



Rediscover the
meaning of travel

Tour Notes

Best of Bulgaria and Romania

Tour Duration – 25 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●●○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore Sofia, Bulgaria's often overlooked capital
- ✓ Enjoy the stunning frescoes and courtyards of the imposing Rila and Rozhen monasteries
- ✓ Get a sense of the rich cultural heritage left by former civilisations - the Thracians, the Ottomans, Turks and the Romans - over the decades
- ✓ Explore the ancient wine-producing village of Melnik, surrounded by strange sandstone pyramids
- ✓ Revel in Plovdiv, home to a host of Roman, Ottoman and 19th century Bulgarian architectural marvels
- ✓ Discover Sibiu, one of the best-preserved medieval cities in Romania
- ✓ See Bran Castle - tenuously linked to the legend of Dracula
- ✓ Visit Viscri, a delightful village Saxon and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mixture of comfortable tourist class hotels and family-run guest houses, all en-suite
Included Meals: Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
Group Size: Maximum of 12 travellers
Start Point: Sofia, Bulgaria
End Point: Bucharest, Romania
Transport: Sedan car (for a maximum 3 travellers) or Minivan/bus (depending on group size), Sofia to Bucharest – train, car, minivan, or flight
Country Visited: Bulgaria and Romania



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Best of Bulgaria and Romania

Embark on an odyssey through the treasures of Bulgaria and Romania and discover a corner of Europe which remains largely undiscovered.

Our adventure starts in Bulgaria with a tour of the vibrant capital Sofia before leaving for the south of the country, with its rich cultural heritage and dramatic Pirin mountain scenery. We continue to the central region along the Rhodopes mountains, via picturesque villages and narrow gorges to Trigrad where unspoilt nature dominates. Then we spend time in the wonderful city of Plovdiv and continue to the north in the shadow of the Balkan Mountains with its fascinating mix of historical old towns and archaeological treasures, from the ancient Thracian Tomb in Kazanlak, via the world-famous rose valley and back to the capital.

From Sofia the next leg of our journey will take us to the Romanian capital, Bucharest. You will be offered the convenience of taking a flight or if you prefer why not take the 'slow travel' option and over the course of a day travel by train or private vehicle with some interesting stops along the way.

Our tour in Romania goes right to the heart of this captivating country – rather than simply skim over its highlights, we take you not only to important cultural gems such as the medieval towns of Sighisoara and Sibiu in Transylvania but spend time getting to grips with life in the villages, often staying in rural communities as guests of local families, where local culture is at its strongest. We traverse the spectacular Carpathian Mountains, home to bears and wolves, and visit the Danube Delta staying at an isolated settlement deep within its backwaters. Taking in the gorgeous painted monasteries of Bucovina and the Saxon village of Viscri, this trip encompasses the very best that Romania has to offer.

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour. On our Bulgaria tours, we have a combined driver/guide for groups of three or less.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Sofia

Arrive in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, and transfer to the city centre. The rest of the day is at leisure, with no guided activities. If you wish to arrange extra sightseeing or excursions, please get in touch prior to your departure. Overnight Hotel Niky or similar. No meals included today.



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Sofia

Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria since 1879, rich with over 2,000 years of history, used to be an old Roman, Byzantine, Medieval Bulgarian and well-known Ottoman city. A royal palace, parliament house and various government ministries were built in the eastern part of the centre, providing Sofia with a quarter of fine buildings which still exist to this day. The Roman, medieval, and Ottoman-era buildings that also dot Sofia give some idea of the city's ancient origins, Monumental public buildings from the Communist period add a melancholy grandeur to downtown squares and intersections.

Day 2: Sofia

After breakfast take a walking city tour through the fascinating historical city of the capital. Starting with the golden-domed Aleksander Nevski Cathedral and Sveta Sofia, one of the capital's oldest churches which gave the city its name. Walk by the fountain-splashed City Garden overlooked by the Neo-Classical National Theatre and continue to the vibrantly decorated Russian Church. Walking through the red-brick Market Hall, we arrive face to face with the third world's largest Art-Nouveau Synagogue. After a traditional style lunch, continue to explore the capital at your own leisure. The evening is yours to discover the mouth-watering local culinary scene - your tour guide will provide you with recommendations. Overnight Hotel Niky or similar. (BL)

Day 3: Sofia – Rila Monastery – Melnik (Approx. driving time today: 3.5 hours – 4 hours)

