



Explore Romania  
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## Explore Romania

# The Treasures of Transylvania and Bucovina

## A self-guided tour to discover Romania

One of the best ways to enjoy a holiday is to be able to set your own pace. This tour proposes a well-balanced mixture of city sites, countryside and beautiful natural landscapes for you to explore with your family or with close friends. Going from Bucharest to Transylvania and then to Bucovina, spending time in vibrant cities and in small villages as well, staying at hotels, but also in authentic country and town houses, eating in restaurants and experiencing traditional homestay cuisine - you will discover a great deal about Romania and, probably, decide to come back in the future.

### Highlights

- The charming villages of Transylvania and Bucovina, where your hosts will happily welcome you in their houses
- The legendary Dracula's Castle
- The sites listed in UNESCO World Heritage: Sighisoara citadel, the painted monasteries in Bucovina, Viscri village
- The beautiful Transylvanian urban landscapes of Brasov and Sibiu, packed with interesting sites to explore

### Day 1

Arrival in Bucharest on Henri Coanda Otopeni International airport. Collect the rented car and transfer to the city centre.

The biggest city in the country, Bucharest is full of contrasts, noticeable especially in its architecture, which is the most important witness of its development from a small settlement to its glory days. In the beginning of the 20th century and especially between the two World Wars, Little Paris had made a name for itself as a European not-so-typical metropolis. Going through 45 years of communism and undergoing nowadays an important restoration process was not an easy job for the 600 years old settlement. It was Vlad the Impaler, the Wallachian ruler who inspired Bram Stoker's Dracula classic vampire novel, the one who established in Bucharest his court, for part of his reign, thus making Bucharest a capital for the first time. Today Bucharest gathers people from all around the country, being the most important economic and cultural city of Romania and housing also the Government, the Parliament and the Presidential institutions.

Accommodation in a 3\*\*\* hotel in the city centre.





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### Day 2



In the morning you have time to further discover Bucharest before you depart towards Sibiu. The European Capital of Culture in 2007, Sibiu is known to exist from the 12th century, rising in prominence to become an important trading town. 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.

Accommodation in a 3\* hotel in the city center.

### Day 3

Today you will drive to Sighisoara, a medieval citadel included in the UNESCO heritage list, inhabited continuously ever since its settlement by the Saxon colonists in the 12th century. This is also the place where, most probably, Vlad Tepes, also known as Dracula, was born more than 600 years ago.

Before you reach Sighisoara, while driving through the undisturbed natural maze of Natura 2000 site Hartibaciu Valley, you can stop in Biertan village to visit its magnificent fortified church of Sf. Maria, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, resembling a miniature Gothic cathedral. It was completed in the 16th century and crowns a low hillock overlooking the village.

Once in Sighisoara you will have time to wonder its cobbled streets and enjoy its mediaeval atmosphere. Accommodation in a 3\* hotel located inside the citadel in a historic building.



### Day 4

Time to continue your journey up North-East, via Tihuta (Borgo) Pass - also featured in Bram Stoker's novel, towards Bucovina region (the land of beech trees). Often described as an oasis of Romanian spirituality this region houses the famous exterior painted monasteries (Voronet, Moldovita, Sucevita, Arbore and Humor) listed by UNESCO.

This will be a long driving day, but the beautiful landscapes while crossing the Carpathians will be your rewards.

In late afternoon you will get to your destination: a traditional guesthouse in Campulung Moldovenesc/Vama village, where dinner will be served by your hosts, accompanied by homemade brandy and wine.



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### Day 5

Today you will discover some of the painted monasteries. In the morning you can visit Moldovita monastery, this wonderful masterpiece of the Moldavian Gothic adorned with exterior lively painted frescoes dating back to the beginning of the 16th century. Then follows a visit to a workshop of painted eggs, where you will see the special technique required in this extremely delicate operation, and also an exhibition of these local treasures.

You continue to Sucevita monastery a masterpiece of its own, painted in dominant green and red. A short drive from here will take you to Marginea village, home of traditional black ceramics, where you can see the craftsmen at work.

