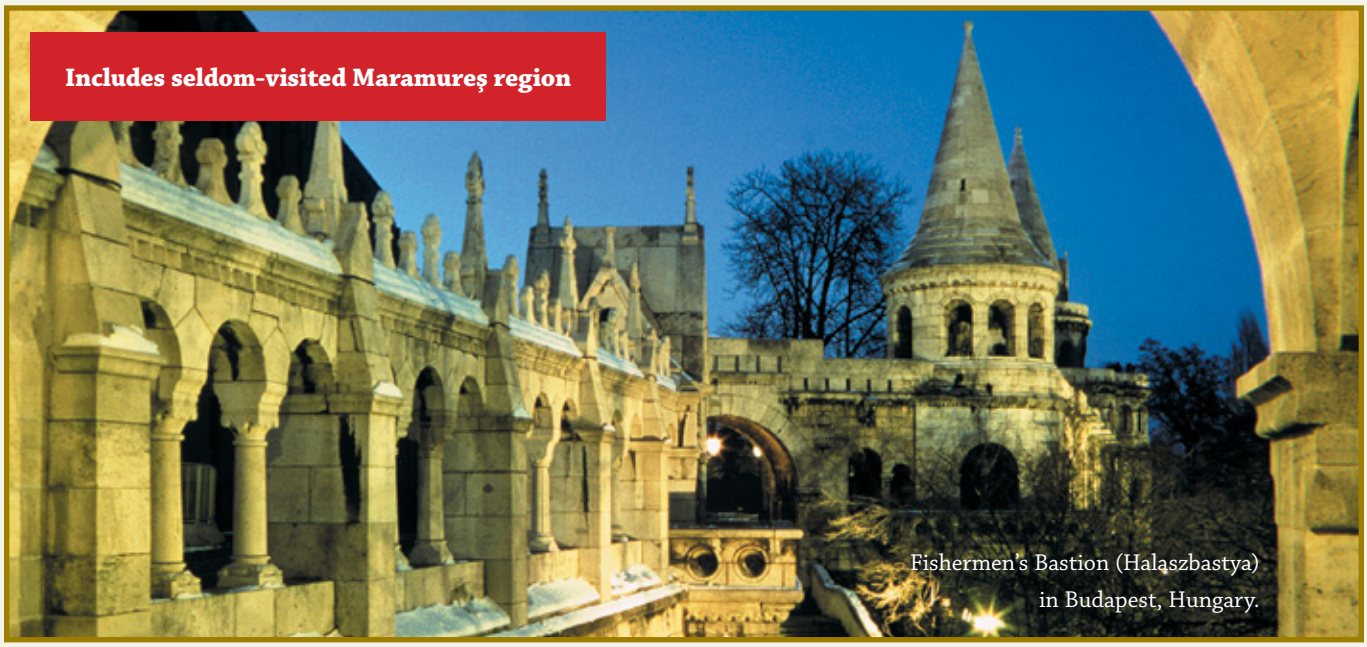
TRANSYLVANIA

DETAILED ITINERARY

ROMANIA & HUNGARY

Nov 13/25



Fishermen's Bastion (Halászbastya) in Budapest, Hungary.

Breathe the fresh air of coniferous woods in the country of Count Dracula, hike in the Carpathian Mountains, sample the famous wines of Hungary and gaze upon magnificent frescoes. Our trip to Hungary and Romania is an artful blend of culture, exquisite scenery, history and activity.

Our adventure in Transylvania begins in Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Onward through Transylvania, into the Carpathian Mountains, we encounter ancient pockets of European culture and sample the region's cuisine while sipping local wines in the ambience of a medieval castle. See the magnificent fortress-town of Sighisoara and walk through the grand square of Brasov. A true highlight is Bran Castle, a fortress atop a dramatic rock outcrop and more commonly known as Dracula's Castle.