Leaving Sofia behind, head to the majestic Rila Mountains. Visit Rila Monastery, the country's most famous cultural heritage and also one of the most picturesque orthodox structures. Experience the tranquillity of the site and admire the magnificent church of Rozhdestvo Bogorodichno with its apocalyptic frescoes. Glance at the immense Monastery's kitchen with its surprisingly gigantic cauldrons before taking an easy walk (flat terrain – distance: 3.5km) to the cave of St. John the Hermit of Rila. Lunch will be taken by the picturesque Rilska River before continuing our journey south. Notice the change in vegetation, shifting from pine forest to endless sunflower fields and a nice Mediterranean climate. Travelling through rolling landscapes, stop at lush Kresna gorge and soon thereafter emerge into the heart of the wine region, ending in Bulgaria's smallest town - Melnik for our overnight stay. Overnight Sininkova house or similar (BL)

Note: For those who do not wish to do the walk, it is possible to be transferred by car to the cave. Tonight, your hotel is located walking distance from the main street, however you may wish to bring a headtorch/flashlight with you to guide you on the way back.

Rila Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

Rila Monastery was founded in the 10th century by St. John of Rila, a hermit canonized by the Orthodox Church. Its ascetic dwelling and tomb made him a sort of medieval superstar admired by the local people, the Bulgarian tsar Peter and even the royals in neighbouring Constantinople. Some one thousand years later, this monastic complex is arguably Bulgaria's most iconic building and was enlisted to UNESCO World Heritage status in 1983.

Day 4: Melnik – Excursion to Rozhen Monastery (Approx. driving time today: 30 minutes)

This morning takes a picturesque trail (gentle uphill on a marked path – maximum 2 hour walk), twisting through an acacia forest up to the highest part of intriguing natural rock formations known as the "sand pyramids". Visit the 13th century Rozhen Monastery, located on a tranquil plateau with dramatic views over the region's sandstone cliffs. Admire the ancient frescoes in the company of one of the monks before indulging in local cuisine at *mehana* (tavern) nearby in the village of Rozhen. Later in the afternoon, visit the home of one of the area's wealthiest wine merchants, beautifully restored to its 19th century appearance. Here enjoy wine tasting in the natural cellars lying right beneath the building. Return to the hotel and any remaining time this afternoon is at leisure to stroll in the peaceful surroundings. Overnight Sininkova house or similar. (BL)



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Note: For those who do not wish to do the walk this morning, it is possible to be transferred by car from Melnik to the Rohzen Monastery and from there take a very short walk to the best viewing point (gentle walk uphill – 30 minutes in both directions).

Melnik

The enchanting small town of Melnik is tucked away in a valley formed by rocky, arid hills crowned with pyramidal sandstone formations and a canyon of beautifully eroded rocks. Once a thriving centre of winemaking and the capital of a principality, Melnik is now a quiet town with less than 400 inhabitants living all-year round.

Day 5: Melnik – Kovachevitsa – Trigrad (Approx. driving time today: 3.5 hours)

Heading east from Melnik across the southern spur of the Pirin Mountains, access the foothills of the Rhodopes, a region studded with quaint traditional villages. Take a detour from the main road to the stone-built highland settlement of Kovachevitsa, gaining an insight into the everyday lives of the Rhodopi inhabitants – a mixture between Bulgarian Christians, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims - Pomaks and Turks who have co-existed peacefully for centuries. The village itself is an enchanting and peaceful architectural reserve, many artists from the capital retreat here during the weekend holidays. Explore the alpine style village with its stone tile roofs and small galleries, before continuing our journey to the pine-covered central Rhodopes, stopping en-route for lunch. Travelling through diverse landscapes of mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, and valleys, arrive in the isolated picturesque village of Yagodina. Overnight Hotel Mursal or similar. (BL)

Day 6: Trigrad Gorge – Yagodina – Eagle’s Eye viewpoint - Trigrad (Approx. driving time today: 1.5 hours and optional: 40 minutes Jeep transfer on track)

