

## 18. Secovlje soline – Slovenia

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The site is situated on the Adriatic coast, at the mouth of the Dragonja River, in the southernmost stretch of the coastline of the Piran Bay. The Secovlje salt pans are among the most important natural heritage sites in Slovenia, the greater part of its pans creating a very special environment hosting a large number of breeding, staging and wintering birds, a number of nationally rare invertebrates and halophytic plants. Forces of nature have been constantly transforming the site, creating a series of diverse biotopes, which complement one another and compose an integrated ecosystem. Only organisms well-adapted to this special environment (salt basin water is several times saltier than sea water) can survive there and among them is the smallest mammal in the world, *Suncus etruscus*.

In Roman times, the area of Piran was part of the provinces of Pannonia and Noricum. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the region was conquered by the Mongolian Avar, the Slavs and, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, by the Bavarians. In the ensuing centuries the region was dominated by the Franks and later fell under Austro-Hungarian rule. After the end of World War I, Slovenia became part of Yugoslavia and in 1991, along with Croatia, declared its independence. The town of Piran is an old Mediterranean town boasting numerous medieval structures and the birthplace of the famous composer and violinist Giuseppe Tartini. Its impressive city walls were first constructed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, they have been extended in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and then fortified in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in an attempt to protect Piran against Turkish raids. The municipal archives of Piran reflect a rich historical tradition, some dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, such as the statutes of 1274.

In the past, the locals earned their living mainly from the exploitation of the sea and land. The Mediterranean climate was favourable for the production of vegetables, wine and olive products. The locals' relation to the sea goes far back in the past, the salt pans in the Dragonja Delta having operated for hundreds of years. During the Napoleonic period, large salt storehouses were built in Portoroz and motivated a vigorous

maritime trade. Some areas were abandoned at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, allowing the re-establishment of the salt marsh. Today, the salt production area in Strunjan and Secovlje operates in the traditional way, gathering the brine on the bio-sediment, the *petola*, on a daily basis. The management of the Secovlje Salina Nature Park has been given to a private company (SOLINE Pridelava soli d.o.o.), which runs the site according to the management plan approved by the Government of Slovenia. Although this is a profit maximisation company, it adopts and implements specific measures that add to the park's sustainable development and promotes environmentally-conscious policies. In the abandoned Fontanigge saltpans, a salt-making museum was established in the last decade, where a wide collection of salt-making tools is kept and two salt repositories can be found. The museum serves educational purposes, in the framework of eco-tourism.

The salt-making festival takes place three times a year during the salt-production period from April to August. The festival is organised by the Park and the local communities and includes significant cultural events, such as traditional dances and local product exhibitions.