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 20 land days • Maximum 14 travelers • Start in Bucharest, Romania, finish in Budapest, Hungary • All meals included • Explore Bucharest highlights • Visit the painted monasteries of Bucovina • See ancient fortified Saxon towns • Sample the cultural diversity of the Romanians, Seclers and Magyars • Hike through the last great wilderness of Europe • Visit UNESCO World Heritage Sites • Visit Maramures region and the tall wooden churches • Sample Hungarian wines in Tokaj

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

May 18 - Jun 05, 2026 - $8495 USD

Activity Level: 2-3

Comfort Level: Some long drives. Due to the layout of the itinerary, the unique places we visit and local European rules, we will not travel by microbus on this tour. Instead we will use up to 3 small vans which allow for ease of travel through towns and cities.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Comfortable accommodations with private bathrooms.

ELDERTREKS

SMALL GROUP
EXOTIC ADVENTURES
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS

We continue to the remote and unspoiled Maramures region, home to the tall wooden churches and continue on to Tokaj, where we will sample the famous sweet white wines. We We conclude our adventure in the famed city of Budapest and the Danube Bend, the Pearl of the Danube. Widely regarded as one of the world's most beautiful cities, Budapest is a city of spas, 2,000 year-old Roman amphitheaters, 400-year-old Turkish baths and 23 museums and galleries, all situated on the graceful Danube

DAY 1 ARRIVE BUCHAREST

Upon arrival in Bucharest, you are transferred to our hotel. Tonight we will have an orientation meeting followed by dinner.

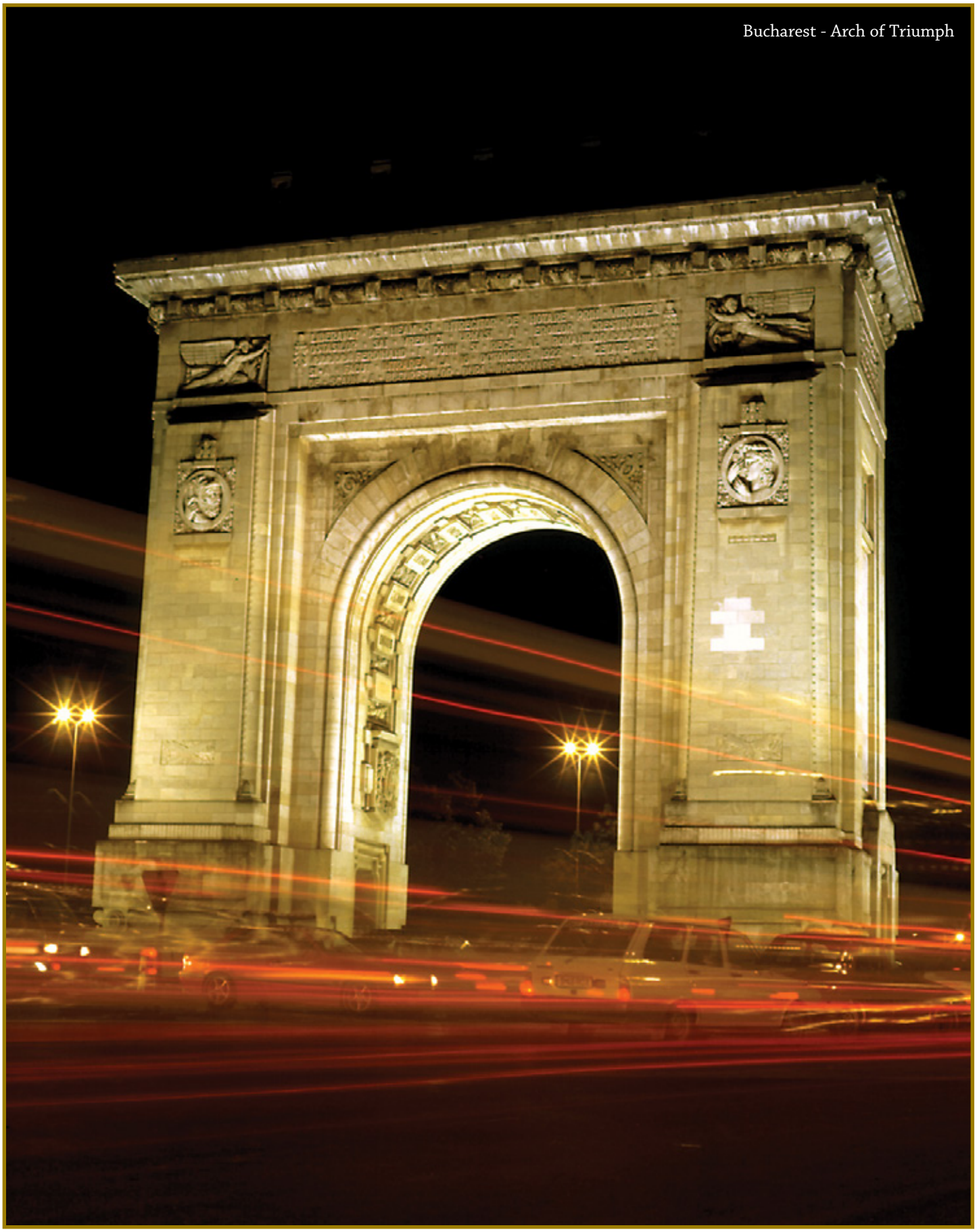
Overnight in Bucharest.