Wake up to the sounds of nature, and after breakfast depart following the Trigradska River via the astounding 7-kilometer-long Trigrad Gorge, a nature reserve with numerous caves. Ascend through the Devil’s Throat boarded by its steep and dramatically narrow marble cliffs, and finally emerging at the pretty village of Yagodina. From here, take a walk down the spectacular stalagmite filled Yagodina Cave. Stretching for about 10 km over five levels, we walk about 45 minutes through stunning galleries with interesting curtain-like rock formations comprising evidence of prehistoric occupation. Return to Yagodina and embark on a 4WD Jeep for a 30-minute drive (one way) of steep ascent to the sightseeing Eagle’s Eye platform built at 1,563m above the sea level, next to the St Ilija peak. The walkable platform reveals a 680m shear drop looking down dramatically on Buynovsko Gorge. A breathtaking 360-degree panorama is revealed over the mountains in the distance. Look out for Golden Eagles which can sometimes be seen soaring on the thermals. We drive back to Yagodina for lunch and afterwards, return to Trigrad, where a short cooking class (optional) can be arranged to learn how to make *Banitsa*, one of the most traditional and delicious Balkan specialties. Overnight Arkan Han Hotel or similar. (BL)

Day 7: Trigrad Gorge – Yagodina – Eagle’s Eye viewpoint - Trigrad (Approx. driving time today: 1.5 hours and optional: 40 minutes Jeep transfer on track)

In the morning we take a walk down the spectacular stalagmite filled Yagodina Cave. Stretching for about 10 km over five levels, we walk about 45 minutes through stunning galleries with interesting curtain-like rock formations comprising evidence of prehistoric occupation. Return to Yagodina and embark on a 4WD Jeep for a 30-minute drive (one way) of steep ascent to the sightseeing Eagle’s Eye platform built at 1,563m above the sea level, next to the St Ilija peak. The walkable platform reveals a 680m shear drop looking down dramatically on Buynovsko Gorge. A breathtaking 360-degree panorama is revealed over the mountains in the distance. Look out for Golden Eagles which can sometimes be seen soaring on the thermals. We drive back to Yagodina for lunch. Afterwards a short cooking class (optional) can be arranged to learn how to make *Banitsa*, one of the most traditional and delicious Balkan specialties. Also, we could depart following the Trigradska River via the astounding 7-kilometer-long Trigrad Gorge, a nature reserve with numerous caves. Ascend through the Devil’s Throat boarded by its steep and dramatically narrow marble cliffs. Overnight Hotel Mursal or similar (BL)



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Notes: *Be aware that the access to the Eagle Eye viewpoint requires a drive off-road on a steep and bumpy mountainous track. The local drivers are experienced and there are no particular risks involved. Nevertheless, we advise to keep your belongings stored in a bag during the drives. Although we really believe the experience is worth the rough journey to the top, if you suffer from vertigo or feel uncomfortable taking part, you may wish to remain in Yagodina and take an easy walk through the nearby pine forest and vast meadows.*

Day 7: Trigrad – Gela - Shiroka Luka – Bachkovo Monastery – Asen’s Fortress - Plovdiv (Approx. driving time today: 3 hours)

Today we head north, to the architectural reserve of Shiroka Luka, nation-wide renowned for its folklore music academy and, in particular for its bagpipe tradition. Take a walk (easy walk on marked trail, soft ground – about 1h30 in total) through nice pastoral landscapes up to the small village of Gela.

Descending to the delightful village of Shiroka Luka, we get the chance to meet Kalin, a bagpipe master, who will explain how to make the unique and traditional *Kaba Gajda* (literally “rude bagpipe”), and of course play a few tunes. Continuing via the famous Pamporovo ski resort, stop for a visit at the country’s second largest monastery, the Bachkovo Monastery, renowned for its fine architecture, sumptuous iconostasis, and dramatic frescoes in the Church of Sveti Nikola. Finally, enter the Thracian Plain, stopping for a short visit to the medieval Asen’s fortress with its tiny church perched on high atop a steep rock. Later this afternoon, arrive in the beautiful city of Plovdiv, home to a host of Roman, Ottoman and 19th century Bulgarian architectural marvels. Overnight Evmolpia Boutique Hotel or similar. (BL)

Note: *For those who do not wish to do the walk, it is possible to be transferred by car directly to the village of Gela, or to take a shorter walk of about 45 minutes in duration.*

Shiroka Luka

This quaint and atmospheric village was originally founded in the late 14th century by villagers fleeing forced Islamization and hiding in this hard-to-reach mountain region. Shiroka Luka characterizes a rebirth of Bulgarian identity in religion, traditions, art, and architecture and above all, is particularly associated with folk culture as the village is also the home of the National School of Folklore Arts.

