, Slovenia and most of Central-Eastern Europe control the least profitable part of the value chain. We are the seventh most robotized economy in the world and the 11th most complex economy in the world, rankings that show the capacity of our economy to produce high-tech knowledge and innovation-based products. Our ambition is clear: we want to evolve as the next European hub for innovation of advanced and sustainable technologies. In both fields, we feel that we have high competences, a great innovation ecosystem, and excellent connections between research, science, industry, and startups.

Q: What is your strategy to nurture startups and attract global talent?
We see an emerging, vibrant, and dynamic ecosystem in Slovenian startups, and we are confident that our strategy, encompassing five key areas, will radically change our performance in this area. The strategic initiatives include a specially designed corporate legal form for startups, ensuring ease of entry and exit for investors, a startup visa to attract global talent, and incentives for investing in venture capital funds and into startups. In addition, we want to ensure we leverage our supportive ecosystem of incubators and technology parks to achieve better results for Slovenian startups.

“Our ambition is clear: we want to evolve as the next European hub for innovation.”

Q: Which focus sectors would you highlight to international investors?
We have been successful in pharma and biotechnology because of the presence of traditional pharmaceutical industries, national research institutes, and public regulators that created a robust environment to focus on biotechnology. We also have excellent startups and scale-ups in the field. In energy, Europe’s focus is to lower critical dependencies in materials, energy, and modern technologies. For example, 96% of our needs for solar capacities are imported from China. Where Slovenia can excel is in developing new net-zero clean technologies. There are obvious signs that Slovenians are particularly good at innovating such technologies. In automotive, there is not one European car made without Slovenian components, and there are interesting startups in this field, such as those developing in-wheel motors. In addition, Slovenia is a logistical hub for Central and Eastern Europe, which opens doors to European markets with 450 million people and 29 million European businesses. The strategic move for the Ministry is to focus on new products and technologies that are the result of Slovenian knowledge, innovation, and design. We want more Slovenian brands to be known across the world because of these Slovenian characteristics. ●

DEWESOFT



Tilen Sotler, CEO, Dewesoft

“This geographic diversification strengthens our business.”
Dewesoft designs and manufactures turn-key data acquisition (DAQ) systems used by some of the world’s most prominent brands, including NASA and Tesla. The company’s commitment to creating a standardized ecosystem enables users to measure with any equipment and easily integrate data without

worrying about compatibility issues. “This customer-driven approach is a core principle at Dewesoft,” explains Tilen Sotler, CEO. “And we have focused on pushing our vision to its limits.” Dewesoft also benefits from the evolution of a successful employee ownership model that promotes transparency and fosters loyalty. Currently, 25% of the company is owned by non-founders. Although headquartered in Slovenia, Dewesoft operates in 90 countries through subsidiaries, including in the U.S. where it has forged impressive partnerships in the aerospace and automotive sectors. “This geographic diversification strengthens our business,” says Sotler. “The U.S. presence began in 2012 and is now a core part of our global growth strategy.”

SPIRIT SLOVENIA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

SPIRIT Slovenia helps global investors and exporters tap into Slovenia’s innovation-led economy. Here, Director Tamara Zajec Balažič explains how.

Q: What is your vision for SPIRIT?
SPIRIT aims to serve as a one-stop shop for both investors and trading companies. Our focus is primarily on small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in areas like innovation, smart technology, and sustainability—key values that Slovenia embodies.

Q: What are your most dynamic investment sectors?
Our work spans multiple sectors. One of the fastest-growing and strongest is pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and medical equipment. Slovenia has significant expertise here and attracts substantial foreign investment, including from the U.S.



Tamara Zajec Balažič, Director, SPIRIT Slovenia Business Development Agency

“SPIRIT Slovenia aims to serve as a one-stop shop for both investors and trading companies.”

Q: What is your message to investors considering Slovenia?
We offer support such as business events, supplier days, matchmaking, and company visits. We assist U.S. companies looking to invest in Slovenia and Slovenian companies seeking U.S. partners.

