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CST Permit #2057026-40

## Romania Myths and Magic Castles, Painted Monasteries & Folklore Maximum Group Size 8

**Guaranteed Departures 2012** - dates of arrival in Bucharest  
**April 21, May 11, May 29, Jun 5, Jun 16, July 13, Sep 8, Sep 22, Oct 12**  
*April 21 tour includes Juni; May 29 tour includes Whit Sunday*

### Post Tour to Moldova

Romania conjures visions of picturesque villages, folklore and crafts, unspoiled countryside and the charm of friendly people living their traditional ways.



Highlights of our journey include:

The countryside with its peasant traditions, costumes, crafts, horse and oxen-drawn carts, a rich folklore;

An opportunity to live in a small village and mingle with the locals;

The unique painted monasteries and wooden churches of Bucovina, entirely covered with frescoes both on the inside and the outside walls;

Medieval Transylvania - a land rich in treasures of the past, filled with Saxon heritage, fortifications, Gothic-style architecture, palaces and castles, ... Dracula

And the friendly Carpathian Mountains.

## Detailed Itinerary

### Day 1 Arrival in Bucharest

Meet at airport and transfer to hotel or if coming from Bulgaria you are driven to hotel.

### Day 2 Bucharest (B, L, D)

Explore Bucharest's history, architecture and cultural sites. In the morning, a panoramic tour including a visit to the outdoor Village Museum and the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, which has a wonderful collection of traditional crafts, folk arts, ceramics and textiles. Lunch at Restaurant Burebista, a traditional restaurant with patio dining.

Afternoon visit to the Palace of Parliament, Revolution Square, Patriarch's Cathedral and a walk in the historic area. Please note: we often have to wait a bit to get into Palace of Parliament as tours are conducted in groups and there is a limited number of English speaking guides. We appreciate your patience. Welcome dinner at a local restaurant with folkloric show.

### Day 3 Bucharest – Sibiu (288 km, 179 miles) (B,D)

Crossing the Carpathians to Sibiu, we'll stop in Râmnicu Valcea for lunch (pay on your own) and drive along the picturesque Olt Valley to the Cozia Monastery, one of the oldest monasteries in Romania, built in 1386. Arrive in Sibiu (one of the oldest Saxon towns in Transylvania - formerly Hermannstadt – founded by the Saxon colonists and once the richest town of Transylvania).

### Day 4 Sibiu (B,D)

Morning: guided walking tour of the medieval town, a very pretty town with cobblestone streets and pastel houses; 15-16th century town squares, the Evangelical Church, Podul Mincinosilor (the Liars' Bridge) and old city walls. We also visit the oldest art museum in the country, the Bruckental Palace Museum, and enjoy a horse and carriage ride thru the open-air museum of Astra, also known as the Museum of Traditional Folk Civilizations (largest open air museum of Romania). Afternoon: visit traditional villages nearby including Cisnădie & Cisnădioara with their beautiful fortified Saxon churches and the mountain village of Sibiel to visit the painted glass icon museum – a unique Romanian art.

### Day 5 Sibiu – Biertan – Sighisoara (B)

Departure to Sighisoara, enroute we visit the village of Biertan with its local fortified Saxon Church, a UNESCO site. Sighisoara is one of the greatest medieval cities left in the world, with a walled citadel on the hilltop, secret gateways and passages, a 14th century Clock Tower and also the birthplace of Prince Vlad Tepes (Dracula). It is the best-preserved and continuously inhabited medieval city of Europe. Upon arrival, free time for lunch on your own. There are many outdoor cafes, all within a block or two walking distance from our hotel. In the afternoon, we enjoy a leisurely walking exploration of the sights. Overnight accommodation inside the old fortress walls in Sighisoara.

### Day 6 Vadu Izei Village - (Iza Valley) (June 3 Whit Sunday) (B,D)

Drive to Maramures, the land of wooden churches and carved wooden gates, unique folk costumes and traditions, where ancient Romania coexists with modern times. On the way, we visit The Palace of Culture and the stunning stained glass windows in Targu Mures. Then we drive through the enchanting countryside to the village of Vadu Izei, Iza Valley, where you can experience local peasant life. Evening: a dinner with "ceterasi" - local violin players. Overnight at a charming guesthouse in the village.

