



Explore Travel Romania
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Explore Romania

GOING TO THE HEART OF IT

Romanian Villages from Maramures, Bucovina and the Saxon Area in Transylvania

Group size: 4 to 14 people

We will be taking you on a journey in time, by connecting you with the people at the countryside who are very much connected with the nature and are relating more with the small and interdependent village community, than with the modern society, preserving their ancestral traditions. You will see a variety of peasant architectural treasures, houses' styles and dimensions changing as you move from one region to another, from the German to Austrian, to Hungarian influences, from a landform to another. And you will taste the delicious specialties of the traditional cuisine, varying as well from one region to another.

Highlights:

- The splendid landscapes and the idyllic settings of the villages in Maramures, Bucovina and the Saxon area in Transylvania
- The unique Merry Cemetery of Sapanta village
- The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and Anticomunist Resistance in Sighet
- Nicolae Popa Museum in Tarpesti with its ethnographic collection, and the wooden and stone sculptures
- UNESCO World Heritage listed painted monasteries in Bucovina and wooden churches in Maramures
- The fortified churches in Transylvania
- The warmth and stories of our friends who are welcoming us in their traditional peasant houses

Day 1

Arrive by plane in Cluj –Napoca, the capital of Transylvania and meet with the tour leader. Transfer by car to Hoteni, at the foot of Gutai Mountains, one of the most authentic villages in Maramures terms of architecture, habits, and traditions. We are received in a traditional wooden house restored to a high degree of comfort. We have lunch and take time to accommodate to the surroundings by taking a short walk through gardens and orchards.

Day 2 (2h easy walking - optional)

After breakfast we drive for about 40 min to Sapanta where The Merry Cemetery lies (unique all over the world due to its bright colored naïve painted crosses and humoristic epitaphs).

Then we get to Sighetu Marmatiei, the capital of historical Maramures, where we take a plunge into Romanian recent history by visiting The Memorial of The Victims of Communism and Anticomunist Resistance. Originally an Austro-Hungarian prison, it would later become a communist political prison. Nowadays it is ranked as one of the best memorials in the world and probably the best on communism. The visit takes us on an itinerary through the cells, each one displaying information and exhibits on different themes: resistance, repression, terror, torture, demolitions, deportation, collectivization, poetry in prison, women in prison etc.

In the afternoon we head back towards Breb. We stop in Harnicesti village from where we continue by foot to Desesti, each one with its own ancient wooden church. We pass through peoples' gardens and orchards following an ancient narrow gauge railway track, then, return by the shores of Mara River where we discover a peasant hydro mechanical workshop.

In the evening we return to Hoteni. Traditional dinner and accommodation in Hoteni.





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Day 3

In the morning we head on Iza Valley and through Barsana village, where we stop to see the workshop and exhibition of Mr. Barsan, one of the last sculptors in Maramures specialized in traditional wood carving.

We stop in Poienile Izei to see the best preserved interior painting of a Maramures wooden church (included in the UNESCO heritage list). From here we continue to Botiza village, famous for the tradition of homemade carpets. Lunch in a peasant house and then continue to Ieud village, cradle of peasant intellectuality of Transylvania, one of the oldest villages in Maramures, housing the second oldest wooden church (1364) in the country.

We are accommodated in the house of a close friend of ours, whose ancestors ruled over this land 700 years ago.



Day 4

In the morning we visit the Hill Church – included in the UNESCO heritage list and then we start by minibus towards Prislop Mountain Pass (1417m) in order to pass into Bucovina region, an oasis of Romanian spirituality, housing the famous exterior painted monasteries (Voronet, Moldovita, Sucevita, Arbore and Humor) included in UNESCO's World heritage list.