MEDEX



Aleša Mižigoj, CEO, Medex

“Expansion is one of our key priorities for the next year.”
Medex develops innovative and clinically proven bee products for human health and wellbeing. Apitherapy has been at the heart of this family-run company’s mission since the 1960s, when the therapeutic effects of royal jelly, bee pollen, and bee venom were

becoming more widely known. Medex’s motto—“powered by bees, proven by science”—fuels its impressive organic and sustainability achievements and drives innovation. “We continuously try to develop beekeeping because it is crucial for pollination,” explains CEO Aleša Mižigoj. “But we want to prove that natural things also work.” Slovenia has a proud tradition of beekeeping and extensive expertise in apitherapy research—a key factor in Medex’s success in the international field. And as the market for high-quality dietary and organic products continues to grow in countries like the U.S., Medex is exploring enticing new opportunities. “Expansion is one of our key priorities for the next year,” says Mižigoj. “Our science-backed products are a significant differentiator.”

FOCUS ON SAVA RE

Rising star looks to the

Under CEO Marko Jazbec, reinsurer Sava Re has expanded significantly, achieving record profits and emerging as a robust investment opportunity.

Sava Re, the operating holding company of the Sava Insurance Group, is one of the largest reinsurance companies in Southeast Europe, serving over 500 partners in 120 global markets. Since the appointment of Marko Jazbec as CEO in 2017, Sava Re has undergone considerable transformation. Emphasizing team-driven strategy, Jazbec highlights the company’s growth, fueled by acquisitions in Slovenia and beyond. “We generate over one billion euros in gross written premiums,” he says, noting that in 2024, Sava Re achieved a return on equity exceeding 13%. Listed in Slovenia, a full EU member, the firm’s robust governance and transparent operations offer stability, and exposure to growth-oriented, yet traditionally under-invested, regional economies. “For an investor from the United States, investing in Sava Re offers a unique opportunity to gain exposure to non-EU markets without the elevated risks,” Jazbec says. “If you invest with us, you are investing in a company with a proven track record.” ●



“We generate over one billion euros in gross written premiums.”

Marko Jazbec, CEO, Sava Re



Industry voices

Slovenia’s innovators are making global waves. In this section, leading business figures share insights on the nation’s growth sectors, economic strategy, and investment potential.

NLB



NLB Group is Slovenia’s largest bank, playing a key role in the domestic and regional economy. CEO Blaž Brodnjak outlines NLB’s strategy and Slovenia’s appeal.

Q: What is your vision for NLB?
My tenure has involved three key phases: fundamental restructuring, privatization, and renewed growth. We manage 70% of the country’s cash, 40% of corporate payments, 41% of investment funds, and 37% of household deposits. This makes us one of the most significant financial institutions in the EU by domestic relevance. Our role in Slovenia is critical. Since 2018, we have also expanded regionally. We are now the only universal financial institution headquartered in the region offering financ-

ing in every country of the former Yugoslavia.

Q: What opportunities exist for investors in the finance sector?
For investors, Slovenia presents a compelling, diversified economic proposition. In addition to specialized industries, Slovenia has a vibrant AI, ICT, and crypto community. Many are actively engaged in blockchain technology across a range of use cases.

“For investors, Slovenia presents a compelling, diversified economic proposition.”
Blaž Brodnjak
CEO, NLB

Q: How can Slovenia grow U.S. engagement in the region?
The first step is getting people to visit and see the region for themselves. My invitation is simple: visit first, then talk to us. You will see the opportunities firsthand. The region hosts diverse industries with strong potential. Even if you are invested in energy stocks, you are indirectly exposed to this region.

AMCHAM SLOVENIA

The AmCham Slovenia business community connects professionals, companies, and investors through a dynamic network that champions innovation and promotes collaboration. The organization stages networking events, advocates for members, and deploys working committees to explore key business topics while exchanging best practices. Mentoring younger members to become effective leaders is a central tenet of AmCham’s mission. “We teach them about leadership and how they could pave the way forward with the things they have learned,” explains Ajša Vodnik, CEO. “There are so many young people with so much passion for life who could change the country.” The organization represents over 400 companies that together generate more than \$2.4 billion in annual revenue. “AmCham provides support and keeps companies and leaders informed; we try to help decision-makers on both sides understand what is at stake,” says Vodnik. Forging connections to the U.S. market is a key pillar of AmCham’s work. Recently, the organization launched its USA Navigator platform—developed in partnership with the U.S. Embassy—to help European



“American companies need good allies and to feel at home. Europe is the right place to be.”
Ajša Vodnik,
CEO, AmCham Slovenia

companies find the best U.S. markets for their products. Its CoLab initiative, meanwhile, aims to forge stakeholder connections with U.S. businesses and provide verified market intelligence. “American companies need good allies and to feel at home,” says Vodnik. “Europe is the right place to be.”

