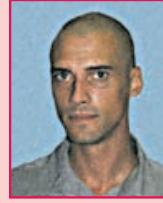


This is the beginning

of a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions, for less busy people) sheet I'm writing for Americans about Slovenia. This way, Slovenia can know what I'm saying behind its back. Because if I'm going to keep any kind of credibility in this relationship as journalist to reading audience I'm going to have to dig deep. I'm going to have to ask (and answer) the hard-hitting questions. I'm going to have to turn up the volume and turn the mirror on myself. I personally will usher in a new wave of journalistic accountability. Let's roll.

**Where is Slovenia?**

Do you know where Venice is? Great. Start at Venice, California and go 15 time zones to the west. It's near the top half of the world, not the bottom.

What's the geography like? Is it a big country?

By car, you can reach one of four international borders within an hour-and-a-half from the center of the country. Ergo, if Slovenia were genitalia, Europe would be John Wayne Bobbitt.

What do they speak there? Slovian?

Um, no, but it sounds an awful lot like Slovian to me.

Say something in Slovene?

Ščegetavček. That means "What time is it?"

How is the cost of living?

Well, the real estate market is bloated, so you can get a really nice apartment for the same price as a Manhattan studio. Staple items cost roughly the same as here. The sin tax is low, so a pint of beer figures out to \$1.85. There are a lot of flea markets. Gas is higher, because it's in Europe...but you don't really care about that. Oddly, the value of human life seems to be higher in Slovenia too.

What is the weather like?

Are you my grandfather? It rains. It shines. It snows. But, rarely, all three on the same day.

What sort of religion do they have there?

Catholic.

Is that different from Roman Catholic?

Yes, by one word.

What do Slovenians think of Americans?

They think we're fat.

Are you saying this dress makes me look fat?

That cloud looks almost exactly like an old-timey car. Isn't that strange?

How's the fashion in Slovenia?

Street fashion is totally sophisticated. Kids are out silk-screening their own clothes, buying weird boas to chop up into pieces, wearing scads of micro-buttons. It's basically what the 80's should have been like if anyone had any fashion sense. The ex-Yugoslavia is the new Japan. Mark my words.

Does it ever bother you to be so superficial?

Next question. Not you, pimpleface. The attractive girl wearing Dolce and Gabbana.

How's the nightlife in Slovenia?

In the capital of Ljubljana, the nightlife is vigorous. The population is close to 400,000 and they easily party like a city of 2 million. Unless that city is Dallas. Ljubljjanans party way harder than Dallasites.

What are the girls like?

They're exactly like American girls. (Giggle. Belly laugh. Cough. Cough. Cough.)

Are there black people in Slovenia?

Yes. But most are imported via television.

How can the fall of communism benefit me?

Hmmm. If you would like to pursue a career as a mid-level bureaucrat, I would say the doors are now wide open. The ruffle is you have to be able to say more than "What time is it?" in Slovian. Or you can write for one of the one English newspapers. Photo required with every resume. ■