The road takes us down to Golden Bistrita Valley. On its shores we will find typical villages of Northern Moldavia like Carlibaba, Botos, Ciocanesti, consisting in very well kept and fine decorated houses. Most of the houses are adorned with traditional painted floral and zoomorphic symbols. Even the newer buildings bear these decorations, including the town hall and the postal office

We pass the rounded Obcinile Bucovinei and stop for the night in Sucevita village, in an agro-tourist pension. Dinner and accommodation.

Day 5

In the morning we visit Sucevita monastery and the black pottery centre in Marginea village and then we pass the mountains to the beautiful valley of Moldovita. After seeing the monastery – built in the beginning of the 16th century and dominated by the yellow color, we visit one of the skilful local masters of the art of painting eggs. After a demonstration and a visit of her own exhibition, we might choose to savor a beer in a local pub or transfer back directly to our hosts in Sucevita to spend a few more hours in the tranquility of our host's orchard.

Dinner and accommodation.



Day 6

In the morning we visit Sucevita monastery and also the 5000 years old black pottery workshop in Marginea village, where we have the opportunity to see the artists at work, then we head south towards Moldova region. The route takes us through a series of extremely beautiful villages, with original architecture.



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At noon we reach Tarpesti village. It is one of the cultural highlights of our trip, as we have the chance to visit the vast collection of popular artefacts belonging to Mr Popa museum-house, to see the archaeological finds that he himself uncovered in more than 20 sites he personally explored, to see the collection of wooden and stone sculptures that he realised throughout his long life. Mr. Popa was a self-taught archeologist, ethnographer and collector, who died in the autumn of 2010 in his 92nd year of life, and his family is carrying on his legacy. We also have a tasty lunch in the laidback atmosphere of his garden.



We leave Tarpesti and head west towards Agapia and Varatec villages, both housing renowned monasteries and an impressive number of Orthodox nuns. From Varatec, passing the hills, we get to Valea Arini and Valea Seaca, two quiet villages with specific Moldovian architecture, then to the impressive Bicz Gorges, featuring vertical and overhanging limestone walls as high as 350m. Here we walk for a half an hour through the gorges and reach The Red Lake, a natural dam lake, formed in the beginning of the 19th century, situated at about 980 m altitude.

We are already in Transylvania, heading towards Viscri (Deutschweisskirche). It is a German village, like most of the saxon settlements nestled between the dense oak forests that cover these hills.

The German colonists arrived here 800-900 years ago when invited by the new master of Transylvania, the Hungarian king. They occupied the fertile valleys, bringing the feudal 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 German population is gone. In exchange you have the privilege to submerge in an enormous open air museum, the huge patrimony the Saxons left behind consists of naturally preserved architecture, especially the medieval fortified churches.

We take a stroll in the village to get the pulse of this small community, who is trying to preserve the German's heritage. Viscri is one of the villages in Romania where Prince Charles bought a traditional house.

Accommodation in peasant houses in Viscri.



Day 7

After breakfast we visit the fortified church in the village and then we take a ride in a horse pulled carriage in the surroundings. We will meet a family who produces wooden charcoal employing a traditional method.

In the afternoon we continue to a family specialised in manufacturing handmade tiles and bricks and then return to the village for a quiet evening.

Dinner and accommodation in peasant houses.



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Day 8

In the morning we leave Viscri and head West to other Saxon villages. We stop in Cris village – housing Bethlen Castle (built in the XIV century, by a noble Hungarian family, with a tumultuous, strange history). Then we continue also to Biertan - one of the first German settlements in Transylvania, the first attestation of its name being certified in 1283. As any other Transylvanian Saxon Community, it had an urban organization, being noticed the franconic style of the rows of houses around the central square overlooked by a grandiose fortress-church.

In the evening transfer to Sighisoara – still inhabited medieval citadel, included in the UNESCO heritage list. Dinner and accommodation in a 3*** hotel (medieval building as well) in the centre of the citadel.



Day 9

Transfer to Cluj for the flight back.

~ End of the program ~

The estimated price per person can vary between 640€ and 1175€ depending on the group size.