**Tour with Whit Sunday:** Attend Whit Sunday services at the village church--Maramures is the best place to see all the celebrations. Villagers decorate their homes and gates with lindentree, poplar and oak branches. They make crowns made of elderberry and wheat, which youngsters will later wear at their weddings. They are also in the habit of cracking lindentree leaves (making lots of noise) to scare away the bad spirits. There are celebrations for the dead. We cannot say for sure how many of these customs we will see, but we will definitely go to churches and get into the celebratory atmosphere with the locals.

### Day 7 Maramures (B,D)

Morning: a walking tour of the village including visit to the whirlpool and distillery, an icon painter and exhibition next door, then a visit to the home of an elderly woman whose house dates from the 1750s. She has artifacts for sale as well. Vadu Izei has a brand-new Orthodox church that is quite fascinating.

Afterwards, we depart for a full day tour of the Maramures region including the Sighetul Marmatiei, Calinesti and Desesti wooden churches (part of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites) as well as the unique Merry Cemetery in Sapanta Village. We visit one of the local markets and mingle with the colorful crowds wearing traditional folk-costumes and observe their centuries-old traditions. **Tour with Whit Sunday:** Attend Whit Sunday events again today. Return to Vadu Izei for dinner and overnight.

### Day 8 Maramures-Bucovina: Gura Humorului (B,D)

Drive through the scenic Prislop Pass to the Bucovina region, renowned for the wondrously detailed exterior frescoes on the walls of its monasteries/ churches. On the way, we will admire the superb wooden architecture of Barsana monastery and the 18th century Rozavlea wooden church, with its beautifully preserved interior paintings.

**Based On Availability** Visit the home of Letitia, a very talented egg painter. Letitia lives in the village of Vama. She is a designer by training and also teaches school. Born in Vama, she graduated from university in Iasi and lived in Bucharest for a time. She returned to her village many years ago and learned how to paint eggs, this being a local custom. She is very talented and her eggs, three or four times the price of the average ones, are of the finest quality. She has gained international recognition and has a collection of painted eggs from all over the world exhibited at her home. Overnight Hotel Passiflora, in the suburbs Gura Humorului.

### Day 9 Bucovina (B,L)

Visit the famous painted monasteries of northern Moldova - part of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Sites- in their construction and painting order, following the evolution of the architecture and painting: Humor, Voronet, Moldovita, Sucevita. Humor Monastery was painted by Toma of Suceava in 1530, and the Voronet Monastery, built in 1488, is one of the most beautiful and dubbed the "Sistine

Chapel of the East." Moldovita Monastery is where the UNESCO Golden Apple award is kept that was given to the painted churches back in 1975. On the south facade of Moldovita is The Siege of Constantinople, belonging to the 24 episodes of the Hymn to the Holy Virgin. Sucevita is the largest of all, looking more like a mighty fortress than a monastery. The Ladder of John of Sinai is considered one of the best of the frescoes of Sucevita, rarely present in medieval Romanian art. You will also visit the Black Pottery Workshop in Marginea Village. Lunch at Popas Turistic Bucovina, a charming and excellent Moldavian restaurant, 3.5 km (2.2 miles) south of Sucevita, in the heart of the Carpathian Mountains. Overnight in the suburbs of Gura Humorului.

#### **Day 10 Bucovina-Targu Neamt- Piatra Neamt-Brasov (B)**

Visit the 15th century Neamt Citadel (15 min walk uphill) and the 15th century Neamt Monastery. Departure across the mountains to Brasov through the spectacular Bicz Gorges - Bicz Lake (largest lake in Romania and a breathtaking 25 mile drive)– the Red Lake – Miercurea Ciuc. Lunch at the Edelweiss Restaurant by Red Lake (pay on your own). Arrival in Brasov around 6 pm. Evening free to stroll and relax on the pedestrian only plaza of old town. There are many great restaurants and beer gardens to choose from.