DAY 2 BUCHAREST EXPLORING

We begin our morning with a guided city tour of Bucharest, seeing the historical downtown and the Parliament Building, which was designed and nearly completed by the Ceausescu Regime as the seat of political and administrative power in Romania. Constructing the Palace required demolishing much of Bucharest's historic district, including 19 Orthodox Christian churches, six Jewish synagogues, three Protestant churches (plus eight relocated churches), and 30,000 residences. This is the world's second largest building after the Pentagon.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Pusta herdsman.


Bucharest - Arch of Triumph

DAY 3 TO BRASOV VIA SINAIA, AND BRAN CASTLE

Departing Bucharest, we begin our journey to Brasov, crossing the Carpathian Mountains. This is our point of entry into Transylvania, the land of Magyar, Saxon, Secler, Romanian and Moc Peoples. Enroute, we stop in Sinaia, named after Mount Sinai in Egypt. It is a mountainside town with winding streets and colorful houses. We visit Peles Castle, a former royal residence. Built between 1875 and 1883, the castle contains many architectural styles, 160 rooms, and beautiful terraces.

After lunch we drive to Bran Castle, one of the most famous castles in Europe and the setting of the famous Bram Stoker novel. Falsely attributed as a residence of Vlad Tepes and the Dracula myth, it is still a very impressive castle even if it isn't connected with infamy! The castle was built in 1378 atop a cliff that served as a customs checkpoint and as a strategic point for protecting the pass. Its narrow stone stairways, the comfortable rooms and furnishings give one a first-hand look at the life of nobles that ruled the region in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Overnight in Brasov.

DAY 4 BRASOV SIGHTSEEING, RISNOV

This morning we explore the downtown core of Brasov, one of the seven main Saxon cities. It has a well-preserved downtown square that is surrounded

Romanian Atheneum in Bucharest.

Photo: © ElderTreks

Brasov

by beautiful buildings. (It is reminiscent of squares found in Prague.) We visit the Black Church, named so by a fire that blackened its walls. Erected in 1476, the Gothic cathedral has a 250-foot high tower and an organ with 4000 pipes. We also visit the first Romanian school with amazing old Slavic manuscripts.

After lunch, we drive through the nearby mountains to the fortress of Risnov with its stunning panorama of the surrounding area. This enormous citadel was built around the year 1215 by the Teutonic Knights and was conquered only once in its history. The citadel is most famous for a well (470 ft/143 m deep) that was dug by Turkish prisoners of war during a siege and which sits today in the center of the fortress.

Overnight in Brasov.

DAY 5 PREJMAR, VISCRI, STORK VILLAGE

This morning we explore Prejmar, a former Saxon fortified church in a town outside Brasov. This church is exquisite in design and contrast, featuring thick walls with internal passages that were used to defend the inhabitants from attack. The Hungarian king, Geza the 2nd, first invited the Saxons to the area in the 13th century, mainly to develop and resettle the area after the Tatar invasions. The Saxons lived in this area until the revolution of 1989, when most of the population left. The Saxon heritage is most valuable from both a cultural and architectural point of view.