Bachkovo Monastery

Situated at the foot of the forested slopes of the Rhodope Mountains, the Bachkovo Monastery lies with its serene courtyards filled with flowerbeds, exotic trees and drinking fountains. The monastery was founded in 1083 by Grigori and Abbasi Bakouriani, Georgian brothers who were commanders in the Byzantine army. In the 13th century, the monastery was sponsored by Tsar Ivan Assen II and his successor Ivan Aleksander. Destroyed by the Ottomans in the 16th century, it was restored by the 17th century.

Day 8: Plovdiv

Revel today in the streets of Plovdiv, starting this morning with a guided city tour within its romantic old town packed with colourful and creaky 19th century mansions. Visit the exquisite merchant house of Stepan Hindlian, built in 1835 and kept as original, walk by the impressive marble Roman amphitheatre, and enter the Cuma Cammi Mosque, dated from 1364. This afternoon is at your own leisure to explore the countless galleries, artisan’s workshops, and cafes hidden in the meandering cobblestone streets. Stunning views over Plovdiv at sunset are not to be missed from the vantage point of Nebet Tepe. This evening, meet up with your guide again for a memorable dinner right in the heart of old Plovdiv. Overnight Evmolpia Boutique Hotel or similar. (BD)



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Plovdiv (European Capital of Culture 2019)

Plovdiv (a.k.a. Philippopolis) was founded by Philipp the Great, father of Alexander, known under the same title. Plovdiv's geographic position made it a glorious centre of trade in between Europe and the far/middle East over the centuries. Plovdiv old wealthy merchant's homes were crafted by the most skilled artisans of the time and present probably the finest display of 18th and 19th century architecture in the Balkans. In addition, one of the world's best-preserved ancient theatres is located in the city centre and was constructed during the reign of the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117 AD). Like Rome, Plovdiv straddles seven hills but as Europe's oldest continuously inhabited city, it is far more ancient.

Day 9: Plovdiv – Kazanlak (Rose Valley) – Kalofer (Approx. driving time today: 1.5 hours)

Leaving Plovdiv and the Rhodopes Mountains behind, we depart to the city of Kazanlak, famous for being the epicentre of the worldwide renowned Bulgarian rose oil production. Here we walk through the city Rose Park (Rosarium) and enter the recently opened Rose museum which gives excellent facts about the rose production. We have our lunch by the Koprinka dam and later on, visit the superb Thracian tomb of Kazanlak, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. This royal tomb reveals great examples of Early Hellenic mural depictions. Following the stairs outside of the tomb, visit the Ethnographic museum for rose liquor and rose jam degustation in a peaceful atmosphere. Continue to Kalofer for the night. Overnight Chardaka Hotel or similar. (BL)

The Valley of Roses

Framed by the lofty Balkan Mountains to the north and the dense forested Sredna Gora Hills to the south, the Valley of Roses is a predilected area of production of rose Damascena and Alba varieties. The valley is named after the rose plantations which for centuries have supplied Bulgaria's rose-oil industry. Today, 85% of the world's rose oil production originates from here and the Valley of Roses is a popular destination, especially during the harvest season in late May – mid June.

Day 10: Kalofer Eco-trek walk - Shipka – Kalofer (Approx. driving time today: 1.5 hours)

After an early breakfast, start our morning at the heart of the Balkan Mountains with a scenic 1.5 hours walk (round-trip on marked path with a few stairs and moderate uphill – comfortable walking shoes with good grip recommended) above the White River crossing numerous wooden bridges. The views are spectacular and keep a close out for local flora and fauna. After a picnic lunch by the river, we go for a visit to Enjo Bonchev rose distillery and take a look at the superb Golden Church of Shipka. Overnight Chardaka Hotel or similar. (BL)

Note: For those who do not wish to do the whole round-trip walk, it is possible to shorten the distance.