SIQ



“Our services are interesting for U.S. companies because of our unique approach.”
Gregor Schoss,
Managing Director, SIQ

The Slovenian Institute of Quality and Metrology (SIQ) has been providing independent certification, inspection, testing, and training services to international clients for more than 60 years. “We conduct testing based on regulatory requirements,” explains Managing Director Gregor Schoss. “Manufacturers can choose between 20 different fields of testing, such as cybersecurity, safety, EMC, and environmental testing.”

The United States is a growing market for SIQ, especially for medical devices. “Our services are interesting for U.S. companies because of our unique approach,” says Schoss. “Clients come to SIQ for certification to launch in Europe, while we also work on certification procedures for the U.S., cooperating with organizations like the FDA and the FCC.” As SIQ offers full-cycle testing across electrical safety, cybersecurity, and environmental verification, the company is constantly innovating to align standards with evolving technological trends. This dynamic strategy means SIQ’s services are highly sought after by start-ups bringing new products to market. “SIQ’s value lies in its speed, pragmatic approach, price—and finding the value for the client,” says Schoss. ●



As published with
USA TODAY

BIOSISTEMIKA

The future of lab tech

Blending science and software, BioSistemika powers lab innovation. CEO Roswita Golčer Hrastnik discusses their global growth and strategy.



Photo: BioSistemika

Founded in 2010 as a spin-out of the National Institute of Biology, BioSistemika specializes in software solutions and digitalization consulting for life science laboratories. Under the leadership of CEO Roswita Golčer Hrastnik, the company quickly recognized the value of combining interdisciplinary scientific and technical expertise. “This synergy is our greatest added value; we understand laboratories inside out,” Golčer Hrastnik says. “It drives the quality, efficiency, and success of the software we deliver.”

Central to the company’s approach is its commitment to its people. As Golčer Hrastnik emphasizes, “what really matters is that people communicate effectively and are driven by curiosity and passion.” This open and collaborative culture, she notes, “enables innovation, encourages communication, and allows people to feel comfortable contributing ideas.” This approach led to the creation of the company’s signature product, SciNote, an electronic laboratory notebook that has achieved wide success.

In 2018, BioSistemika started developing Datana, a DNA data storage solution designed to address the challenge of long-term data archiving. Having already attracted significant European funding, the company is now seeking strategic investors to further scale the project. For Golčer Hrastnik, Slovenia’s highly educated workforce, central European location, and BioSistemika’s proven track record combine to create a compelling opportunity for U.S. investors targeting the expanding global life sciences market. “For our American clients, we are a trusted strategic ally—innovative, reliable, and deeply knowledgeable.”

Alongside its success in product development, BioSistemika’s distinguishing strength lies in developing software solutions that meet glob-



“For our American clients, we are a trusted strategic ally—innovative, reliable, and deeply knowledgeable.”

Roswita Golčer Hrastnik,
CEO, BioSistemika

al regulatory environments. “We are familiar with the requirements not only in pharma and medical diagnostics but also across different regions,” Golčer Hrastnik notes, highlighting the company’s agility in navigating complex compliance landscapes. “Understanding these nuances allows us to help clients bring their products to market faster while meeting all compliance requirements. We are highly effective at accelerating our clients’ time to market.”

As BioSistemika continues to expand, the outlook remains ambitious. “In a specialized field like ours, global orientation is essential.” This is accompanied by a mission that remains focused on developing scalable, user-friendly, and compliant software. “We excel in software development,” Golčer Hrastnik adds. “Our clients rely on us to deliver market-ready software on time, aligned with their product launches.” ●

FOCUS ON GIZ

Innovating in energy



Photo: GIZ DEE.

Slovenia’s Electricity Distribution Economic Interest Grouping (GIZ) is playing a pivotal role in the nation’s rapid transition to green energy.



“We must build a strong network that will support the green transition.”

Uroš Blažica,
President, GIZ, and CEO,
Elektro Primorska

Led by President Uroš Blažica, GIZ is Slovenia’s national association of energy distributors, representing the five regional system operators that manage the country’s electricity network. Responsible for aligning technical standards, coordinating regulatory responses, and steering joint investments in grid modernization, the association is at the forefront of Slovenia’s energy strategy, which targets 55% renewable electricity by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050.

“The energy sector has changed so much in the last 12 years—more than in the previous 100—because of renewable energy, technology, and digitalization,” says Blažica. “The world has decided to go green, and the question is how fast the transformation will happen because industry is ready for that.”