Biertan

After an hour drive, we will stop at the village of Viscri (UNESCO World Heritage Site), with one of the most impressive of all the Saxon citadels. From the tower, there is a view of the idyllic countryside and of the village, a classic Saxon Strassendorf, with a row of houses on either side of a single street and a brook running down the center. Hear about the history of the village from one of the last Saxon inhabitants as we learn about the traditions, culture and folklore of the local people. Enjoy a typical Saxon lunch with a local family.

We continue through the Homorod valley where we pass the official stork village of Romania, Sinpaul. The white stork is the national bird for most of the Eastern European countries and we will see the many nests built by the storks here.

Overnight in Odorheiu Secuiesc.

DAY 6 MT. HARGITA HIKES, SECLER GATES AND ENLAKA VILLAGE

This morning we drive up to Mt. Hargita, the sacred peak of the local Seclers, via the scenic Ivo-stream valley. There we have a two hour-long hike to the very peak, where we can enjoy the landscape of central Transylvania with long-range views of the Carpathians. After lunch, below the top of the hill, we enjoy a short break, before continuing on to the remote village of Enlaka. Enroute we stop in a small village, famous for its dozens of “Secler-gates”, whose beauty adorns the streets. These gates were a sign of hospitability and showcased the skill of local

Sighisoara

woodworkers. Many of these gates are more than one hundred years old, and are deemed to be national monuments. Afterwards continue on to Enlaka, a traditional Unitarian village and a potential UNESCO World Heritage Site that preserves the ancient traditions and architecture of the local people. After sightseeing in the local museum and Unitarian church, we enjoy a dinner in a local barn cooked by a local family.

Overnight in Odorheiu Secuiesc.

DAY 7 BIERTAN, SIGHISOARA

Today we will visit more Saxon heritage sites. Our first stop is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Biertan. The Saxons built this fortified church, which houses a magnificent altar made up of 28 panels, in the 15th century. We drive through picturesque countryside seeing other secluded Saxon villages before arriving at Sighisoara (Shassburg), the best-preserved medieval/fortified Saxon town in Europe. Walk up to Citadel Hill along narrow winding streets crowned with a 200-foot clock tower that watches over the main gate. This 14th-century building contains old documents, weapons, coins and glass icons. Atop Citadel Hill, there is a Gothic cathedral with strange stone sculptures on the buttresses. You can also visit the house where Vlad Tepes "Dracula" was born. It is now a pub!

Overnight in Odorheiu Secuiesc.

DAY 8 CHARCOAL MAKERS TO BUCOVINA

Our first stop will be a small pass to see the work of a traditional charcoal maker before continuing on to the village of Korond, whose inhabitants are the most famous handicraft makers in the country and where more than 5000 families make a livelihood from producing ceramics and wooden crafts.

We continue on to Voronet, our base to explore the famous Painted Monasteries of Bucovina. Our journey today has us crossing the Bucsin-Pass of the Eastern Carpathians through beautiful traditional countryside towards our base in remote Bucovina, home of the painted monasteries.

Overnight in Voronet.

Underground salt mine.

DAY 9 PAINTED MONASTERIES OF BUCOVINA: VORONET, VATRA MOLDOVITA, SUCEVITA, VAMA JEWISH CEMETERY AND EGG MUSEUM, MARGINEA, CACIKA, SOLCA

Among the most picturesque treasures of Romania are the Painted Monasteries of Bucovina. Their painted exterior walls are decorated with elaborate 15th and 16th century frescoes featuring portraits of saints and prophets, scenes from the life of Jesus, images of angels and demons, and heaven and hell. Deemed masterpieces of Byzantine art, these churches are one-of-a-kind architectural sites in Europe. Far from being merely wall decorations, the murals represent complete cycles of religious doctrine. The purpose of the frescoes was to make the story of the Bible and the lives of the most important Orthodox saints known to villagers by the use of images. Their outstanding composition, elegant outline and harmonious colors blend perfectly with the surrounding landscape. Some of Romania's most beautiful countryside is to be found in Bucovina, whose rolling green hills nestle villages and monasteries within their valleys. Horses decked with red-tasseled bridles travel country lanes, as villagers crowd churchyards in traditional folk dress on Sundays and holidays. Seven of the churches were placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993. The eighth, Sucevita, is awaiting sanction to be added to the list.