Day 11: Kalofer – Karlovo – Sofia (Approx. driving time today: 2.5 hours)

We start our day visiting a micro-farm where we observe the farmer producing white traditional cheese. We continue our way to the town of Karlovo, following the footprints of the 19th century revolutionary Vasil Levski. On arrival, take a walk in the old part of the city, protected as an architectural reserve, and visit two of the most remarkable houses in the town. In Pateva House, enjoy for the first time the magic of locally produced roses and herbs, while in Buhalov Khan House we learn about the traditional art crafts and drink a Turkish coffee prepared on sand. Continue to the 15th century old Kurshum Mosque (literally meaning the "Bullet" mosque), named after its leaden roof and later and continue back to Sofia. Overnight L'Opera Guest House or similar. (BLD)

Note: For those wishing to continue their tour to Romania, note that there is the option today to leave the group and transfer by car to Ruse, a privileged village located north from Kalofer. Please contact us for details.



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Day 12: Sofia to Bucharest

Today we leave Bulgaria and head to the Romanian capital Bucharest. Generally, there is one direct flight a day, an evening departure, linking the two cities. Or if you prefer you can take the train. Although schedules can change the service leaves Sofia at around 7am and arrives in Bucharest at just after 5pm. Often a simple change of trains will be required at Ruse, on the Bulgarian side of the border. Another option is travel by road and again the journey will take most of the day, although a couple of stops will be made along the way. Once we have reached Bucharest we will stay overnight. Overnight Venezia Hotel or similar. (B)

Notes

Please note that flight schedules from Sofia to Bucharest can vary and the service does not always operate on a daily basis. Therefore, should you wish to fly it maybe necessary to take a flight on the afternoon or evening of Day 11 in which case you will have an extra night in Bucharest. It should also be noted that you will fly unaccompanied, without a guide. Generally, we would recommend doing this journey by road transfer, during which you will be escorted by a local English speaking guide. Please contact us if you would like further information.

Bucharest

Bucharest all too often has a bad reputation, perceived by many to be little more than a grey and soulless city, full of gloomy Soviet architecture. To dismiss Bucharest like this is to do it a grave injustice and ignores its lively cultural life which led to it once being nicknamed 'Little Paris'. Of course, it does have its fair share of concrete block style buildings, many of which sprung up during Ceausescu's regime, but it also contains a marvellous collection of ancient churches, neoclassical and Art Nouveau buildings, parks, and lively markets as well as some excellent museums. Bucharest's historic quarter is perhaps its highlight, founded as a citadel by Vlad (the Impaler) Tepes and with 16th century churches and narrow streets reminiscent of times gone by. In direct contrast to this is Ceausescu's 'civic centre' with its wide boulevards and imposing Palace of Parliament. Bucharest dates back to the 15th century when it was a summer residence for the princely court, and during its time has been sacked by the Ottomans, invaded by Russians, Austrians, and Germans, and suffered a number of earthquakes. Recovering now from the rule of Ceausescu, Bucharest is starting to quietly assert itself as one of the major cultural capitals of Eastern Europe.

Day 13: Bucharest - Peles Castle - Azuga - Brasov (Driving distance: 150km; Approx. driving time is 3.5 hours today)

We start the day with a city tour of Bucharest. After lunch (optional) we leave Bucharest via the Prahova Valley. We stop of to see Peles Castle and then drive to the small village of Azuga and visit the Rhein wine cellars, which produce a renowned sparkling wine. There is a tour of the cellars followed by a wine tasting. We continue to one of Transylvania's major towns, Brasov for the evening. Overnight in Brasov city centre – Safrano Hotel or similar. (B)

Brasov

Also known as Kronstadt due to the presence of German colonists as early as the 12th century, Brasov is still a mix of minorities, like Hungarians and Gypsies, with a mediaeval centre boasting colourful facades, old ramparts, secret narrow cobbled streets, guard towers and the largest gothic church between Vienna and Istanbul. Long under Saxon rule, the town betrays hints of its previous inhabitants in many of the buildings, with fine examples of merchants' houses and an impressive Byzantine style cathedral, and it is still possible to see the old fortifications which once protected Brasov from invaders.