The association’s leadership rotates every two years among the heads of its five member com-

panies, while its highest body, the GIZ general meeting, is composed of representatives from each member’s management board. This integrated structure enables a level of collaboration essential to the coordination and regulation of a sector that is both decentralized and regionally diverse. “It is a complex setup, but it is key for companies to invest more than in the previous year because by increasing investments, we influence revenue growth.”

In line with this strategy and Slovenia’s national climate targets, all five distribution companies have significantly increased infrastructure investment in the last decade, particularly in network automation and cybersecurity—investments backed by EU funding. This coordinated approach has paved the way for significant progress already, with the European Investment Bank ranking Slovenian business second among all EU nations for climate-action initiatives. For Blažica, however, the challenge ahead lies in ensuring consumers are supported in the shift to energy efficiency, with GIZ’s overriding goal to ready Slovenia’s power grid for the demands of the transition. “We are investing a lot in low-voltage networks because the end-consumers are thinking about sustainability and energy efficiency,” says Blažica, emphasizing their importance for solar panels, electric vehicles, heat pumps, and more. “We must build a strong network that will support the green transition.”



giz-dee.si

Engineering innovation

Engineering meets excellence at Slovenian firms like Gostol and BIA Separations, advancing technologies from heavy industry to bioprocessing.

GOSTOL - GOSPAN



Fabrizio Korošec,
Managing Director,
GOSTOL - GOSPAN

“We aim to strengthen our commercial footprint by partnering with forward-looking clients.”

The GOSTOL Group supplies integrated industrial solutions for commercial bakeries, including equipment for every stage of the dough mixing, proofing, baking, and cooling process. In recent years, the company has been successfully targeting bigger brands, leveraging its 70+ years of sector experience to win large-scale contracts with international clients. “Nowadays, most clients expect to be given the whole package, which includes solutions, quality, and responsibility for the products,” explains Managing Director Fabrizio Korošec. “There are not many compet-

itors who are able to do all that we can.” In fact, GOSTOL can offer a bespoke manufacturing service, supplying custom machines for niche product lines. This strategy has fueled impressive growth. “Through strategic positioning and dedication, we successfully grew from \$15 million to \$45 million in six years,” says Korošec. GOSTOL’s solutions feature highly automated, synchronized systems with turnkey controls—innovations designed to meet client demand for quality, efficiency, and scalability. “Our biggest effort is digitalization and flexible industrialization,” says Korošec. “This means that, on the one hand, you can bake diverse types of bread at the same time, and, on the other, we improve automation.” In the U.S., GOSTOL is already working with bakery group Bimbo, delivering for one of its largest sites in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. Now, Korošec’s goal is to expand his company’s U.S. presence over the next five years via strategic collaboration. “We aim to strengthen our commercial footprint by partnering with forward-looking clients who are not only growing but also willing to invest in a shared future,” he says.

BIA SEPARATIONS

Operating from a dedicated research, production, and training facility in Ajdovščina, BIA Separations is the leading developer of monolith technology and chromatographic columns for the production, purification, and analysis of large biomolecules. Drawing on more than two decades of experience, BIA Separations develops products that are revolutionizing the purification of viruses for vaccines and gene vectors, pursuing the highest quality standards in its research, development, and production facilities. The organization’s growth strategy is focused on international markets, with 80% of exports going to the U.S. “My business partners and top collaborators are in the U.S.,” explains Founder and CEO Aleš Štrancar. “I am very open to working with the U.S.” BIA Separations represents an attractive proposition for U.S. biopharmaceutical companies looking for a top-tier ally in manufacturing processes. The company currently supplies Novartis and other well-known brands in the U.S., while also collaborating with institutions like the North Carolina Biotech Center. “Clients trust us to deliver, and



Aleš Štrancar,
Founder & CEO,
Bia Separations

“Clients trust us to deliver, and we meet their expectations.”

we meet their expectations. That is how we have grown,” says Štrancar. The business was founded to advance the field of gene therapy, with the aim of solving one of its main bottlenecks: manufacturing. Now, BIA Separations’ research focus has expanded to cancer therapy projects. “Our company’s role is to support pharmaceutical developers in creating and producing therapies—gene and cancer therapies—more efficiently and effectively,” says Štrancar. “That is what drives us. We help companies striving to develop new treatments because these illnesses are growing faster than natural rates.”

Sartorius BIA Separations

The Biotech Hub of Tomorrow in the Heart of Europe

Strategic Location:

Slovenia, Europe’s hidden gem, offers stunning landscapes and prime location for biotech business.

