

EXPLORE worldwide

Dossier Amended Jan 2003

Please note: The Local Payment must be paid only in USD cash.

Romania

Village Folklore & Danube Delta

Amended 27 Jan 2003. Valid from 01 Jan 2003 to 31 Dec 2003

CONNECTING TRAVEL FROM LONDON

11 days/10 nights Tour including Connecting Group Flights London-Bucharest-London

Depart Thursday from London Heathrow Airport to join tour in Bucharest (day 1 of Land Only itinerary).

Return Sunday from Bucharest (day 11 of itinerary) and arrive London Heathrow the same day.

JOINING TOUR ABROAD

11 days/10 nights Land Only Bucharest back to Bucharest

Join Bucharest on Thursday (day 1)
End Bucharest on Sunday (day 11)

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point in Bucharest. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for name and address of hotel and time of rendezvous with tour leader.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this tour, we particularly mention:

- * **BUCHAREST** City tour including the Village Museum
- * **TRANSYLVANIA** Visit Bran Castle and walk in Alps around Sinaia
- * **BRASOV** Walking tour of medieval Old Brasov
- * **MARAMURES** Remote area with traditional villages, exploring on foot and by bus
- * **BUCOVINA** Visit the monasteries of Moldovita, Sucevita and Putna
- * **BORSA** Steam train and walking through the forested Vaser valley
- * **DANUBE DELTA** 2 night cruise in this famous birdwatchers' paradise – explore the wildlife sanctuary by boat and on foot

Ruggedly beautiful Romania in the very heart of Central Europe, offers the interested traveller a romantic glimpse of a traditional way of life. Our trip opens up several enchanting prospects for exploration. Heading north from Bucharest to the mountains and medieval towns of Transylvania and then on to the villages of Maramures, we find friendly people, proud of their customs and folklore, with a timeless rural way of life. In Bucovina we wander through meadows and valleys, stopping to admire the great medieval monasteries with their brilliant frescoes. Finally we cruise through the myriad channels of the Danube Delta, one of the world's greatest wildlife sanctuaries, where rare birds come from afar to take advantage of the abundant food and warm, sunny summers. Due to the use of our ponton on the Delta an ability to swim is recommended.

Walking Grades and Fitness:

Grading is a somewhat difficult topic as much depends on the individuals own perception of his or her abilities. The following is intended as a general guide to our walking grades. This is rated **Grade A/B**.

Grade A walks (Easy): tend to be short day walks and rambles at low altitudes which are suitable for people of all ages. They can be enjoyed by anyone who leads a reasonably active life and no special preparation is required. Many of the walks in this category are optional.

Grade B walks (Moderate): will usually involve some longer walks (4-6 hours/day) at low altitudes (below 3000m). Some previous hill walking experience would be beneficial but these walks should be within the capabilities of those who lead a normal active life. Grade B walking tours may contain some optional strenuous days, and in order to get the best out of the trip we would advise that you tone up your fitness before you join.

LAND ONLY ITINERARY

Note: Although it is our intention to follow the itinerary as printed, tours in Romania may be subject to change, and transportation and night stops may vary. Earlier departures in the year (eg March/April) may be subject to snowfall and possible changes in the route/walks in the north.

Day 1. Thursday. Join tour Bucharest

Arrive Bucharest and check into hotel.
Overnight hotel and breakfast. H+.

Day 2. In Bucharest and drive to Sinaia

This morning we make a tour of Romania's capital, a remarkable blend of turn of the century elegance and communist excess. Situated on the Danube plain and set amid a series of lakes and spacious gardens, remnants of more gracious days still exist to charm the visitor. We visit many of the older parts of the city to see some of the buildings that earned the city the reputation as the 'Paris of Eastern Europe'. We also make a visit to the fascinating Village Museum which has assembled wooden churches, windmills and peasant dwellings from different regions of the country. After the city tour we drive to Sinaia, known as the 'Pearl of the Carpathians because of its stunning scenery and royal castles. Time allowing, you may wish to visit Pelisor Palace (optional), largely the creation of Queen Marie of Romania, and a fine exhibition of an Art Deco and Art Nouveau interior. Of the 6,000 or so bears in Romania, many inhabit this wild corner of Transylvania. **Overnight hotel and breakfast. H+.**

Day 3. Drive to Brasov then overnight train to Sighetiu Marmatiei

This morning we have the chance to take a short walk in the Bucegi mountains around Sinaia where the forests of the beautiful Prahova valley are now protected as a nature reserve. Next we visit the castle at Bran. The truth behind 'Dracula's Castle' is even more fascinating than its myths! Earlier this century it was the home of the remarkable British born Queen Marie of Romania, grand daughter of Queen Victoria. Vlad the Impaler, the heroic 15th century ruler of Wallachia never lived here and there is no connection with the excellent novel by Bram Stoker – who never came near Transylvania. Perched on a crag in a valley between two high mountain ranges, it controlled an international trade route, but is now a rural back-water. Exploring the village, the castle and the museums, gives us a

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chance to unravel myth from fact. We continue to the medieval city of Brasov. The old town still has its medieval walls, town hall and several churches dating from the 14th through to the 18th century. There are also the ruins of an old citadel. Brasov is one of the most historic cities of Transylvania, and we spend the rest of the day exploring. The town is a gem of old buildings, cobbled streets and local atmosphere, all clustered within the medieval fortifications and overlooked by a magnificent 15th century Gothic cathedral. Founded by German settlers to protect the routes that made their way up to the high passes over the high Carpathians, Brasov is an architectural delight. This evening we board the overnight train to Sighetiu Marmatiei. **Overnight train with sleeping berths and breakfast.**

Day 4. Arrive Sighetiu Marmatiei and drive to Borsa

Leaving Sighetiu Marmatiei by bus this morning, we make our way through high forested hills and fertile valleys dotted with orchards and meadows. This is the heart of Maramures county, the most traditional region of Romania and an enchanting area to explore. Villages are long and narrow, with houses fronting on to a main street (many of which are unpaved and where cows, chickens and pigs amble at leisure), with a small holding lying immediately behind. Ancient customs and folklore are still prominent: farm gateways are intricately carved with traditional designs and outdoor festivals with music and dancing are a regular event. The old wooden churches with slim spires are packed every Sunday – the men dressed in black trousers and a white sheepskin jerkin, and the women in a floral skirt, apron, thick black jerkin and headscarf. We visit the village of Sapinta, to see the 'Merry Cemetery', where each grave has a humorous caricature and short poem about the deceased. Later we visit the church at Bogdan Voda then continue our drive to Borsa, a small winter ski resort in the Rodna mountains. **2 nights hotel with all meals. H+.**

Day 5. Train through Vaser valley and hike to Moisei

There are few settlements in Europe which cannot be reached by road, and remain so untouched that bears still roam freely in the forests. Today we enter such a region as we take the narrow gauge railway from Viseu de Sus up the Vaser valley to Novats. This forestry railway is used to transport loggers up towards the Ukrainian border and bring logs back down.

We chug slowly through the valley, passing huge expanses of beech forest, which gurgle to the sound of the fast mountain rivers dashing through them. We then walk up a forested valley along lonely trails, enjoying the stillness and freshness of the forest. After a stiff climb of over 600m, we reach a ridge where there are spectacular views across the Viseu valley. We descend through hay meadows and scattered copses to Moisei, where we meet our bus (5-6 hours walk) and return to Borsa.

Day 6. Walk in Rodna mountains; drive to Sucevita via Moldovita

Leaving Borsa by chairlift ride, we walk along the top of a ridge, stopping at a shepherd's hut where we may be invited to sample some fresh sheep's cheese, washed down with tuica, the fiery local plum brandy. After an hour or two of walking (initially steeply up onto a mountain ridge) we meet our bus and drive east across the Carpathians to Moldavia and the northern region of Bucovina. Here we discover the remarkable medieval monasteries, founded during the reign of Prince Stephen the Great (1457-1504). Whilst most Romanian churches have frescoes inside, what makes these so astonishing are the fantastic frescoes on the exterior walls. These vivid Biblical images were used to educate the medieval population in an exciting graphic fashion. The exact composition of the paint, which has shown such amazing durability, is still unknown. Painted during the 16th century, the frescoes are a fusion of formal Byzantine style, with colourful folk art. The monasteries are now UNESCO World Heritage sites, but also house thriving religious communities of nuns and monks. We stop at Moldovita, which nestles beneath the forests of the Obcina Mare ridge. Among the most interesting scenes pictured here are the 'Seige of Constantinople' and the 'Last Judgement'. We drive up to the Ciurimira Pass, and continue through the forest to our accommodation in a clearing near Sucevita. **Overnight basic alpine style huts with breakfast and dinner. L+.**

Day 7. Walk to Putna and overnight train to Bucharest

We include a visit to Sucevita monastery, the largest of the monasteries in the Bucovina region, with massive towers and stone walls protecting the inner buildings, which are decorated with portraits of historical legends and biblical scenes. There is an excellent small museum showing some of the treasures of the monastery, the most valuable items being seventeenth century embroideries, icons and gold work. Leaving Sucevita we walk through the romantic countryside along paths and old cart tracks, through the lovely valley north of Sucevita. First we take a trail through the beech woods to emerge in a grassy valley dotted with the houses that form the rambling village of Putna, close to the Ukrainian border. The walk is moderately easy and we have plenty of time to complete it (6 hours). Putna monastery (founded in 1466) is the oldest in Moldavia, and inside is the tomb of Stephen the Great. We meet our vehicle and drive to Suceava, then take the overnight train to Bucharest. **Overnight train with sleeping berths and picnic lunch.**

Day 8. Drive to and cruise in Danube Delta

After our arrival in Bucharest we continue south by road to the ancient port of Tulcea, the so-called 'Gateway to the Delta'. From here we board our ponton – a barge-style vessel resembling a large house boat that will serve as both our transport and our floating

accommodation while in the delta. Though simple, it has a sun-deck and twin-berth cabins on the lower deck and provides an innovative and flexible way of seeing the abundant birdlife of the delta. From this base we can reach the smaller waterways and reedy channels and visit the tranquil and beautiful lakes hidden in the backwaters. **2 nights aboard ponton with dinner, breakfast and 1 lunch.**