Today we will explore the Painted Monasteries of of Voronet, Vatra Moldovita, Sucevita and we also stop at the abandoned Jewish cemetery near Vama and visit an egg museum. Later we will stop at the Polish village of Cacika to see its cathedral and the Soviet war cemetery of Solca.

Overnight in Voronet.

DAY 10 PAINTED MONASTERIES OF BUCOVINA: HUMOR, PETRAUC, SUCEVITA. SUCEAVA FORTRESS

We have a second day to explore the painted monasteries, this time visiting the monasteries of Humor, Petrauc and Sucevita, as well as the Coronation Church of Suceava and the nearby Suceava Fortress. There will be plenty of photo opportunities to capture the beautiful landscape of Romania, and see local people travelling on horse carts, surrounded by hundreds of handmade haystacks.

Overnight in Voronet.

Medieval center of Sighisoara

Moc village.

DAY 11 BUCOVINA TO TO MARAMURES - CIACONESTI, PRISLOP, BORSA, SACEL, DRAGOMIRESTI

Today we begin our long drive through spectacular and traditional mountain scenery through one of the more remote parts of Romania. Our first stop today is the village of Ciaconesti, noted for its decorated Hutul houses, which form an outdoor living museum. Most of the houses bear traditional motifs with Ukrainian influence, similar to painted Easter eggs. The village is on the shore of the Bistrica River, which is known as an excellent fly-fishing river and where an annual trout-festival takes place.

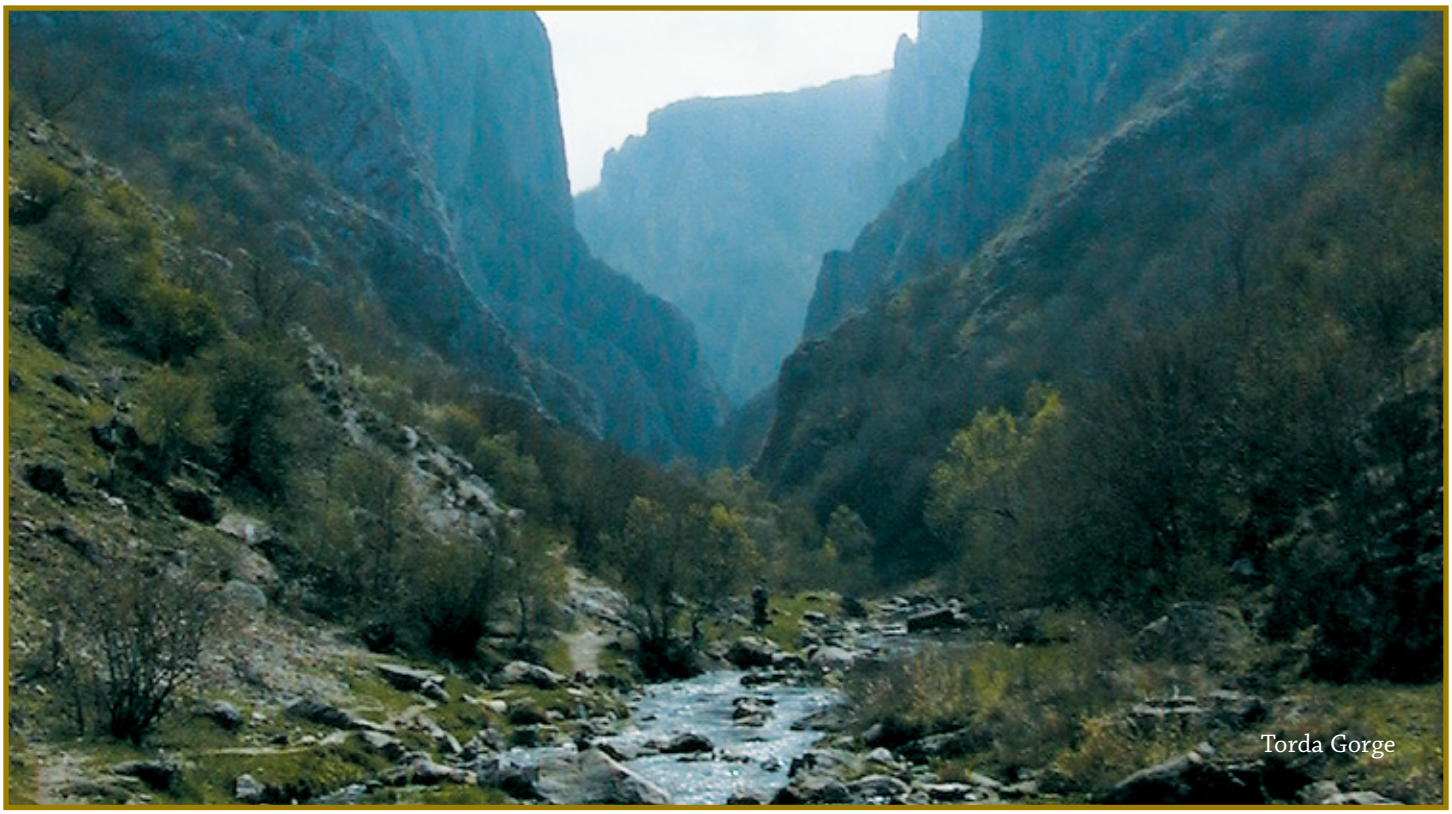
We leave behind the historical area of Bucovina, and cross the highest pass of Northern Romania, Prislop Pass (1400m); a beautiful alpine region, known to house the last population of Romanian Black grouses.