#### **Day 11 Brasov-Bran-Sinaia-Bucharest (210km) (May 1Juni) (B)**

Guided walking tour in the historical center of Brasov (formerly Kronstadt) including the Black Church, the largest gothic structure between Vienna and Istanbul; admiring its great collection of oriental carpets. Then we depart for Bran for visit to "Dracula's Castle."

Juni takes place in the Schei Quarter of Brasov - this is where the Romanians used to live in the Middle Ages. It starts in the morning and goes until the afternoon. It is a show/procession/ceremony which blends elements of myth, rites, ceremony and magic. There are 7 categories of Juni, all of them are part of this carnival, all in very colorful costumes, most of them on horseback. They proceed from Schei - the old Romanian Quarter and ride to the center of town and into the Great Square. It is a very old custom from the times of the Dacians and is related to an old pagan ritual when winter is over and spring begins. The changing of cycles: sun wins over frost.

We then drive across the mountains to Sinaia, a well-known ski resort nicknamed the "Pearl of the Carpathians," admiring the old Saxon fortified churches enroute. Lunch in Sinaia, then a visit to the Sinaia Monastery, the oldest building in town (1695) and build in the typical "Brancovenesc" architectural style (reminiscent of Mogosoiaia Palace). Afterwards we visit the fabulous Peles Castle – former summer residence of the Royal family (ground floor only/best part). Late afternoon drive south to Bucharest. Farewell dinner with traditional dishes in a Bucharest restaurant.

#### **Day 12 Bucharest Transfer to the airport. (B)**

**Price:** \$2295 per person, based on a min group size of 6. Single Room Supplement: \$325.  
\$200 per person discount if booked with Bulgaria Tour.

**Includes:** Accommodation as listed or similar, Meals: 11 breakfasts, 2 dinners in Bucharest (one with folklore show), 1 lunch at traditional restaurant in Bucharest, 1 lunch at Popas Bucovina, 2 dinners at Maramures village guesthouse; transportation by ac minivan 3-8 people (sedan for 2 people), accompanying escort throughout, entrance fees to all places mentioned in the itinerary.

**Does Not Include:** international flight, tips, insurance, personal expenses such as laundry, phone calls, drinks

#### **Hotels based on availability**

**Bucharest:** Hotel Berthelot, brand new four star, located in a quiet area in the very centre of Bucharest, very close to the Revolution Square, museum, quality shops, Amzei fruit and vegetable market and an array of quality restaurants, some outdoors.

**Sibiu:** Hotel Imparatul Romanilor, located in the old part of Sibiu near the main square, in a 16th century building built in the traditional Transylvanian renaissance style, a former merchant's hall transformed into hotel in the 18th century, with many famous guests: emperor Frantz Joseph II, composers Frantz Liszt, Johan Strauss, Prince Charles among others.

**Sighisoara:** Sighisoara, Wagner, House with Antler, Casa cu Serb hotels - 3 star, all are located in the best preserved and fortified town in Southeast Europe, surrounded by historical buildings and cobblestone streets. The building of the hotel was the former town hall in the 19th century, beautifully turned into a hotel while preserving the old architecture and charm.

**Maramures:** Covaciu Guesthouse is two modern villas, each with 3 rooms and 2 bathrooms, TV and audio-video system. The location is excellent, in a quiet neighborhood, far away from the main street. The terraces offer a beautiful view of the village. The host is a well known "ceteras" (traditional violin player) so he is well connected to the village music happenings. We may perhaps be invited to attend an evening local music/dance, event or private gathering of Covacius' friends and neighbors (not guaranteed.)

**Bucovina (Gura Humorului):** Hotel Passiflora , a new 4 star hotel with great scenic views, situated in the heart of Bucovina, in the suburbs of Gura Humorului, in the village of Manastirea Humorului. Rooms have high speed internet connection, TV, land line telephone, refrigerator, balcony or loggia, hair dryer. The restaurant specializes in local Bucovina cuisine.

