Syrmia &
Slavonia

TOURIST BOARD OF THE
VUKOVAR-SYRMIA COUNTY

Sacral Treasure of Srijem and Slavonia

Inwrought with Faith

A Stronghold and Strength of the People of Srijem and Slavonia

Perhaps due to the everyday hardships, perhaps due to the tumultuous history of the area, invasions and wars, the Church has always been a stronghold and strength of its believers, a guiding light connecting the past and the future; it is where the people, oppressed and exiled, find their comfort, peace and hope. The rich sacral heritage of Eastern Croatia, encompassing more than centuries, witnesses of the spirituality of its people and their faith. It is a long history in which the sacral facilities have remained more or less unchanged, the shrines have a tradition longer than that of much more famous ones, while the pilgrimage sites gather believers from all parts of Croatia and the region even today.

Here you will find sings of faith and piousness everywhere – in the towns or in their vicinity, with fertile fields and field paths – paths along smaller or larger rivers, at crossroads, at house corners, at distant cemeteries, in centuries old forests... From modest wooden crosses up to the monumental churches, they are a reflection of the character of the people of Srijem and Slavonia, valuable and humble at the same time, honest and self-sacrificing, responsible and considerate.

There are numerous religious communities active in the East of Croatia; fifty years ago, the first mosque in Croatia was built in Gunja and the area is exceptionally rich in mediaeval sacral monuments and churches with monasteries. There are two shrines here – in Šumanovci and in Ilača, a large number of pilgrimage sites, among which the most famous are the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady in Bapska and the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Helper of Christians in Sotin.

Shrines – a Reflection of Love and Faith

The Shrine of the Mother of Good Hope in Šumanovci

The pilgrims also call it Our Hidden Lady of Šumanovci. For almost more than six and a half centuries, miracles have been taking place here, some of which have become legendary, such as the healing of a blind girl who washed her face with the water from the well beside the shrine. The well with the miraculous water is beside the chapel, a hundred meters from the shrine that is the second oldest on the territory of the Đakovo-Osjiek Archdiocese.

In the idyllic ambience of the Slavonian oak forest, believers from all parts of Croatia pray here, and thousands of them come for the holidays of the Assumption of Mary and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the church foundations, the monks of the church, that was incinerated in the Turkish conquests, first built a wooden church, while today's church was built in 1822.

The Shrine of Our Lady in Vodica in Ilača

Many have found their peace and refuge here. What Lourdes is for France, Ilača is for Srijem. Since in 1865 at the site of the today's chapel a water source suddenly sprang with the image of Our Lady appearing that same evening, thousands of pilgrims from Srijem and Slavonia come to visit this holy place. The same year that the appearance happened, beside the water source, a sculpture of Our Lady was placed, while in 1867 the construction of a church started that was consecrated three years later on the day of the Assumption of Mary. Believers come to Ilača every year for the holiday of the Assumption of Mary, however pilgrimage festivals in this most Eastern Croatian shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary take place also on other holidays of the Blessed Virgin. Many come on foot, from the most distant Slavonian places in order to be able to pray to Our Lady in peace.

Monasteries – Spiritual and Cultural Centres

Church and Monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul in Šarengrad

On the foundations of the older church and monastery dating back to the 11th century, belonging to the Templars or Benedictines at the beginning of the 15th century, in the age of Gothic, the then master of the town, Ivan Morovićki, ban or governor of Mačva, built a new church and monastery for the Franciscans, who never left it even during the times of the Ottoman occupation. At the time of baroque, the church was renovated and expanded its tower being an exceptionally valuable mediaeval monument; in the last decade, baroque frescos are being restored under the strict supervision of the conservators. The Šarengrad monastery is the only preserved mediaeval monastery in Slavonia with exceptional gothic elements.