On our way towards Sighetul Marmatei, we will have our first glance at the Maramureş style of church, with the beautifully decorated wooden churches of Borsa and Leud. The whole Maramureş region is home to the extremely hospitable Moroseni people, who are known for their unchanged way of life and for their well-preserved wooden villages and churches. About 30 churches belong to this architectural style, mostly built in the 17th-18th centuries, with 8 of them belonging to Unesco World Heritage. It is perhaps one of the well known regions of Romania but due to its remoteness is seldom visited. We will also stop at the Museum of Peasant Woman in Dragomiresti village, which is dedicated to the celebration of the role of the woman as mother, wife and her role as 'engine of life - the one who keeps the traditional customs, folklore and language alive'.

Overnight in Sighetu Marmatiei.

DAY 12 MARAMURES - EXPLORING COSAU AND THE IZA VALLEY - BUDESTI, SARBI, BARSANA, BOTIZA, POIENILE IZEI

Today is dedicated to visiting the most famous examples of the Maramureş monasteries and churches,



Torda Gorge

Photo: © Lajos Németh

including the Rozavlea, Poienile Izei, Barsana, Budesti and Desesti wooden churches. They are mostly Romanian-Orthodox (with a few exceptions of Greek-Orthodox), built by thick timber, as a response to the prohibition against the erection of stone orthodox churches by the Catholic Austro-Hungarian authorities of the era. Most of them share similar characteristics of being tall, having slim bell towers at the western edge of the building and painted inside with beautiful Biblical scenes.

We will stop at the traditional water mill workshop and whirlpools of Sarbi village, a place for washing clothes, rugs and blankets. The village also well-known for its hat-makers, which is a common part of male traditional dress, and there are plenty of wool rugs for sale.

Overnight in Sighetu Marmatiei.

DAY 13 MARAMURES - PERI MONASTERY, MERRY CEMETERY, COMMUNIST VICTIMS MEMORIAL, ELIE WIESEL MUSEUM

On our tour today we will visit the local sights in and around Sighetul Marmatiei. First we drive to the tallest wooden church of the region, the Peri-Sapanta church, located in a beautiful Dendrological park. The original church was built in 1391 but decayed significantly and so was rebuilt in 1997. The tower is 78 meters tall and the building is considered the tallest wooden church in the world, as registered in the Guinness Book of Records.

