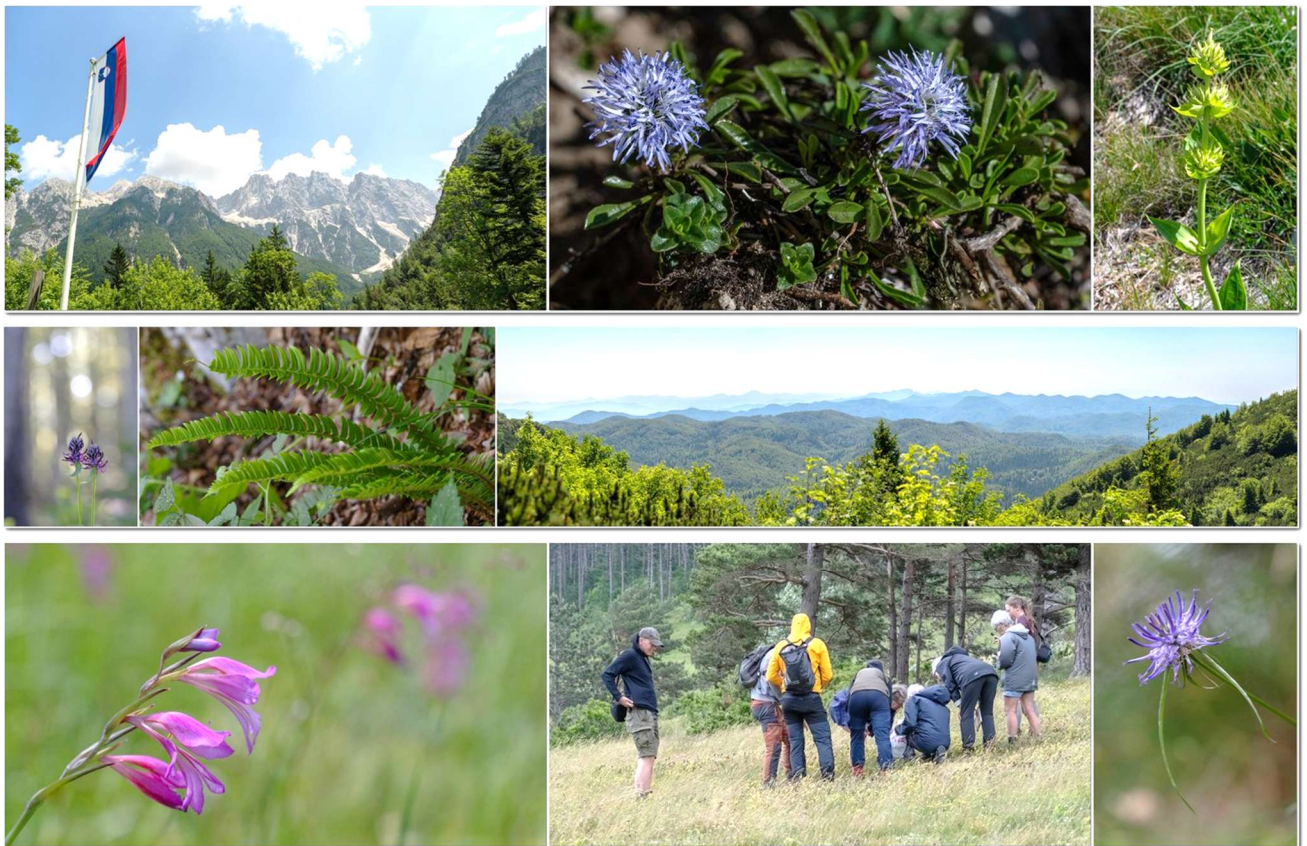


ISU Botanical Excursion in Slovenia June 2025



Hiking, discovering plants and identifying them together, getting to know ISU members and learning about the country and its people – our members experienced all these aspects of an ISU excursion at this year's ISU event in Slovenia.

Guide: Thomas Ster, former director of the Botanical Garden in Graz, Austria
Text: Marie-Paule Carcan,
Photos: Jo Bogaerts

After a pleasant dinner and a nice introduction with the guide and the other participants on Monday evening, the excursion started on Tuesday morning, 17 June.

Day 1

To start with, there was a beautiful find close to our first hotel, namely *Aristolochia clematitis* (see below) with the Dusky Grass-Veneer.



