

A Cultural Walking Tour of rural Romania ~ The Painted Monasteries, Transylvania & the Danube Delta

<http://www.kudutravel.com/tours/romania-walking-tour>

31 May –10 June 2017

The mountains of Transylvania and the deep forests which surround the Orthodox painted monasteries very largely escaped the ravages of the Ceausescu era. Remote and tranquil, these areas offer travellers an experience now very rare in western Europe - exploring on foot a landscape barely changed since the Middle Ages. In early summer the mountain meadows are filled with wildflowers (including swathes of orchids) and horses and carts are carrying hay from first light.

Based in comfortable rural hotels and a floating boat hotel, we see the outstanding mediaeval Byzantine art of the Painted Monasteries; sample traditional Romanian dishes (organic by definition) accompanied by wines from the Black Sea; discover the rich birdlife of the Danube delta; and explore the galleries and museums of Bucharest, staying in a 4-star boutique hotel.

HIGHLIGHTS of our Romania walking tour include:

- Visiting the UNESCO listed 'Painted Monasteries', some of the greatest examples of mediaeval Byzantine art
- Stepping back in time - walking in a remarkably unspoilt rural landscape with many wildflowers and horses
- Exploring the Danube delta, Europe's most important wetland reserve, by boat and seeing the rich birdlife
- Discovering the fortified churches of Transylvania and the museums & galleries of cosmopolitan Bucharest

Guests' comments on this trip:

'It was a wonderful holiday, hugely enhanced by the guides and of course the participant company. I think we all had a good time.'

'Of the 26-organised group holidays which we have joined, Romania was close to the top. The walking was at a level we have enjoyed with dedicated walking companies, and the sightseeing/cultural experience was unsurpassed. We enjoyed the food and drink too much - we both gained weight in spite of the exercise! Our guides and driver did their utmost to make the experience memorable and perhaps most importantly we will now regularly include Kudu in our exploration of potential future holidays.'

Itinerary

DAY 1

D included

After an afternoon arrival at Bucharest's Otopeni airport, we drive (3 hrs) north into Transylvania, heading for Brasov where we spend a night in a recently restored hotel in the mediaeval city centre. Dinner features traditional dishes, such as *ciorba*, a thick meat and vegetable soup with sour cream.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

We explore the well restored mediaeval centre of Brasov on foot and visit the Biserica Neagra (Black Church). Surprisingly, it is adorned with a superb collection of Persian carpets, brought back from the east over the centuries by wealthy merchants. After seeing the fortified Saxon churches of Honigberg and Tartlau and the perfectly preserved mediaeval Saxon Citadel of Sighisoara, we continue towards the UNESCO listed Saxon village of Viscri. Our base for 2 nights is a new country inn noted for its excellent regional cooking.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

Our visit to Viscri starts at the 13th century hilltop fortified church. In the traditional village house owned by Prince Charles, we learn about the history of the Transylvanian Szeklers and HRH's patronage of a local preservation organisation. In the afternoon on our country walk, we see the subsistence farming practised locally and look for orchids and butterflies in the wildflower meadows.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

Setting off early for Bucovina in the northeast corner of Romania, we break the journey firstly to walk in the meadows above the dramatic Bicz Gorge, where the 300 m high granite cliffs conceal wallcreepers and Eagle owls, and later at an unusual family-run ethnographic museum. Our 4-star hotel for the next 2 nights is comfortably furnished and we dine in a nearby restaurant well-known for Moldavian specialities such as wild mushroom dishes.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

Today's walk (4 hrs) follows an undulating path through mixed beech and pine forest and links two of the great mediaeval monasteries. We begin with a visit to Sucevita, a classic example of a heavily fortified monastery, where illiterate soldiers and peasants (forbidden to enter the church) were educated by the biblical scenes depicted on the external frescoes. We picnic in a forest glade en route to Putna monastery - founded, according to legend, by King Stefan Cel Mare who fired 3 arrows in the air to mark the respective positions of the holy well, the altar and the bell tower. Our last stop is the UNESCO listed painted monastery in Moldovita. Constructed at a time when Moldavia was under constant threat of Turkish invasion, the frescoes of Moldovita depict a particularly exuberant Liberation of Constantinople.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

A cross country walk this morning takes us up through flower-filled meadows and forests, where small boys are gathering baskets of 'fraises de bois', then over a low col to follow a

ridge and drop down to the village of Humor. The monastery is surrounded with wooden (rather than stone ramparts) and has most impressive interior frescoes. A short drive brings us to Voronet monastery, built by Stefan Cel Mare in gratitude for successfully forcing the Turks back across the Danube. The predominant colour used here is 'Voronet blue', obtained from lapis lazuli, and the Last Judgement fresco which covers the entire western wall is an acknowledged masterpiece of Byzantine art. Heading south (2½ hrs), we stay the night in a small modern hotel with an outdoor pool.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

This morning we head for the delta (3¼ hrs), the most important wetland in Europe, first crossing the Danube by ferry at Galati. In the port of Tulcea, we board our superior grade ponton, a hotel boat with all cabins en-suite, an upper deck housing an air-conditioned dining room and bar and a spacious open viewing deck. As we sail along the main navigable channel, typical delta bird species will immediately put in an appearance – whiskered terns, squacco herons, glossy ibis, white pelicans and pygmy cormorants – it's hard to know where to look first!

DAY 8

B, L, D included

We take to a small boat for the morning, meandering through narrow channels between the reeds and seeing purple and night herons, spoonbills, hobbies and red-footed falcons chasing dragonflies, ferruginous ducks, Caspian gulls and numerous terns. We return to the ponton for lunch (fish, naturally) and in the afternoon, take a stroll ashore through a village inhabited by Russian Old Believers who fled into the delta for safety centuries ago.

DAY 9

B, L, D included

After a final morning sailing through the delta and relaxing in deckchairs on the top deck, we disembark, regain our vehicle and drive to the capital, Bucharest (4.5 hrs). We settle for 2 nights into our 4-star boutique hotel (air-conditioned and centrally located), before strolling to one of the liveliest and oldest areas of the city, rich in monuments, where the merchant's caravanserai were clustered.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

The award-winning Museum of the Romanian Peasant exhibits fine textiles, costumes and pottery and the National Museum, housed in the former royal palace, has a marvellous collection of Romanian mediaeval art and jewellery, as well as a noted European collection (including works by El Greco and Rembrandt). The rest of the afternoon is free to pursue individual interests. Our farewell dinner is in a fine old restaurant specialising in traditional Romanian game dishes, including (optionally) bear and venison.

DAY 11

B included

A morning private transfer to the airport completes our journey.

Activity Level

Standard

5 walking days, 1 to 4 hours daily. Lightweight walking boots with a Vibram-type sole and good ankle support are a good idea, particularly as many paths in the forests and mountains are quite rough. Walking poles/sticks are also very useful.

Temperatures

In late May and early June temperatures are likely to range from 15°C at night to 28°C during the day. Bucharest and the delta are much warmer than the mountains.

Accommodation

- 1 night in Brasov, in a recently restored hotel in the mediaeval city centre
- 2 nights near Viscri, in a new country inn noted for its excellent regional cooking
- 2 nights in a 4-star hotel in Sucevita
- 1 night in a modern hotel near Bacau
- 2 nights in the Dabube Delta, on a superior grade ponton, a hotel boat with all cabins en-suite, an upper deck housing an air-conditioned dining room and bar and a spacious open viewing deck
- 2 nights in Bucharest, in a 4-star boutique hotel

Trip Price

£ 2,390 per person sharing

£ 180 single supplement

£ 400 deposit per person

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable. We shall endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible, but hotels in some countries do have single rooms that are small and less well positioned - in this case the supplement is simply ensuring your privacy.

Price includes

- All accommodation for Days 1 through 11 on a twin shared basis
- All meals with wine (or local spirits as available) at lunches and dinners
- All land transportation as described except during free periods
- All water transportation on the ponton and a small boat as described
- All entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- Gratuities for the driver and hotel and restaurant staff (appreciation for Kudu tour guides is optional)

Price does not include

- International transportation to and from Bucharest
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Photo and video charges at the monasteries
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol other than wine with group meals, free time activities)
- Meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Romanian departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries),

wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from the EU, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to Romania. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassy of Romania.

Residents of countries in the EU can only claim free (emergency) medical treatment in Romania by presenting their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which is issued in the UK by the Department of Health.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Romania, but you may wish to consult your doctor about updating your immunisation against Hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid, or anything else they consider advisable. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk/travellers) and the FCO (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details please see the website, or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 14 guests.