Later we continue to the Sapinta Merry Cemetery, known for its brightly colored tombstones which depicts interesting or funny moments of the deceased, many with greatly written epitaphs. The cemetery also functions as an open-air museum and is known as one of the so-called "Seven Wonders of Romania." We visit a workshop for wooden painted crosses nearby.

After lunch we visit the Communists Victims' Memorial, before we finish at the Memorial House of Elie Wiesel, which also houses the Museum of Jewish Culture in Maramureş. Elie Wisel, a Nobel-prized writer (1986) was born and raised in this region and is a descendant of a Hungarian Jewish family who was deported to Auschwitz for 11 months, before his liberation and is the only survivor of his family. Later he emigrated to the US and Canada, and died in Manhattan, NY in 2016.

Overnight in Sighetu Marmatiei.

DAY 14 TO TARCAL-TOKAJ, HUNGARY

We leave the Carpathian region of Romania, entering Hungary along the Hungarian Great Plain and its floodplain of the Tisza and Bodrog Rivers. A

Budapest at night

longer morning drive takes us to the world famous wine region of Tokaj.

The small town of Tokaj has less than 4000 inhabitants (of six different religions) and is situated on the shore of the Bodrog river at the foot of Tokaj Hill. The area is world-renowned for its famous white dessert and ice-wines wines, such as "Aszu", "Szomorodni." We will visit and dine in some of the local cellars where we learn about the history and technology of this very special way of wine making. We will visit and dine in some of the local cellars where we learn about the history and technology of this very special way of wine making. Of course, we will have ample opportunity to sample and buy them as well.

Overnight in the Tarca/Tokaj area

DAY 15 ZEMPLEN HILLS - REGEC AND BOLDOGKOVARALJA FORTRESSES

We have a relaxing day to drive around and visit Zemplen Hills, the most remote and tranquil part of Hungary, with its small villages, gentle hills and huge forests, inhabited by wolves and eagles. The area is dotted with several beautiful hilltop fortresses built during the medieval times, when most of the old Hungarian kingdom was under Ottoman rule, and only a small section, including Zemplen Hills was left alone. After the Tatar invasion of the 14th century, the Hungarian king, Bela the 4th, ordered all the local landlords to build this type of fortress which would provide the local population a better chance of survival and help defend the roads and the country. The dozens of fortresses survived several centuries and functioned as shelters later in the Turkish era. Many of them saw the largest battles of the era between the 15th -17th century.

We will visit the fortress Regec, known for its scenery and location, which was home to one of the most famous Hungarian freedom fighters, Ferenc Rakoczi 2nd, who led the national uprising against the Austrian Habsburgs at the beginning of the 18th century. We will get an overview into the last 1100 years of the history of Hungary, which also shaped the history of Central Europe and the Balkans up to the up to the early 20th century. On the way back, we also stop at the picturesque Boldogkovaralja fortress, overlooking the lovely Hernad river-valley, and the village below.

Afterwards, we will return back to our hotel, where the rest of the afternoon is free to relax.

Overnight in Tarcal/Tokaj

DAY 16 MEZOKOVESD (MATYO WORKSHOPS), GODOLLO, TO BUDAPEST

As we start our drive towards Budapest this morning, we follow along the foothills of Bukk and Matra Hills toward the capital of Hungary. Enroute we stop at Mezokovesd city to visit the local Museum Of Embroideries. Hungary and Transylvania have several areas with very distinctive and incredibly ornate local cloths which are decorated with beautiful embroideries. Probably the most well known and recognized is the "Matyo" style, which is mostly done in and around Mezokovesd town. We will visit two small workshops here, where we learn about the history of embroideries, paintings and other interesting facts about the local culture.