Church and Monastery of St. John of Capistrano in Ilok

Originally, a gothic church dating back to 1349 was first consecrated to the Assumption of Mary, while today it is consecrated to St. John of Capistrano. Wanting to leave a permanent stamp of Catholicism and of the Franciscan order on the border between the East and the West, Capistrano came to die in the church and a monastery was raised at the most beautiful place in Srijem, above the powerful Danube, in the fort of Nikola of Ilok, king of Bosnia. The tower of the monastery remains to be one of the most beautiful gazebos; within the church, there is a chapel in which John of Capistrano spent the days while ill and where he died in 1456. After the Ottomans left, the church and the monastery were baroquised. At the beginning of the 20th century, their renovation was entrusted to Herman Bolle who made the latest stylistic changes in the neo-gothic style, such as those that he applied also to the Zagreb cathedral.

Church and Franciscan Monastery of Sts. Philip and Jacob in Vukovar

This zero-category monument located above the Danube in one of the most beautiful places in town was completely destroyed in the Homeland War. The renovation managed to bring back the old glory and its rich cultural and historic heritage has been integrated in Vukovar's tourist offer.

The relics of St. Bona, the Franciscan Museum of Vukovar, the crypt of the counts of Eltz, a rich library, the wine cellar of the monastery and the most beautiful belvedere in Vukovar are all additional reasons why you should visit this place of peace and spirituality. The church and the monastery were built in 1732 thanks to generous donations of the noble Eltz family; the construction lasted for nine years. After the cathedrals in Đakovo and Zagreb, the church of Sts. Philip and Jacob is the third longest in Croatia.

Churches : Testimonies of History

The Church of St. Elijah of the Early Romanesque Style on Meraja in Vinkovci

One of the oldest churches on the territory of the Vukovar-Srijem County was an early Romanesque one-nave structure with lesenes in the total length of somewhat less than 12 meters. In approximately thirty square meters, 160 believers could gather. It was built in the 12th century in the centre of the mediaeval town of Bogdánfalva and its foundations were found during the archaeological research some fifty years ago. It is believed that the early Romanesque church was demolished in 1242 with the invasion of the Tatars, after which it must have later been renovated; after the construction of a larger Gothic church of the same name, it served for a while as its chapel or sacristy. You will have to believe us because, unfortunately, on Meraja or the Small park only the foundations have remained.

Gothic Church of St. Elijah on Meraja in Vinkovci

The early Romanesque church became too small during the years, so that a new building was constructed beside it that was functional in the late mediaeval period and early Modern Age. Thus, the gothic church of St. Elijah, with the later consecration to St. Vincent, on Meraja or in the Small park in Vinkovci, became a reflection of the demographic changes in the mediaeval town of St. Elijah, the precursor of Vinkovci.

After the church of St. John of Nepomuk at the end of the 18th century was built in the centre of Vinkovci, today's parish church of St. Eusebius and Polion, the gothic church on Meraja was desacralized and first turned into a military warehouse to be later sold and turned into a wheat magazine. Nowadays the space occasionally houses exhibitions and lovers of sacral art will recognise the outlines of the former church in the eclectic architecture.

St. Bartholomew in Novi Mikanovci

Presently, it is best known for its inclined and round tower becoming octagonal at the top. The church of St. Bartholomew in Novi Mikanovci was originally a one-nave Romanesque structure. It used to be a church-fort whose tower used to serve as a loophole and observatory; only later did it become a belfry and defended the property of the family under the name of Hrvati (Croats) on the Eastern slopes of the Đakovo plain inhabited by the colonists from Saxony. In Gothic times, it lost its Romanesque apse and in the renovations and expansion in the 18th century also all the other Romanesque features. Fifteen graves from the late mediaeval period and early modern age were found and researched within the church, while a stone bench for priests, the so-called sedilia, was discovered in the sanctuary with mediaeval frescos and at least three figures in the back.

Church of Blessed Virgin Mary in Bapska

On the edge of the loess plateau steeply descending towards a water source in the valley, there is the originally Romanesque church from the 13th century, in the almost forgotten mediaeval town of Baba. This well-known Srijem pilgrimage site is located in the cemetery a kilometre and a half away from Bapska. During the centuries, the church experienced a series of extensions and variations, in the gothic, baroque and classicist styles; it has been considered one of the most beautiful examples of Romanesque construction in Srijem and Slavonia until today. In the church, there is the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the 17th century, in particular worshiped on the holiday of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on 8th September. From the church towards the water source known as “Our Lady’s Well”, that the inhabitants of the town and the pilgrims always considered miraculous, there is a way of the cross.