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Day 14: Brasov – Excursion to Bran and Wild Bears (Driving distance: 100km; Approx. driving time is 2.5 hours today)

This morning we explore the city of Brasov before travelling for 45 minutes to Bran village. This is home to Bran castle, tenuously linked to the legend of Dracula. We have a tour of the castle and discover its colourful history. Returning to Brasov, we visit a special observatory in the forest accompanied by National Forestry Administration representatives. Here, if we are lucky we hope to see wild European Brown Bear in their natural habitat. The trip will take about 4 hours and include a 20 minute walk. We return to Brasov late this evening. Overnight in Brasov city centre – Safrano Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 14: Brasov - Viscri (Driving distance: 100 km; Approx. driving time is 1.5-2 hours today)

From Brasov we drive (about 1 ½ hours) to the delightful village of Viscri, a Saxon village and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. On the way we stop to view a beautiful UNESCO listed fortified church of Prejmer. Spend the day exploring the village and surroundings and learning about local life. We visit the fortified church in the village, and then enjoy a horse and carriage ride through the surroundings. Along the way we will meet people specialising in traditional crafts and gain an insight into the customs of this part of the country. Overnight local house. (BLD)

Day 16: Viscri - Sighisoara - Sibiu (Driving distance: 150km; Approx. driving time is 2.5 hours today)

Today we travel to Sighisoara with its beautiful medieval citadel. We explore the fortress and also visit the house where Vlad the Impaler was born. We then head to Sibiu, one of the best preserved medieval cities in Romania and carefully restored in recent years. We have time to explore the old centre with its ramparts, churches, and narrow alleys. Overnight in Sibiu Continental Forum Hotel or similar. (B)

Sighisoara

In a region full of spectacular architecture, Sighisoara manages to stand out. Its fortified old town is a mass of medieval houses, testament to its previous existence as an important centre of commerce, with artisans from throughout the Holy Roman Empire visiting the settlement. The town was dominated by Saxon artisans and craftsmen, who also built the fortifications protecting it. Most impressive is the old clock tower, constructed in the 13th and 14th centuries as part of the town's defences and today containing a museum giving an insight into Sighisoara's history.

Sibiu

Sibiu's colourful old town is a spectacular sight to behold, with its fantastic old cathedrals, merchants' houses and public squares – it positively exudes medieval atmosphere. Sibiu itself is divided into an old and new quarter, although to be fair even the new quarter contains impressive buildings dating back to the 16th century. The city is known to exist from the 12th century, rising in prominence to become an important trading town. Like Brasov it was inhabited by Saxon merchants who formed themselves into guilds, fortifying the town to protect its wealth. Sibiu is packed full of fascinating sites to explore, from its ramparts and towers to its passageways linking the two parts of the town together.

Day 17: Sibiu – Alba - Iulia – Turda - Cluj (Driving distance: 180km; Approx. driving time is 3 hours today)

In the morning we drive to Alba-Iulia, a city with a high importance in Romania's history, being the place where the Romanian Principalities and Transylvania united to form Romania after the First World War. The city is also home of the best preserved Vauban fortress in Europe. It was designed by an Italian architect in the early 18th century, modeled on a star shape with seven points. With its arrow-shaped bastions, the fortress is outstanding both for its baroque decorative elements and for the beauty of its six gates.



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We then continue to Turda salt mine. The salt mine that we see today dates from the 17th century and it is now a fascinating underground entertainment area, described as 'the coolest underground place in the world'. This evening we will arrive into Cluj, the former capital of Transylvania. Overnight in Capitolina Chic Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 18: Cluj - Sucevita (Driving distance: 280km; Approx. driving time is 5 hours today)

We explore Cluj this morning, a vibrant and cosmopolitan city. We then depart Cluj, travelling through the Carpathian Mountains and via the Tihuta mountain pass. This was the pass described as the 'Borgo pass' in Bram Stoker's Dracula novel. Our drive takes us to the region of Bucovina, located on the northern slopes of the central Eastern Carpathians. We arrive at our destination for the evening, Sucevita village, where we will have a traditional dinner prepared by our hosts. Overnight in traditional guesthouse. (BD)

Carpathian Mountains

The Carpathian Mountains stretch across a wide part of Eastern Europe, encompassing parts of Romania, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Serbia. Rich in wildlife they are home to some of Europe's last remaining populations of large mammals, with bears, wolves, and lynx to be found prowling through the forests. The birdlife here is equally spectacular, with raptors such as eagles a frequent sighting. This is one of the most pristine environments to be found on the continent, with superb views to be had from every angle and the possibility of seeing wildlife adding further excitement.