The road led up to the Nano High Plateau. At the various stops (sometimes only a few metres apart), interesting plants were already found. Our guide Thomas Ster, former director of the Botanical

Garden in Graz, Austria, was able to identify many plants. When in doubt, he took a piece of the plant or flower with him and we were given an explanation later. The rolling landscape was very green due to the rain that had fallen in the previous weeks, and the High Karst region was a good place for botanising. Thomas also knew a lot about the geology of the region and its influence on the different plant species. Some plants are widespread from the Southern Alps of South Tyrol to Carinthia and Slovenia. Other plants are specific to a particular region, endemic. And sometimes Mediterranean flora is also found. In the evening before dinner, the plants we had collected were brought out and we determined what species or variety they were.



Day 2: Caven Illyrska Bistrica

On Wednesday morning, we set off for the edge of the Ternovan forest. On the southern flank, the beech and spruce forest recedes. Here, probably due to grazing, the Karst meadows of the Caven have been able to develop such a rich variety of species. This Illyrian region is rich in species.

To view or photograph some plants, it is sometimes necessary to climb a few metres up the steep slope. This is how we found *Hladnikia pastinacifolia* (see below), a Slovenian paleodemite with a limited habitat of only 4 km² in the Trnovo Forest, a plateau in western Slovenia.



Hladnikia pastinacifolia, Slovenian paleodemite - restricted to only 4km² in Trnovo Forest Plateau-Western Slovenia

After spending the morning in the forest and on the slopes, we headed towards Ledenica Paradana. This place is a globally renowned rarity: a typical ice cave with a cold trap influenced by the underground Karst. At the foot of an enormous sinkhole, the entrance leads to a downward-sloping passage. Cold air is trapped there in the summer. Two-thirds of the way down, you can feel the temperature drop by 15°C. The ice that has been formed in the cave was once mined. Blocks weighing 10 to 40 kg were sawn and carried up in baskets. At night, the blocks were transported to Gorizia or Trieste to be used to cool fish and other products. This place has unique vegetation, with plants that one would not expect to find in a mountainous area. As we descend, we gradually go from tall trees

to dwarf spruces and low shrubs, followed by only moss and eventually only ice. This vegetation is determined solely by the different climate zones that prevail in that place. That is why it is called a kind of botanical “locus typicus” (type locale). Due to the difference in temperature, the vegetation at the bottom is completely different from the one at the top.

Day 3: Sneznik

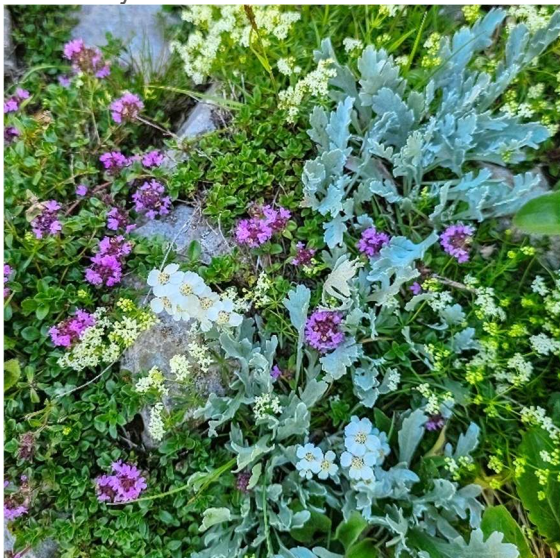
Thursday morning, 19 June, began with a challenging climb ahead, a 500-metre ascent to the summit of the Sneznik (1,795 metres). At first, there was a beautiful trail through the forest.



Along the way, we stopped several times along the side of the road. Slowly, the landscape opened up with a view of the Sneznik, see below.



Here and there on the mountain road, you come across small ‘rock gardens’, see picture below, or example of how nature plays landscape architect here. Unassuming plants grow effortlessly between the rocks.



After a fruitful but tiring day, we return to the hotel, making a pleasant

discovery along the way of *Stipa eriocalis*, which makes Adel (see above) very happy. And in the evening, there is more comparing, identifying and questioning (see below).



Day 4: farewell

On Friday morning, 20 June, we said our goodbyes after breakfast. However, a few of us still found time to visit the Trajnice Strgar nursery. We were given a very warm welcome, and it was great to see Bernarda Strgar again. After a final drive to the airport, everyone goes their separate ways. Over the course of three days, we gained a wonderful impression of the Upper Karst region and the foothills of the Dinaric Alps.

Thanks to our excellent guide Thomas Ster and Armin Pleschberger for all the interesting information about the plants. Thanks to Eva and Lido, Adel and Stefano, Kerstin and Brigitte for sharing their interests, exchanging experiences and for conviviality. Also, a big thank you to our driver who took us everywhere safe and with patience.