Church of St. Catherine in Nijemci

On the elevation in the centre of Nijemci, at the site of the former mediaeval Gradina, with a preserved moat, there is the proud church of St. Catherine, a virgin and martyr, built in the 14th century. Even though today it is basically gothic and baroquised with valuable late baroque and classicist inventory, according to the archaeological research, the church had a Romanesque predecessor.

Beneath the present floor, two more floor levels have been discovered; in the right angle in front of the apse, there are the traces of the Roman architecture and during excavations graves in rows of the Bijelo Brdo culture were discovered. During the Ottoman times, Nijemci were the seat of the kaza, which is witnessed by the remnants of the architecture in the park beneath the church.

Church of St. Luke – Lučica in Lipovac

Created on an artificial island in the bayou of the river Spačva, the church of St. Luke, or more popularly of Our Lady of Lučica, retained the most original gothic features on the territory of the Vukovar-Srijem County. It got its name after the today lost painting of St. Luke painting Our Blessed Virgin.

The church of St. Luke is a one-nave gothic structure with a polygonal apse and typical wooden belfry. According to sources, there used to be a Templar monastery first and then there was the Franciscan monastery destroyed with the arrival of the Ottomans. The church was renovated several times in the 19th century and it got its appearance during the time of Bishop Strossmayer. The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin has in the past years become a special event when members of cultural societies from the entire Srijem and Slavonia come here as pilgrims.

Church of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist in Ivankovo

Ivankovo is from the outside entirely dominated by the renovated parish church of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist built in 1725. From the centre of the town to the church, there is the way of the cross. There used to be a gothic church consecrated to St. George, which is witnessed by historic sources in which the originally Hungarian name of the mediaeval Ivankovo, Ivankaszent-gyorgy, can be found. In the course of the centuries, the town changed its owners – from the Hungarians to Ottomans; the parish used to belong to the Osuvak archdeaconry of the Pécs diocese. There used to be a cemetery here, largely destroyed by the extension of the church and construction of the belfry, but archaeologists managed to research 55 graves in detail dating back to the end of the 13th and the early 16th century.

Church of St. Michael Archangel in Cerna

The church in Cerna, built at the time of the Gothic, was mentioned as early as the 14th century. It is located at the archaeological site from the prehistoric period surrounded by the Bosut and Bić. After the Ottoman rule, the church was renovated, first in the baroque and then in the classicist style. At that time, it was under the management of the Franciscan monastery in Šarengrad; in the mid-18th century, it was taken over from the Franciscans by the diocese priests. The Chronicles of the Cerna parish from 1927 say that on 26 October there was a terrible cyclone, until then not seen in the area, causing tremendous damage to the fields and the village with falling ice destroying almost all the windows in the town. The church of St. Michael Archangel was also affected, however, it was renovated the following year when it got new bells and the old organ was replaced with a new harmonium.

The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Helper of Christians in Sotin

The parish church in Sotin is a baroquised late mediaeval structure that during the five centuries of its existence was destroyed and renovated three times, most recently after the Homeland War in which the statues of Sts. Joachim and Anne disappeared. The painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Helper, made after the work of the German renaissance painter Lucas Cranach, was fortunately saved. Its effigy was worshipped since 1739 in a special chapel in Sotin. That year, fleeing from the Ottomans, the painting was brought into this small place by the Franciscans from Belgrade. Nowadays, the painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Helper is kept in the main altar of the church that at the time of construction was considered the most beautiful one in Slavonia. The main day of the pilgrimage to the Blessed Virgin Mary the Helper is celebrated on Sunday after the Ascension Day, the holiday being on 24