**Brasov:** Casa Wagner, a boutique hotel right in the Council Square.

# Moldova

## extension follows Romania Tours

May 2-7, May 11-16, Jun 9-14, June 27—Jul 3, Jul 24-31, Sep 19-24, Oct 19-24

### Day 12 Bucharest-Chisinau.

Transfer to airport for flight to Chisinau. Arrival and transfer to hotel. The city is beautifully surrounded by seven hills seated in the Bac river valley. The population of Chisinau is over 752,000. The first historic record of the name Chisinau dates back to July 17, 1436. The name derives from an old word meaning "spring, pump, pipe."

Afternoon, a guided orientation walking tour of "the city made of white stone." Well-known architects and poets such as Bernardazzi, Sciusev and Pushkin gave Chisinau a unique character.

### Day 13 Chisinau

Guided tour will show both the historic and the modern faces of Chisinau. On Stephen the Great Boulevard are many administrative buildings like the Presidency, the Parliament, and the City Administration. There are cultural centers such as the National Theatre M. Eminescu, the Organ Hall, Theatre of Opera and Ballet. In the historical zone there are more than 700 houses from the 19th century arranged in Estates. There are more than eighteen old churches and the main Cathedral. Visit The National Museums of History and Ethnography of Moldova.

### Day 14 Excursion: Besalma

In the morning depart for Besalma and visit the Gagauzian National History and Ethnographic Museum founded in 1966. It has an excellent exhibition featuring the distinctive culture of the Gagauzian people who live here. They are a unique Orthodox community of Turkish Gagauzian origin. Local museum guides relate the history of this small nation in the south of Moldova.

Moldova is world renowned for its fine wine production. No visit would be complete without a visit to a Moldovan wine cellar. Milestii Mici is one of Moldova's most famous natural wine cellars and one of the largest wine depositories in the world. The wines stored at Milestii Mici are made of various years' crops from 1968 to 1991. Wine tasting and dinner at Milestii Mici. Return to Chisinau for overnight.

### Day 15 Excursion: Tiraspol, Transnistria

Full day trip to Tiraspol, Transnistria, at the present moment the administrative center of the self proclaimed Transnistria (Moldova). Feel the atmosphere of this disputed territory which always has been a battlefield between the major powers of the region. The buildings of the Soviets, the monument of Suvorov, Central Plaza. Return to Chisinau for overnight.

### Day 16 Excursion: Soroca & Old Orhei (Orchey)

After breakfast, an excursion to the ancient city of Soroca and the Soroca Fortress, where the ruler of Moldova Stefan the Great built the wooden "pearl fortress" on the bank of the Dniester river to defend the country from the attacks of tartars in 1499. From 1543 to 1546 the fortress was rebuilt in stone and today stands as the only Moldovan medieval monument entirely preserved. It is unique in Eastern Europe.

Continue sightseeing to Old Orhei (Orchey), situated in a picturesque setting. You will have the opportunity to visit the most interesting archaeological site housing the ruins of two cities (14th -16th century). Tartars settled here on their expansion to Western Europe.

Visit a well-maintained Orthodox cave monastery called St. Maria Dormata. This monastery was expanded and modified inside the cliffs by the monks over the centuries. Christian churches provide magnificent scenery through the windows of the monastery that still functions today. Enjoy a folklore show and dinner in Trebujeni and sample Moldavian dishes and wine. Return to Chisinau for overnight.

### Day 17 Chisinau - Home

Transfer to Chisinau airport for flight home via Bucharest or onward destination.

**Price when booked as extension to our Romania tour:** \$1260 per person based on min 4 people, Single Room Supplement \$250  
**Plus Flight:** Bucharest-Chisinau and return if needed.

Hotel Luna in Chisinau is a 3 star boutique hotel, only 19 rooms. A 20 in drive from the airport, it is walking distance to the majority of embassies, Presidency, Parliament and Government, National opera and theatres, central city parks. Room facilities include wi-fi, cable TV, air conditioning.