You continue to Voronet monastery, the most famous of them all due to its predominant “Voronet blue”, and also known as the “Sistine Chapel of the East”.

In the evening you return to your hosts for dinner and accommodation - same as for the previous night.



### Day 6

You will leave Bucovina today to cross the mountains back into Transylvania. But before doing that, you make one stop in Tarpesti village at the house of the peasant artist Nicolae Popa, a self-taught archeologist, ethnographer and collector. Mr. Popa died in the autumn of 2010 in his 92nd year of life, but his family is carrying on his legacy. You will visit the peasant museum and then continue through Bicz Gorges - the most spectacular gorges in Romania, with rock walls as high as 350 m, and then Lacu Rosu - at about 900 m altitude, home of a natural dam lake formed in the 19th century, back into Transylvania.



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You will travel then through a very beautiful area that has largely escaped the scars of industrial development, inhabited by the Szekler minority in Romania. Szeklers are Hungarian-speaking people, who settled here in the ninth century, when they were given land in exchange for protecting Hungary's frontiers against invading forces. You can discover the specific architecture and traditions in a place where nature seems to exist in harmony with farming methods, some having more in common with those used in the 18th century rather than with the modern ones.

In the evening you reach Sovata. Accommodation in a 4\* Health Spa Resort.

### Day 7

Sovata is an internationally-recognized health and spa resort that has become famous for its salt lakes. The Romans were the first to exploit salt in this area. Holes in the rock were filled with rainwater and spring water, which resulted in the lake system visible today. The Bear Lake is the most famous of these formations, which got its name from its shape. Because of its extremely high salt content, bathers can float on the surface of the helio-thermal lake, which is unique in Europe.

After a swim in the lake you can continue south to Viscri village (Deutschweisskirch). This is a Saxon village included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, one of the villages in Romania where the Prince of Wales owns a traditional house.

The Saxon colonists arrived on the territory of Transylvania 800-900 years ago when invited by the new master, the Hungarian king. They occupied the fertile valleys, bringing urban organization, laying foundations for villages, towns and cities. The mountains however, the higher grounds, as well as the lands close to the borders of Transylvania remained Romanian, or as they called them at the time, Wallachian. Nowadays, following the Red Army invasion in 1944 and the communist era, most of the Saxon population is gone, but we have the privilege to submerge in an enormous open air museum, the huge patrimony they left behind consisting of naturally preserved architecture and also of a semi tamed natural environment where biodiversity is at its highest rates in the European lowlands. There are over 150 fortified churches that survived to these days - nowhere in the world can be found so many reinforced churches and fortresses - 7 of them are included in the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Dinner and accommodation in a traditional Saxon peasant house, carefully restored to receive tourists.





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### Day 8

After breakfast you take a ride in horse pulled carriages around the village, seeing some craftsmen at work, and also visiting the village's fortified church. Picnic lunch on a high hill overlooking the village and part of the wooded Transylvanian plateau.

You quit Viscri and transfer to Bran village, to visit Bran Castle (also known as Dracula's Castle). This is a beautiful 14th century castle, restored in the 20th century to its former glory, by the royal family of Romania. You can visit the imposing structure guarding the passing point between the two Romanian provinces: Walachia to the south and Transylvania to the north.

You continue to Brasov, one of Transylvania's major cities.

Accommodation in a 3\* hotel located in the main square of the city, in a historic building.

### Day 9

Day dedicated to discovering Brasov, no driving necessary.

Also known as Kronstadt due to the presence of Saxon colonists as early as the 12th century, fringed by the peaks of the Southern Carpathian Mountains and resplendent with Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance architecture, as well as a wealth of historical attractions, Brasov is one of the most visited places in Romania. As one of the medieval Saxon's seven walled citadels built in the 12th century - and its location at the intersection of the trade routes linking the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe - Brasov has been a popular destination throughout the ages.



Optional activity in the evening: bear watching program with a specialized guide.

Same accommodation as for the previous night.

### Day 10

In the morning you transfer, across the spectacular Southern Carpathians, back to Bucharest for your flight back home.

~ End of the program ~