Day 9. On the Danube Delta

The Danube Delta – over 4,000 square kilometres in all – is one of the great glories of Europe. It is a premier wildlife sanctuary and paradise for birdwatchers and photographers alike. We spend the day aboard the ponton, with the opportunity of closer views of the many species which inhabit the delta. Apart from its richness in wildlife, the Delta is simply a beautiful place to relax aboard our vessel. We make our way through a maze of channels fringed by vast reed beds and ancient willow trees. Whilst different birds are seen depending on the month of visiting, most people will see the spectacular White Pelican. Vast quantities of birds congregate here, including grebes, falcons, egrets, swans and cormorants. The marshy conditions make life difficult for the birds' terrestrial predators, making the delta an even more attractive haven and breeding ground. Much of all this can be enjoyed from the deck of our ponton. We will also take time to visit a village in the Delta. These are some of the most remote settlements in Europe, far away from our roads.

Day 10. Cruise to Tulcea; drive to Bucharest

We spend the morning sailing back to Tulcea, and after lunch (included) drive back to Bucharest, arriving late in the afternoon. **Overnight hotel with lunch and breakfast. H+.**

Day 11. Sunday. Tour ends Bucharest

PERSONAL EXPENSES

You'll also need some extra money to cover meals not included in the tour price, other sightseeing, **airport taxes**, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry. **Important Note:** We strongly recommend you bring your money in mixed denomination **US\$ cash or £Sterling cash** as it is not possible to exchange travellers cheques on the tour. **Please note that the exchange rates at the airport on arrival are particularly low. Also old style £10 and £20 notes are not accepted.**

Meal Plan

Local Food and Drink: Meals other than those included in the itinerary are paid for separately by the traveller. You'll need some spending money for drinks and should calculate for buying 5 evening meals, 4 lunches and 1 breakfast. Some examples of comparative costs are given below:

	UK	Romania
Coffee	£0.70	£0.50
Tea	0.70	0.25
Soft Drink	0.80	0.50
Bottle of Water	0.70	0.60
Bottle of Wine	7.00	3.70
Bottle of Beer	1.00	1.00
2 Course Meal*	7.50	5.00
3 Course Meal**	15.00	10.00

*Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant

**Typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant

Local Payment

Payable in **US Dollars cash** only to your tour leader at the start of the tour.

Tipping: In this area, tipping is a recognised part of life. Some local staff will still look to members of the group for personal recognition. Accordingly, you should allow £10 for tipping of the driver and the boat crew.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Seasonal Climate

Romania's climate is continental. Temperatures vary, being strongly influenced by the physical features of the Carpathians. The spring and summer months are the best season for sightseeing – July and August are the hottest months. September trips are likely to be a little cooler. Temperatures drop at night and walks in the mountains can be cold at any time of year. Early summer departures are best for botanists. Snowfall may occur on earlier departures in Spring.

Visa Requirements

An entry visa is not required by citizens of EU countries. All other nationalities must obtain a visa before they travel and should consult their travel agent or relevant consular office.

Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory, although we recommend vaccination against Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid and Polio.

Special Note: Visa and Vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few specific recommendations regarding your tour.

Luggage: One main piece of baggage and a daysack for carrying personal items during the day walks. Total allowance: **44lbs/20kgs**. Remember you are expected to handle your own luggage – so don't overload yourself.

Clothing: Pack essentially for '**Hot Conditions**', ie. summer clothing, although medium weights are needed for autumn. You should bring a warm fleece or sweater throughout the season as temperatures are lower in the mountains. – particularly at night. Rainwear may also be needed anytime, so is essential.

Footwear: Comfortable walking boots are essential and trainers or sandals.

Equipment: Bring a water bottle, insect repellent, sunscreen, a sunhat and a torch. Binoculars are useful for the Delta. Only small face towels are provided in the hotels, so if you prefer a larger bath towel it is advised that you take your own.

EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS : The following key is intended as a guide to the type of accommodation listed for each night stop. We stress that standards may vary and reserve the right to make changes as necessary without warning.

Hotels / Pensions / Lodges

H+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, normally with private facilities. Local grading 2/3/4 star.

H : Usually twin bedded rooms, sometimes 3-4 bedded rooms may have to be used. Normally with shared facilities. Local grading 1/2/3 star.

Local Style Accommodation

L+ : Usually twin bedded rooms, may be some 3-4 bedded. Normally shared facilities.

L : Could be twin bedded but more usually multiple share or dorm style sleeping arrangements. Normally shared facilities.

Camping – under canvas or bivouac

C+ : Designated campsite, usually with fixed WC/ shower. Possibly with fixed pre-erected tents.

C : Natural/Rough/Wild/Bush Camp. Limited or no facilities. Temporary WC. Usually need to pitch own tents.

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