After lunch, we continue to travel towards Budapest, and stop at the former royal palace of Godollo. Godollo was a palace of Emperor Franz Joseph, King Charles IV (the last Hungarian king), and Nicholaus Horthy, Regent of Hungary between the two World Wars. Partially restored over the last two years, the building and garden provide a glimpse into the Austro-Hungarian Empire's regal past, highlighting the life of the famous Sissi, wife of Emperor Franz Joseph.

Overnight in Budapest.

Painted Monastery at Voronet (Bucovina)

DAY 17 BUDAPEST SIGHTSEEING - BUDA HIGHLIGHTS

The broad Danube River runs through the middle of this stunning metropolis, dividing hilly Buda from the Pest plain, with nine beautiful old bridges and romantic islands. Although Budapest was first populated 50,000 years ago, its current name dates just over 140 years old and came into existence when Old Buda, Buda and Pest all united in 1873. It boasts 80 thermal springs which supply 12 spa baths, 237 historical monuments, 23 museums and galleries, 40 theaters, and seven concert halls.

Today we explore the hilly Buda side, with a guided walking tour through the Castle District. We have the opportunity to see the Royal Palace and National Gallery, followed by a visit to the Matthias Church which has a magnificent view of the beautiful bridges just below. For lunch we will cross the Danube, and visit the big Markethall, and than the afternoon is free, with endless opportunities to visit famous sites of your choice, including a nearby synagogue, which is the 2nd largest in the world, the Opera House, The Terror House, the National Museum, or art galleries, just to name a few.

Following dinner we will enjoy an unforgettable city view with a drive up to the Citadel Hill (aka Geller Hill) to see Budapest illuminated at night.

Overnight in Budapest.

DAY 18 BUDAPEST SIGHTSEEING - PEST HIGHLIGHTS

Today, we begin our exploration of the Pest side on foot and by bus. First, we drive to Heroes' Square to see its grand statues, museums and the lovely park, where we stop and learn about Hungarian history. We drive along Andrassy Street (a World Heritage Site), and see its most important buildings, including the famous Opera House. We then visit the Basilica, the greatest of the Hungarian churches. After lunch we have a guided tour in the Parliament Building, which is ranked as one of the most beautiful in the world. With 691 rooms, this neo-Gothic palace stretches 880 feet (268 meters) along the embankment of the Danube River.

Overnight in Budapest.

DAY 19 DANUBE BEND: VISEGRAD, SZENTENDRE

Today, we travel north from Budapest to the very center of the Danube Bend, visiting the Royal Palace of Visegrad City. Completed in 1330, Visegrad was the largest building ensembles in medieval Hungary and was declared as the capital in the 14th century. "From Visegrad, from an earthly paradise" - thus wrote an ambassador of the Pope, guest of King Matthias (1458-1490), and a person well used to glitter and pomp. We travel to the Serbian city of Szentendre to explore this legendary old museum town. With its winding streets, church towers and colorful houses, Szentendre is probably the Danube Bend's most visited tourist center and is a fascinating place to explore. It is a perfect place for shopping, including gorgeous embroideries and other so-called "hungaricums". Tonight, we enjoy our farewell dinner.

Overnight in Budapest.

DAY 20 DEPART BUDAPEST

Our adventure in Eastern Europe concludes today as we depart for Budapest Airport to board our international flights home.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 14 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit museums, national parks and reserves and have talks and discussions on many aspects of history, culture and nature. But this is only a portion of the educational experience. We believe that it is equally educational to meet local people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are wandering through the streets of a mountain village.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All local transportation is included in the land price of the trip. All transportation is in 2 or 3, 9-seater vans with a/c.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in good accommodations that range from mountain-view lodges and small hotels to larger city-based hotels. All nights have private bathrooms.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Our adventures in Transylvania take place in the spring and summer. Temperatures can vary between the low 70's ˚F (21°C) in the Carpathian Mountains to the high 80's ˚F (32°C) on the plains of Hungary.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the "Terms and Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is mandatory for this adventure. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings; many served open-air picnic style. Hungary and Romania are known for their food and drinks and there will be ample opportunity to sample the specialties throughout the adventure.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.

Bran “Dracula” Castle