Day 19: Sucevita – Excursion to Painted Monasteries of Bucovina and Voronet (Driving distance: 120km; Approx. driving time is 2.5 hours today)

In the morning we visit Moldovita Monastery, a wonderful masterpiece of Moldavian Gothic architecture adorned with lively exterior frescoes dating back to the beginning of the 16th century. Then we visit an egg painting workshop where we are shown the special technique required in this extremely delicate operation. We also see an exhibition of these local treasures. Later we visit Voronet monastery with its exterior frescoes dating to the 15th century, also named the Sistine Chapel of the East. On the way back to our accommodation in Sucevita, we stop in Marginea village to see the black pottery workshop and then we visit Sucevita monastery – the largest of the painted monasteries. We arrive back in Sucevita in time for dinner with our hosts. Overnight in traditional guesthouse. (BD)

Painted Monasteries of Bucovina

The impressive monasteries of Bucovina, Romania, with their fine exterior and interior frescoes, have been preserved and handed down from mediaeval times, and because of their uniqueness and artistic value, were added to UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List in 1993. Most of the churches are fortified with strong defensive surrounding walls as protection against Turkish invaders and they sheltered large armies of soldiers awaiting battle. The exterior walls of the monasteries are richly decorated with vivid frescoes depicting dramatic Biblical scenes, intended to teach Christianity to the illiterate by means of pictures. The artwork has amazingly survived harsh exposure to the elements for over 450 years and the intense colours have been well preserved. The best of the monasteries are generally considered to be Voronet, Sucevita, Moldovita and Arbore.

Day 20: Sucevita – Tarpesti – Agapia – Piatra Neamt (Driving distance: 180km; Approx. driving time is 3 hours today)

This morning we travel to the village of Tarpesti and the remarkable Popa Museum. At his home, Nicolae Popa had gathered an incredible collection of Romanian folk art and handicrafts, giving us a fantastic insight into the ancient traditions of this region. We visit the museum and have a home prepared lunch here. We then travel to the Agapia Monastery before ending the day in Piatra-Neamt where we have time to explore. Overnight in Piatra-Neamt, Central Plaza Hotel or similar. (BL)



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Day 21: Piatra Neamt – Galati - Danube Delta with Tulcea – Crisan (Driving distance: 340km; approx. 5,5 - 6 hours driving time)

We leave Piatra-Neamt and continue via the Siret valley to Galati, on the ancient commercial road that connected the Orient, through Constantinople and the Black Sea, through the middle of Moldavia then Poland, to the wealthy cities of the Hanseatic League on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Here we cross the Danube by ferry and on towards Tulcea, the gate to the Danube Delta. In Tulcea we take a fast boat and arrive to our guesthouse for the following nights. Overnight in Crisan, Vasiliu Guesthouse or similar. (BD)

Danube Delta

The Danube Delta is the best preserved of Europe's delta regions and a wetland paradise for wildlife, with over 300 species of birds in its numerous lakes and marshes. Species include storks, egrets, pelicans, eagles, and numerous species of ducks. Birds are not the only inhabitants of the Delta though, and there is also a rich community of fish and animals, from wildcats, foxes, and wolves, and even an occasional boar or deer. The region is also home to some very traditional villages, many of them home to Lipovani descendants of the 'Old Believers' who left Russia in the 18th century to avoid religious persecution. We avoid the 'floating hotels' that most companies use as these are unable to reach the most interesting parts of the Delta but stay in a delightful village as guests of a local family who are able to show us all the intricacies of traditional delta life.

Day 22: Danube Delta

Today, depending on the weather, we can have two outings by small boat exploring the winding channels of the Danube Delta (returning for lunch at our guesthouse) or a whole day in the Delta with picnic lunch. In the evening we return to our guests for dinner and accommodation. Overnight at Vasiliu Guesthouse or similar. (BLD)

Day 23: Danube Delta

Today we visit the protected area of Letea forest, with oak trees as high as 30 meters, poplars, ash, but also Mediterranean type vegetation with creepers and vines. We have a fisherman's lunch in Letea village and return in late afternoon to our guesthouse. Dinner and overnight at Vasiliu Guesthouse or similar. (BLD)

Day 24: Crisan – Tulcea - Bucharest (Driving distance: 280 km; Approx. driving time is 4.5 hours today)

We leave the Delta behind and travel by boat back to Tulcea and from there we head back to Bucharest for our final night. Overnight Venezia Hotel or similar. (B)

Day 25: Departure from Bucharest

Tour ends with transfer to the airport. (B)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions

Arrival and departure airport transfers

All accommodation as per the itinerary or similar

Land transportation

Travel between Sofia and Bucharest – a choice of flight, standard class rail or road

Services of an English-speaking guide/tour leader - a combined driver/guide for groups of three or less

Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)

Entrance fees for sites as listed as part of the itinerary



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Excluded

International flights (except when requested between Sofia and Bucharest)
Travel Insurance
Items of a personal nature
Activities mentioned as optional in the itinerary
Visas- if applicable
Drinks
Tips (discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing there are no travel warnings in place for areas that we visit in Bulgaria. It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore, please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis, please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

On this tour you can expect to stay in comfortable tourist class hotels and family-run guest houses. You can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom. In general, you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch (L) and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash. Tap water is generally safe and drinkable but may have an odd taste.