Tradition Meets Innovation:

Slovenia combines a rich tradition in pharmacy with cutting-edge innovations, making it an ideal location for biopharma partnerships.

Biopharmaceutical Excellence & Global Partnerships:

Sartorius BIA Separations leads in the next-gen biopharmaceutical processes, collaborating with business partners from the USA (80%) and abroad, such as AstraZeneca, Arcturus, Sanofi, BioNet Asia, Avexis/Novartis and many more.

Innovative Campus:

The Sartorius BIA Separations’ campus features state-of-the-art facilities and highly skilled workforce with close to 30 years’ experience in gene therapy processes and products development to meet biopharma manufacturing needs.

Hub for Biotech:

As a hub for biotech excellence, we offer opportunities in the biopharmaceutical sector, alongside strong high-tech companies like Krka, Sandoz, and Novartis Gene Therapy.

Advanced Therapies:

At Sartorius BIA Separations we are strong in the field of mRNA vaccines, LNP formulation, gene therapy, CAR-T, bacteriophages, human plasma fractionation and more, driving the present and the future of medicine. Our products and expertise were utilized in the development and manufacture of gene therapy product Zolgensma and many others—some not disclosed and many still in trials.



Photo: Creative Architecture

TOURISM & CULTURE

Slovenian tourism scales new heights

Record-breaking visitor numbers in 2024 have positioned Slovenia as a standout destination in Europe, with the capital Ljubljana driving a growth strategy rooted in sustainability and authentic experiences.



Photo: Unsplash



Photo: Unsplash



Photo: Unsplash

Slovenian tourism is on a roll. After reaching record levels in 2023, the sector set new highs again in 2024 as visitor numbers rose 6.3% to 6.6 million—generating 16.9 million overnight stays—according to official figures. This growth was driven largely by international visitors, who now account for over 75% of all arrivals, with notable double-digit increases from the United States, Croatia, and Serbia. Germany remains the largest single market of traveler origin, accounting for over 10%, followed by Italy, Austria, and Croatia. Slovenia’s mountain landscape continues to be the biggest draw, with its ski resorts and the lakeside town of Bled among the nation’s most-visited regions.

At the heart of this momentum lies the capital, Ljubljana, which saw visitor arrivals and overnight stays rise by nearly 13%. With close to 1.2 million visitors and 2.6 million overnight stays in 2024, the city has emerged as a central driver of the country’s tourism strategy, with American travelers a market of particular importance.

“U.S. travelers are valued here because of their respect for Europe,” explains Petra Stušek, CEO of Ljubljana Tourism, Visit Ljubljana. Visitor numbers from the U.S. rose sharply in 2024, showing an 18% increase, and are up 25% since 2019. “American travelers want to explore our heritage, our DNA, and respect our culture,” she continues, noting that this success is part of a long-term plan. “These are the values of visitors that we

want to attract.”

Ljubljana’s model is built around sustainability, culture, and decentralization. The city is home to one of Europe’s largest pedestrian zones, operates



“U.S. travelers are valued here because of their respect for Europe.”

Petra Stušek,
CEO, Ljubljana Tourism
Visit Ljubljana

a free electric shuttle service, and was the first capital in Europe to declare a zero-waste mission. Its cultural credentials are equally strong: more than 12% of local GDP is invested in cultural activity, and over 10,000 events are hosted annually. The city also benefits from its strategic and histor-

ic location at the crossroads of Slavic, Romance, and Germanic cultural spheres, which is reflected in its architecture, cuisine, and civic ethos.

With occupancy rates averaging almost 100% during the summer, initiatives such as the LUV Festival and November Gourmet Ljubljana aim to extend tourism beyond the peak months and highlight lesser-known parts of the city. Visit Ljubljana also leads a regional alliance of 26 municipalities, with the goal of growing their tourism offering and promoting their unique points of interest. Its Cultural Quarters platform, meanwhile, brings together SMEs and NGOs from across the city to network and promote the agency’s efforts to local stakeholders. “If the locals are happy, then the visitors will be happier,” says Stušek.

Beyond the capital, Slovenia’s traditional draws continue to power the sector. Mountain destinations accounted for 35% of overnight stays in 2024, with seaside municipalities at 16% and spa resorts 12%. The nation’s Alpine landscape, array of geothermal spa destinations, and attractions such as Terme Čatež, Central Europe’s largest waterpark, present a vibrant and varied offering for visitors—while the country’s size is another selling point. “In one day, visitors can ski in the mountains and visit the Adriatic coast,” notes Terme Čatež CEO Bojan Petan. With a model based on natural beauty, culture, and authenticity, Slovenia’s tourism strategy is securing its place on the map for conscientious global travelers ●.

