

## ROMANIA & MOLDOVA

featuring Bucharest, Transylvania & Gagauzia

**13 days**

Created on: 28 Oct, 2024

### Day 1 Arrival in Bucharest

Welcome to Bucharest, Romania's vibrant capital, a city where history and modernity intertwine.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

### Day 2 Bucharest City Tour

Bucharest, the capital of Romania, often referred to as "Little Paris," is a city rich in history, culture, and vibrant life, captivating that combines historical charm with a vibrant modern atmosphere. The city is where the cultures of Western and Eastern Europe blend beautifully. Beyond this exotic mix, one can undoubtedly feel the inevitable influence of the communist regime.

Our Bucharest tour begins with the most distinctive building in the city, dating from the communist period, the Palace Parliament.\* Also known as the House of the People, the impressive edifice entered the Guinness World Records as the second largest building in the world after the Pentagon. Join a guided tour to explore its opulent interiors, featuring grand ballrooms, intricate chandeliers, and lavish decor. As you walk through the halls, your guide will share fascinating insights into the building's controversial history and its role in Romania's political landscape.

After our visit we continue to Revolution Square, one of Bucharest's most significant historical and cultural landmarks. This vibrant square is not only a central hub of activity but also a poignant reminder of Romania's tumultuous past, particularly its struggle for freedom during the 1989 revolution. A visit to this square offers a unique blend of history, architecture, and public life, making it a must-see destination for any traveller.

Then head to the Old Town, a charming neighbourhood with cobbled streets, colourful buildings and a lively atmosphere, a vibrant and historically rich area that encapsulates the essence of Bucharest. Whether you're exploring the historic sites, indulging in delicious cuisine, or soaking in the local culture, Old Town provides a captivating glimpse into the heart of Romania's capital. A visit here is not just a journey through the past; it's an invitation to experience the dynamic spirit of Bucharest today. Enjoy your exploration of this enchanting part of the city! Wander through the narrow alleys, admire the architectural details and enjoy the historical charm of the city.

The balance of the day is free for independent exploration.

\* Please note that the Palace of Parliament is sometimes closed for private events, sometimes without notice. In the improbable event that we cannot visit, we will include the Cotroceni Palace instead.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 3 Bucharest - Cozia Monastery - Sibiel - Sibiu

Today we depart the capital and travel by road to the picturesque landscape of the Calimanesti Valley and Cozia Monastery, a serene and historic Romanian Orthodox institution. Founded in 1388 by Mircea the Elder, the monastery is renowned for its beautiful architecture, rich history, and spiritual significance. As we approach Cozia Monastery, we are greeted by its imposing exterior, adorned with intricate carvings and frescoes. The monastery's main church, the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, is a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, featuring a domed roof, ornate columns, and vibrant murals depicting religious scenes.

We continue to Sibiu (Hermannstadt in German), the most important of the 12th century Saxon settlements in Transylvania and its industrious emigres, primarily from the Rhineland, the Moselle Valley, Flanders and Saxony. Here they erected walls for protection, the first of which was destroyed by invaders not long after its construction, but remains of a 15th century brick wall still stand. Because of the

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bloodshed at its walls, the Turks, after an unsuccessful onslaught, called Sibiu the "Red City." Built into the walls are defense towers that were assigned to particular guilds and medieval houses.

Our evening meal takes place in a local farmhouse where traditional Romanian dinner awaits -- a feast for the senses that showcases the rich flavours and heritage of this beautiful region.

Overnight in Sibiu.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### **Day 4 Sibiu - Biertan - Medias**

This morning we have a tour of Sibiu, a charming city nestled in the heart of Transylvania, offering a delightful blend of medieval architecture, vibrant culture, and picturesque landscapes. We begin our day by exploring the Little Square, a quaint cobblestone square lined with colourful houses and elegant buildings. Wander through the narrow streets, admire the intricate details of the facades, and soak up the charming atmosphere.

We make our way to the Big Square, the city's main public space, admiring the stunning Gothic architecture of the Council Tower and the Evangelical Cathedral. One of Sibiu's most iconic landmarks is the Bridge of Lies, a pedestrian bridge adorned with colourful figures. According to local legend, if a couple kisses on the bridge, their love will last forever.

Our next stop today is the fortified church of Biertan, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its impressive fortifications and beautiful interior. We explore the church's fortified walls, admire the intricate frescoes, and learn about its history.

We overnight in nearby Medias, known for its well-preserved medieval architecture. Located on the Transylvanian Plateau, the city is famous for its fortified walls, narrow cobbled streets, and Gothic churches.

Overnight in Medias.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### **Day 5 Medias - Sighisoara - Viscri - Predeal**

This morning we continue our tour to Sighisoara, a medieval gem renowned for its well-preserved citadel and association with the legendary Vlad the Impaler. Sighisoara has a long tradition in craftsmanship and trade and its fortifications and defense towers still witness for guilds as those of tinsmiths, butchers, hatters, and blacksmiths. Narrow winding streets, houses with thick walls and huge portals painted in vivid colours, towers, and old churches (13th-16th centuries) enhance the charm of the place.