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To limit unnecessary plastic waste, we would appreciate if you could bring your own water bottle or flask that you can refill with drinkable water for the whole length of stay, or alternatively, a bottle will be lent to you on arrival for the duration of your tour.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements, you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs, and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide for a 3 course meal with water. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch/Dinner £12 - £20

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general, you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer £2 - 3 / Water £2

Tipping

If you are satisfied with the services you receive from your local guide and driver, then you may consider leaving a tip. This amount is obviously left at your discretion although, for our group tour, a reasonable amount to tip the driver would be around EUR 50-60 per person and for your tour guide EUR 60-80 per person, depending on the group size. Expectation of a tip for hotel staff is rare, however in restaurant, bills rarely include service, and it is customary to leave a tip of about 10%.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: ATM machines are common and can be found in all sizeable towns and cities but not in the villages

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are commonly accepted in hotels, restaurants and shops in the big cities and towns, but acceptance is less widespread in more rural areas. You cannot rely on using a credit card exclusively whilst travelling in Bulgaria and Romania.

Local Currency: Bulgarian Lev (BGN –always abbreviated to lv.) and the Romanian Leu (RON)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Euros, US Dollar or Pound Sterling

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you on arrival



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Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time, and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities.

Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

Many nationalities including British, US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and EU passport holders do not require a visa to visit Bulgaria or Romania for stays of less than 90 days.

Regulations do frequently change though, so we advise that you check the current requirements with your nearest embassy.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition, certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively, UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

For visits to Bulgaria, there are no compulsory vaccinations. However, we strongly recommend that you contact your Doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice, and the recommended vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A and B, Polio, and Typhoid.



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The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

Bulgaria has four distinct seasons, with a warm spring, a long hot summer, a mild autumn, and a cold winter, with significant snowfall in the mountain areas. In the South and Eastern parts, temperatures are usually mild and representative of a Mediterranean climate. Spring presents Bulgaria at its most beautiful, with both open countryside and city parks bright with lush green grass and flowers in full bloom. Autumn is also generally a very pleasant season to visit as the weather usually remains reasonably mild well into November, with little rainfall. Consequently, we advise that the best time to visit the country is from April to October.

Access to the Internet

Access to the Internet via Wi-Fi should be available in every location on your tour. Wi-Fi is usually available in the rooms, however on some occasions, will be only available at the restaurant or main lobby of the accommodation. Nevertheless, we can never guarantee that Wi-Fi connection will be working when you stay at the properties.

Driving times

The driving times stated in the itinerary are given in the best of faith. Driving times may on occasion be longer due to unforeseen circumstances such as poor weather, road construction activity, mechanical problems etc.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet although this will be rare in summer. For the mountainous areas, it is advisable to bring warmer clothes especially for nighttime and early mornings and even during the day it can be cold. When visiting a church, a monastery, or a mosque, you should be appropriately dressed, covering your shoulders, and wearing pants or shorts which should be at the knee or below. When visiting a mosque, you will be asked to remove your shoes and women should cover their head, arms, and legs.

Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared and to be adequately immunized. Suncream/sunblock is a must – please ensure you bring enough as it may not be available locally. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. It is highly recommended to also bring a torch or flashlight, especially for the nights in Trigrad and Melnik to assist with walking around hotel/lodges at night. For walks, telescopic poles will be available for you to use in the vehicle – please advise before the departure if you need.



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Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots with closed toes and ankle support are recommended for the walks, as well as a pair of sandals for general travelling.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electricity in Bulgaria and Romanian is 220V, with a frequency of 50Hz or 230V, with a frequency of 50hz. Plugs have two round pins like most European countries and correspond to plug types C and F.

Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour, but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 11 January 2024.