INTERVIEW



Maja Pak,
Director, Slovenian Tourism Board

The Slovenian Tourist Board is championing Slovenia as a green, gourmet, and culturally rich destination. Director Maja Pak discusses their strategy and rising interest from U.S. travelers.

Q: What is your vision for the Slovenian Tourist Board?

We have a clear vision: to position Slovenia as a boutique, green destination focused on quality, sustainability, and authenticity. For Slovenian tourism, sustainability is not optional; it is the only path forward. A key decision was the development of the brand “I Feel Slovenia”, promoting the country as an active, healthy, green destination. The brand embodies our vision and love for nature, reflected in all our activities. Our love for nature is part of our identity—it is in our DNA, and Slovenians are committed to preserving it.

Q: What aspects of Slovenian culture would you like to highlight to visitors?

We aim for tourists to see Slovenia as a vibrant, diverse, and green country, rich in authentic stories, with deep respect for nature and culture, and outstanding gastronomy. Slovenian gastronomy is exceptional, thanks to passionate chefs who use local ingredients and follow sustainable practices.

Q: What makes the U.S. such a strong growth market for Slovenian tourism?

The United States is one of Slovenia’s key long-haul markets. Last year saw a significant increase in visitors, and this year we expect 15% more overnight stays from the U.S. in the first four months alone. We anticipate the U.S. will be one of the fastest-growing markets this year. We also work with leading U.S. media and focus heavily on the U.S. in our global digital campaigns, which cover 20 markets annually. In Slovenia, luxury inbound agencies cater specifically to American travelers, creating high-end, personalized experiences that add significant value. The U.S. remains a key market for the future.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE



Dr. Asta Vrečko,
Minister of Culture

“Slovenia offers an abundance of talent and expertise, making partnerships mutually enriching.”

Minister of Culture Asta Vrečko discusses her strategy to revitalize Slovenia’s arts sector and opportunities for U.S. collaboration.

Q: What is your vision for the Ministry?
Our main goal at the Ministry of Culture is to reestablish culture as the core of society. Culture had been generally neglected, so we aim to implement systemic changes in both policy and budgeting. We significantly increased the Ministry’s budget and secured substantial new funding from various EU funding sources. Notably, we also obtained

environmental funds to support green cultural policies.

Q: What aspect of culture best captures Slovenia’s identity?

As a nation, with our language and written tradition, our roots stretch back centuries, even millennia. Notably, the first Slovenian translation of the Bible was published only a few decades after other major European translations, reflecting the importance of our literary tradition. The Slovenian language is central to our identity. With only two million speakers, our language binds us together.

Q: What opportunities do you see for American visitors and investors in Slovenia?

Cultural exchange between the USA and Slovenia has long been active, both before and after independence. This relationship, rooted in cultural diplomacy, remains vibrant today. An important area of collaboration is in the cultural and creative industries. We are developing new policies in fields like audiovisual arts and film, areas where U.S. collaboration could be particularly valuable. Slovenia offers an abundance of talent and expertise, making partnerships mutually enriching.

TERME ČATEŽ



Photo: Terme Čatež

As Central Europe’s largest waterpark, Terme Čatež is a magnet for tourists looking for a fun-filled vacation. Slovenia has long appealed to visitors seeking a relaxing retreat amid its forests and greenery—a draw that growing numbers of U.S. travelers are recognizing. Tourism from the United States grew by 31% in 2023, the most recent year for which government figures are available. “Americans often prefer touring Europe because of its accessibility,” says Bojan Petan, CEO. “Once they discover Slovenia, they recognize it as a hidden gem—ideal for nature, wellness, and leisure travel.”

Terme Čatež is well-placed to capitalize on grow-

ing U.S. interest. The destination holds a 23% share of the wellness resort market and accounts for 4% of all overnight stays in Slovenia. Spanning 70 hectares, with ample room for expansion, it welcomes around one million swimmers annually. Recent developments include amenities designed to appeal to sports tourists, as well as new facilities for health- and eco-conscious travelers. These include the geothermal Wellness Riviera and the Grand Spa Terme. “Our mission is to use Slovenia’s natural resources—especially geothermal water—responsibly while creating diverse offerings for families, couples, and wellness travelers,” says Petan. ●

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