Here we have a city tour, exploring its narrow cobbled streets, colourful houses, and fortified citadel. We visit the Birthplace of Vlad the Impaler Museum, where we can learn about the life and times of the infamous historical figure. Explore the museum's exhibits, see personal belongings, and gain insights into the Vlad the Impaler legend.

We ascend the Hill Church, a fortified church perched atop a hill overlooking the city. Here we enjoy panoramic views of Sighisoara and the surrounding countryside while exploring the church's interior and learning about its history.

After our morning tour, we head to Viscri, a charming Saxon village known for its well-preserved medieval architecture. Visit the property of Charles of Viscri, the former king of Romania. Explore the charming village, admire the traditional Saxon houses, and learn about the village's history and culture.

We arrive in nearby Predeal this afternoon for a three-night stay. This laid-back town is a popular ski resort nestled in the Carpathian Mountains, known for the scenic beauty of the surrounding landscape.

Overnight Predeal.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 6 Predeal: Zarnesti & Bran Castle

This day offers a unique combination of wildlife encounters, historical exploration, and breathtaking scenery. It's a perfect way to experience the beauty and diversity of Romania's Transylvania region.

We begin our day with a visit to the Zarnesti Bear Reserve, a sanctuary for rescued bears. Here we can witness these majestic creatures in their natural habitat, roaming freely through the forested area. Observe their playful behaviour, learn about their conservation efforts, and perhaps even catch a glimpse of a bear cub.

After our visit to the bear reserve, we continue our journey to Bran Castle, also known as Dracula's Castle. This iconic fortress is perched atop a hill overlooking the Bran Valley. We explore the castle's interior, learn about its history, and discover the legends associated with it.

Our final stop for the day is the Rasnov Fortress, a medieval citadel located just a short distance from Bran Castle. Explore the fortress's fortifications, visit the museum inside, and enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

Overnight Predeal.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 7 Predeal: Sinaia - Slanic Prahova - Maneciu & Ungereni

This day trip from Predeal offers a satisfying blend of historical, cultural, and natural attractions.

Peles Castle, a magnificent architectural wonder, is situated in the picturesque town of Sinaia. We explore its opulent interior, adorned with exquisite furnishings, tapestries, and art. Learn about the history of the castle and its royal residents.

After our visit to Peles Castle, we head to Slanic Prahova, a charming town known for its salt mines. We descend into the underground world of the salt mines, marvel at the intricate salt formations, and learn about the history of salt mining in the region.

On our way back to Transylvania, we make a stop at Maneciu Ungureni, a picturesque village known for its wooden churches. We explore the Unification Church, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and admire its unique architecture and intricate wood carvings.

Overnight Predeal.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 8 Predeal - Brasov - Prejmer - Cheile Bicuzului - Piatra Neamt

This morning we check-out and continue our journey to Brasov, a vibrant city nestled in the Carpathian Mountains offering a delightful blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. We begin our day with a city tour, exploring its charming streets, medieval architecture, and bustling atmosphere.

We visit the Black Church, one of the largest Gothic churches in Eastern Europe, renowned for its impressive interior and historical significance. Explore the church's interior, admire the intricate details of the frescoes, and learn about its history.

We continue with a visit to the Old Town Hall, a beautiful Gothic building that once served as the city's administrative centre. We explore the building's interior and enjoy panoramic views of the city from the tower.

After our city tour, we head to Prejmer, a charming Saxon village known for its fortified church. Explore the church's imposing fortifications, learn about its history, and admire the intricate details of the interior.

Later this afternoon, we'll embark on a short hike through the Cheile Bicuzului gorge, one of the most spectacular geological formations in Romania, a true paradise for nature and adventure lovers. Located in the northeastern part of the country, in the Hasmas Mountains, these gorges were sculpted by the Bicz River over millennia, resulting in an impressive landscape with steep cliffs and virgin forests. We'll also see the Red Lake, a stunning natural phenomenon known for its vibrant red-brown colour, which is caused by the high iron content in the water. The lake is surrounded by towering limestone cliffs and lush green forests, creating a breathtaking landscape.

Overnight Piatra Neamt.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 9 Piatra Neamt - Iasi, Romania - Chisinau, Moldova

We begin our day in Iasi, a historic city known as the "Cultural Capital of Romania." We'll have a city tour exploring its charming streets, elegant architecture, and vibrant atmosphere.

We visit the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iasi, a magnificent Romanian Orthodox cathedral renowned for its impressive architecture and intricate details. Admire the cathedral's exterior, explore the interior, and learn about its history and religious significance.

We continue to the Palace of Culture, a grand building that once served as the residence of the Romanian royal family. Here we can explore the palace's opulent interior and admire its ornate decorations.