Rokovci walls in Rokovci

To the South of Vinkovci, to the right of the road to Rokovci, there are the ruins of a church that can be reached on a path or a field path. The walls are the remnants of the portal and the monumental church of St. Rochus from the 13th century, made in the decadent Romanesque style and changed into the late gothic style. It seems that it was changed by the Franciscans from the monastery that used to be somewhat more to the North, near the village built in 1415. The church of St. Rochus is a monastery church that at the time was built far from the business complex of the monastery. Around the church, there was a cemetery that the people of Rokovci used until the 18th century. After moving Rokovci from the old place under the Kunjevci forest, the people of Rokovci first built a wooden church in the new village, and then in 1814 the today's church of St. Rochus, their patron saint.

Our Lady of Lourdes in Prkovci

Beneath the filial church in Prkovci, in an artificially built cave, there is the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, a votive offering of Kata Filakovac, who in the distant 1908 brought it from her pilgrimage in Lourdes. A year later, the then bishop permitted that a cave be built and the works were completed on 14 August 1910.

Since then, on 15 August, on the holiday of the Assumption of Mary and on 8 September, on the holiday of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, worshippers from all over Srijem and Slavonia gather; they also frequently come on regular days in order to pray to Our Lady in peace and quiet. Thus, a small village near Vinkovci, with a little over 600 inhabitants, became a famous Slavonian pilgrimage site. In November, St. Martin the Bishop is celebrated in Prkovci, to whom the filial church is consecrated.

Monastery and Shrine of St. Anthony of Padua in Vinkovci

No saint is as much loved in the area as St. Anthony. On the holiday of the saint, thousands of worshippers from the entire Slavonia gather in the church of St. Anthony of Padua in Vinkovci. Even though the 13th of June is celebrated in all of Croatia, visiting the monastery and the shrine of St. Anthony of Padua in the Vinkovci Meraja is a unique event. Since the time when the Franciscans came to Vinkovci in 1938, the chapel in their monastery was too tight for all those who prayed to St. Anthony.

With time, the old church in the vicinity of the monastery was renovated in which today, behind the main altar, there is a large relief made of gilded terracotta with the figure of the saint, the patron saint of children, preachers, expecting mothers, the oppressed, the poor, travellers and harvest.

Theme Route: In the Footsteps of St. Martin

Step by step, the footstep of a bare foot leads to the parish church in Svinjarevci, completely renovated after the Homeland War with a new tower and belfry. There is so much symbolism in the footstep with the stylised half of the robe. It shows the way, invites to sharing and solidarity, just like St. Martin the Bishop did. This is his footstep and Michel Audiard, a French sculptor, told the story on the life of the first saint who was not a martyr yet still has his holiday and who travelled through most of Europe on foot.

St. Martin was a young officer when, on his way into the military camp to the North of Paris, he gave a half of his robe to a freezing pauper that he cut off with a sword. After this event, he left the military service, devoted himself to faith, became a monk and then a bishop in the French Tours, always close to the poor.

His footsteps mark the cultural and historic route connecting all towns and places with churches, cathedrals and chapels consecrated to St. Martin. More than 200 of them have been installed in Europe, eighteen in Croatia, the most Eastern one being the one in the parish church of St. Martin in Svinjarevci.

This oldest European cultural itinerary with the full name "Saint Martin of Tours, a European, symbol of sharing, joint value", was proclaimed the great cultural itinerary of the Council of Europe in 2005.

That year, in the place where he was a bishop, the European Cultural Centre of St. Martin of Tours was founded, after which ten more such national cultural centres were established, among which is also the one in Croatia.

An Inseparable Part of Life

Since the times when St. Polion, a lector of the Christian church in Cibalae, the Roman Vinkovci, was burned in the 4th century, at the place of his martyr death a church complex was raised and pilgrimages have become an integral part of the life of the people of Srijem and Slavonia. In the Middle Ages, pilgrimages were made to the famous places such as the Christ sepulchre in Jerusalem or the Way of St. James in Spain. They would bring saint medals from their spiritual journey and, since at the time most of them were from the Italian towns of Rome and Loreto, it seems that those were their favourite shrines.

The sacral inventory of families in this area has been preserved for generations. In particular, the homes in smaller towns and villages are decorated by holy pictures, crucifixes and holy statuettes, while parts of the costumes, woven handkerchiefs - cloths, bed covers, pillows, cushions and napkins, often have sacral motives, content or messages. During the Corpus Christi processions, at Brašančevo, when the wheat is turned into flour, the figurines and crucifixes are placed on the front family home fences where the procession passes, but also in the provisional chapels, the so-called ‘sevnice’ or ‘sivnice’, made from branches, twigs and flowers. Such chapels are built on all the four sides of the town and are demolished after the holiday.

Those permanent small votive sacral monuments - chapels, chapels with statues of saints or only crucifixes, scattered in the fields, can be found at the town exits, at crossroads, etc. It was always believed that they protect the towns from all the troubles, bad weather and disease. The old monuments are renovated and new ones are built. Generations are changing, while faith remains an inseparable part of life of the people of Srijem and Slavonia.

Saints from the territory of the Vukovar-Srijem County

Saint Eusebius, Bishop and Martyr

According to the records from the trial of St. Polion, a bishop of Cibalae, the Roman Vinkovci, he was executed on 28 April of probably 258. That was a time of bloody persecution of Christians, when bishops, under the threat of death penalty, had to recognise the state deities of the Roman Empire. Deprived of freedom and declared guilty because a Christian and bishop of the worshippers of Christ, he was sentenced to death and died as a martyr. This Polion's record is the only material trace on the life of St. Eusebius. "We celebrate the memory of these two heroes with joy and pray to the Almighty to make us stakeholders of their merits", the Polion documents say about. This is how it has remained in Vinkovci until today. The largest parish church in Vinkovci bears the name of the two of them and celebrates them on 29 May.

Saint Polion, Lector and Martyr

"Do what is ordered to you; I will follow the teachings of my teachers and joyously accept the torture awaiting me", Polion said to the Roman prefect Probo who sentenced him to a horrifying death by burning at the stake. The sentence was executed immediately, a mile away from Cibalae, a town in which the young Polion worked as a lector or reader. The destiny so wanted that this was on 28 April, the same date when bishop Eusebius was executed thirty years later.

This was between 284 and 305, at the time of the rule of the emperors Diocletian and Maximilian, the fiercest persecutors of Christians. As soon as on 28 April the perfect Probo, manager of a large Roman province, came to Cibalae, he detained all Christians who did not want to recognise the Roman gods and implemented the imperial command that same day.

Saint Bono, Priest and Martyr

Known as the patron saint of children, St. Bono was the first Roman soldier and persecutor of Christians. after meeting Pope Stephen I, he converted to Christianity and became a priest. As a worshipper of the Christian God, he was thrown into the dungeon and died a death of a martyr in Rome on 1 August 260. In the captivity, he encouraged and consoled Christians, and even Pope Stephen I until his last breath. With the approval of Pope Benedict XIV, his relics came to Vukovar on 24 June 1754 on the Drava and the Danube, so that on that date the holiday of St. Bono is celebrated in the town. During the Homeland War, they were moved from the altar of St. Joseph and are kept in the crypt of the old part of the church of Sts. Philip and Jacob until 1995 when they were burned. Hidden in the ruins remains a wrist that is nowadays kept in a silver sarcophagus of the renovated church.

St. John of Capistrano

He was born in 1386 in a noble family of the Italian town of Capistrano. He was a brilliant law student, a town judge and for a while he was even the manager of the town. Within the political upheaval, he was thrown into a dungeon, after which he decided to change his way of life. He was ordained on the holiday of St. Francis in 1415 and became a priest and an excellent preacher to the people only two years later.

He travelled through Spain, Germany, Austria, Czechia, Poland, Hungary and in 1465 he came to Belgrade where, ahead of the battle with the Ottomans, he saw a fiery dart in the sky, which was the crucial moment for the victory of the small Christian army. He died in Ilok that year, on 23 October, and the day is celebrated in his commemoration. The relics of St. John of Capistrano disappeared from Ilok in 1526 and have not been found since.

Fun facts

- The Registry of Cultural Goods of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia lists 50 structures as sacral architectural heritage from the area of the Vukovar-Srijem County.

- The list of the parishes from 1332 to 1337, when the papal legate collected the papal tenth on the territory of today's Vukovar-Srijem County, notes approximately sixty churches.

- The oldest known Christian shrine in Srijem and Slavonia is the archaeological site of Kamenica, where a cemetery and memorial complex were raised in honour of St. Polion in the 4th century.

- In the period from the 16th to 18th century, people from the area made pilgrimages to the shrines of Our Lady in Loreto, St. Anthony in Padua, to Rome, which is witnessed by the findings of the saint medallions in the graves.

- The early Romanesque church on Meraja in Vinkovci with its surface of 33 m2 would fit into most of today's average living rooms.

- When you set out from the church of St. Mary in Bapska along the Way of the Cross towards the miraculous spring, if you try to count the stairs when descending and again when ascending, you will never get the same number.

- The majority of the mediaeval churches on the territory of Srijem and Slavonia are partially built from Roman bricks, in particular in the lower parts. This does not mean that they were made in the antiquity but rather that the term recycling is older than considered today.

- The Franciscan church of St. John of Capistrano in Ilok owes its today's appearance to Herman Bolle, a world renowned architect, who also worked on the Zagreb cathedral.

- The late baroque church of St. Michael Archangel in Lovas is an identical copy of the church built in 1769 and destroyed in the Homeland War.

Religious communities and their churches

Vinkovci:
Babtist Church, *Kralja Mislava 4*
Church of God, *N. Š. Zrinskog 19*
Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia, Church Municipality Vinkovci, *Zagrebačka 23*
Islamic Community of Croatia *(Medlis Islamic community Vinkovci), M. J. Zagorke 9*
Christian Adventist Church, *Zagrebačka 11*
Reformed Christian Church, *V. Nazora 31*
Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia, Eparchy of Osječko Polje and Baranja, Church Municipality of Vinkovci, *Istarska 1*

Vukovar:

Church of St. Nikolai, *Ul. Europske unije 48*
Church of St. Steven of Decani *(Borovo Naselje)*
Chapel of St. Paraskeva on Dobra voda
Dobra voda is on the bank of the Vuka river across Adica
Crkva Krista kralja, *Tri ruže 33, 32230 Vukovar*
Christian Adventist Church, *204. vukovarske brigade 22, 32000 Vukovar*
Baptist Church Vukovar, *204 Vukovarske brigade 74, 32000 Vukovar*
Evangelical Pentecostal Church. *Trg Drvena pijaca 2, 32000 Vukovar*

Ilok:
Evangelical Church in the Rep. of Croatia, Church Municipality Ilok
Trg Adama Vereša 1

Gunja:
Mosque, *Maka Dizdara 29*

Soljani
Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia,
Church Municipality Soljani
Vladimira Nazora 4

Grkokatoličke župe:

Church of Christ the King
Tri ruže 33, Vukovar

Elevation of the Holy Cross
Kralja Zvonimira 86, Vinkovci

Saint Josaphat the Martyr
Vladimira Nazora 12, Rajevo Selo

Cover of the Blessed Virgin
Bana Josipa Jelačića 4, Petrovci

Birth of the Blessed Virgin
Rusinska 1, Mikluševci

Decapitation of St. John the Baptist
Orolička 13, Berak

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Syrmia & Slavonia

TOURIST BOARD OF THE VUKOVAR-SYRMIA COUNTY

Vukovar

CITY OF VUKOVAR TOURIST BOARD

Vinkovci

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Ilok

CITY OF ILOK TOURIST BOARD

Županja

CITY OF ŽUPANJA TOURIST BOARD

Nijemci

MUNICIPALITY OF NIJEMCI TOURIST BOARD

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Laced with gold

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