After exploring Iasi, we cross the border into the Republic of Moldova and head to Chisinau (2-3 hours depending on the border), the capital city and our base for the next four nights.\*

Although not well-known, Moldova offers some attractions that would surprise even the most seasoned traveller. Little Moldova has a landscape covered with vineyards, pristine forests and lakes, medieval monasteries and fortresses, wine caves, a rich history, and eight ethnic nationalities. A chronicler once called Moldova "a country in the way of all disasters." Indeed the territory of Moldova is located on the boundary of Eastern and Western Europe and has been populated from ancient times.

\* We have found (especially since the pandemic) that the dubious quality of accommodation suitable for international groups outside of the capital preclude over-nighting at any of the locations below, at least until the situation improves.

IF YOU'RE WONDERING why we don't include Transnistria in our program, the situation with regard to security and tensions with Moldova and Russia are so changeable that it is difficult for us to make firm plans for a group tour up to two years in advance. Should the situation stabilize such that we can confidently blend it into our program without compromising on safety and convenience, this itinerary will be reviewed. One option is to extend your trip by a day and organize a day trip should conditions allow. We don't have an itinerary or pricing off-the-shelf, but our partners at destination may be able to advise/assist.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 10 Chisinau: City Tour & Cricova Winery

We begin our day in Chisinau exploring its bustling city centre.

We visit the Arc de Triomphe, a triumphal arch commemorating the Romanian soldiers who fought in World War I. We continue with a visit to the National Museum of History and Ethnography, where we can delve into Moldova's rich history and explore the museum's exhibits showcasing archaeological finds, traditional crafts, and historical documents.

This afternoon we visit Cricova Winery, which is like stepping into a subterranean fairytale. This vast underground complex, one of the largest in the world, is a treasure trove of history, culture, and, of course, exquisite wines. The journey begins with a descent into a labyrinth of tunnels carved into limestone. As you venture deeper, the walls are adorned with intricate carvings and murals, depicting scenes of Moldovan history and folklore. Cricova is more than just a winery; it's an underground city. There are tasting rooms, storage cellars, and even a chapel. The "Presidential Hall" is particularly impressive, a vast chamber once used for receptions and celebrations.

A knowledgeable guide will lead us through a selection of Moldovan wines, from crisp whites to rich reds. You'll learn about the unique grape varieties and the winemaking process. The wines are paired with local cheeses and charcuterie, enhancing the flavours.

Overnight in Chisinau.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 11 Chisinau: Orheiul Vechi

This morning we depart to for Orheiul Vechi, a captivating archaeological complex that offers a glimpse into Moldova's rich history.

This open-air museum showcases the remnants of an ancient Moldavian fortress city, dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries. Wander through the ruins of the ancient fortress, imagining the bustling life of its past inhabitants; discover the underground shelters, where people sought refuge and stored supplies. We'll marvel at the unique cave monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, carved high above the Reut River.

Our excursion also delves into the region's early history by exploring the remnants of the Geto-Dacian fortress. This provides insights into the lives of the Geto-Dacian people who once inhabited the area and the traces of ancient civilizations, including the Dacians, who are believed to be related to the present-day Moldovans.

Overnight in Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 12 Chisinau: Gagauzia & Comrat

We have an early start for our drive to Gagauzia, a journey of approximately 2-3 hours.

Gagauzia, an autonomous region within Moldova, is home to a unique ethnic group with a distinct culture and history. The Gagauz people, numbering around 200,000 worldwide, have a fascinating blend of Turkic, Slavic, and Greek influences. The Gagauz language is a Turkic language closely related to Turkish and Azerbaijani. It is spoken primarily by the Gagauz people in Moldova and Bulgaria.

The majority of Gagauz are Eastern Orthodox Christians, which is a significant aspect of their cultural identity. Gagauz culture is rich in traditions, including folk dances, music, and crafts. They have preserved many of their traditional customs and practices. The Gagauz people have maintained a strong sense of cultural identity and have played a significant role in the history of Moldova. Their unique culture and traditions offer a fascinating glimpse into the diverse ethnic landscape of the region.

We arrive in Comrat, the capital of Gagauzia, and explore the Gagauz Culture Museum in Beshalma. Learn about the traditions, customs, and way of life of the Gagauz people. We'll explore the Provincial History Museum in Comrat, where we can learn about Gagauzia's history, culture, and traditions. Discover the region's archaeological finds, folk art, and historical documents. We visit the country residence of Manuk Bey in Hincesti, a 17th-century building that reflects its Armenian origins.

After our tour, we indulge in a wine tasting experience at the renowned Kara-Gani Winery, a picturesque family-owned winery nestled in the southern region of Moldova. Surrounded by rolling vineyards and breathtaking landscapes, this charming winery offers a delightful experience for wine enthusiasts and travellers alike.

The winery is known for its high-quality wines, produced using traditional Moldovan methods and modern techniques. Their range includes a variety of red, white, and rosé wines, each with its own unique flavour profile.

As the day draws to a close, we make our way back to Chisinau in time for our farewell dinner and overnight.

Overnight Chisinau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 13 Departure

Departure from Chisinau.

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SAFE TRAVELS!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast