



Treasures of Travel

Jewels of the Balkans ~ Romania & Bulgaria, 2024 ~ 19 Days/17 Nights ~

The Balkans- true mosaic of people of different cultural, religious and historical backgrounds. The birthplace of the Cyrillic alphabet and home to some well-known, important citizens such as Tito and Mother Teresa, is also blessed with picturesque villages and monasteries, unspoiled countryside and many fascinating historical sites proudly telling you about the glorious past and turbulent history of the area.

Day 1

Depart the USA on overnight flight to Bucharest, Romania.

Day 2 ~ Sinaia

Upon your arrival at Bucharest airport, we'll meet and transfer you to Sinaia for overnight, named the Pearl of the Carpathians, due to its unique natural beauties. **Overnight in Sinaia.**

Day 3 ~ Sibiu

We start our day with the visit to the summer residence of the first royal couple, King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth, **Peles Castle**, one of the most beautiful palaces in Europe. You will discover this unique masterpiece of German Neo-Renaissance style castle, a reminder of the King's Carol German origins. We'll drive to Sibiu, diving into Transylvania, having a photo stop at Fagaras citadel, one of the best conserved feudal monuments in Europe. The fortress is surrounded by two sets of walls and a moat, which is why it has never been conquered. Upon arrival in Sibiu we'll have a guided walking tour of the medieval town (the Main Square, the Evangelical Church, the Liars' Bridge etc.). Sibiu - once one of the easternmost cities of the glittering Hapsburg Empire was European Cultural Capital in 2007. Nine centuries of cultural treasures await discovery. **Overnight in Sibiu.**

Day 4 ~ Sibiu

In the morning, we'll drive to Hunedoara and visit **Corvin castle**, the largest gothic Castle in the Eastern Europe. In the afternoon, visit the picturesque village of Sibiel. We'll tour the **Icon Glass Museum** that hosts the largest painted icons in Transylvania, unique in Europe. **Dinner will be in a local family home including meat and cabbage rolls cooking demonstration.** You will have the unique chance to learn more about the local traditions in Romania and discover the old ways of cooking. **Overnight in Sibiu.**

Day 5 ~ Sighisoara

After breakfast we'll head to Turda and visit the salt mine. **Turda Salt Mine** is very old, mentioned by Hungarian chancellery for the first time in the Middle Ages (1075AD). In 1932, after more than 900 years of constant salt mining, the salt extraction was stopped due to low productivity and the mine closed. Sixty years later, the mine has been reopened, this time for tourism, for people to discover one of the world's most spectacular underground formation. Drive to Sighisoara, the best preserved medieval citadel in Europe (UNESCO heritage). **Overnight in Sighisoara.**

Day 6 ~ Gura Humorului

We'll start the day with a sightseeing walking tour in the old citadel. This perfectly intact 16th century gem with nine towers, cobbled streets, burgher houses and ornate churches rivals the historic streets of Old Prague or Vienna for atmospheric magic. Admire the **Clock Tower** with its weapons museum, the 13th century Venetian House and the Church of the Dominican Monastery, known for its Transylvanian renaissance carved altarpiece, baroque pulpit, Oriental carpets and 17th century organ, etc. We'll then travel towards Bucovina, passing by Targu Mures, a famous Hungarian stronghold and by Bistrita (Bram Stoker's novel Dracula, this is the city where Jonathan Harker spent the night before meeting the count). **Dinner and overnight in Gura Humorului.**

Day 7 ~ Gura Humorului

Today, we'll discover the hidden treasures of Bucovina, the land of UNESCO painted monasteries. Visit **Vornet Monastery**, called "the Sistine Chapel of the East" due to the dominant "blue" of its frescoes and the beauty of the paintings, masterpieces of the post-Byzantine time, of which the scene of the "Last Judgement" is worldwide known. We'll also visit the **Museum of Painted Eggs** in Vatra Moldovitei. Of all the Romanian customs the one of painting eggs for Easter is by far the smoothest and the warmest. Nowhere else but in Bucovina the egg is looked upon with so much love and the tradition of painting is raised at an artistic level. The oldest and most suggestive painted eggs, carrying old symbols – pre Christian ones - are taken from the areas inhabited by those people called "hutuli", this tradition is at home here in Moldovita - Bucovina, a place where these people came to a long time ago. We'll tour **Moldovita Monastery**, one of the eight painted churches included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. Its external walls, covered with frescos representing complete religious cycles, are a masterpiece inspired by 15th and 16th century Byzantine art. We end our day with a visit to **Sucevita Monastery**, a masterpiece and a 'testament of Moldavian art'. **Dinner and overnight in Gura Humorului.**

Day 8 ~ Brasov

We'll drive along Bicaz Lake and its impressive dam, to admire the scenic view. We could cross the fabulous Bicaz Gorges – on foot, if the weather permits. Arrival at Lacu Rosu, located at 3000 ft altitude, formed over 2 centuries ago, after a massive slip of ground that locked the water path. Moreover, at the surface of the 30 ft depth lake, the tips of the tree trunks swallowed by the waters can be seen, where the birds and wild geese are resting. Upon arrival in Brasov we'll have a walking tour of the city to admire the unique baroque buildings. 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. Founded by the Teutonic Knights in 1211 on an ancient Dacian site and settled by the Saxons as one of the seven walled citadels, Brasov exudes a distinct medieval ambiance and has been used as backdrop in many recent period films. We'll visit **Black Church**, the largest gothic church between Vienna and Istanbul. **Overnight in Brasov.**

Day 9 ~ Bucharest

In the morning we'll leave Brasov for Bran to visit the famous medieval castle built as a fortress - The **"Dracula's" Castle** – for the citizens of Brasov with view to defend the city. Prince Vlad used the Castle as a general headquarters during his incursions in Transylvania. Surrounded by an aura of mystery and legend and perched high atop a 200-foot-high rock, Bran Castle owes its fame to its imposing towers and turrets as well as to the myth created around Bram Stoker's Dracula. Built on the site of a Teutonic Knights stronghold dating from 1212, the castle was first documented in an act issued by Louis I of Hungary on November 19, 1377, giving the Saxons of Kronstadt (Brasov) the privilege to build the Citadel. Next we'll head to Bucharest, the Romanian capital. We'll have **sightseeing tour in the city** that was once called 'little Paris of the East', discovering unique places and people as we pass by Victory Avenue, Romanian Athenaeum, Royal Palace, National Military Club. In the afternoon, we'll carry on with walking tour in the old city center of Bucharest. The tangle of cobbled streets and alleys of this

district undoubtedly reminds of Paris. Strolling in its narrow streets is the best way to soak up the old Bucharest life. **Overnight in Bucharest.**

Day 10 ~ Shumen

After breakfast you'll meet your Bulgarian guide and driver to departure to Danube Bridge1 (the Bridge of Friendship), crossing the border, to **Ruse** – the largest Bulgarian Danubian city, once important Roman port with the name “Sexaginta Prista” (the Harbour of 60 shops). Ruse is also called the “small Vienna” because of its architecture. We'll have a walking tour in the central part of the city and free time for lunch.

On the way to Shumen we'll stop in Ivanovo village to visit **Ivanovo Rock-hewn churches UNESCO site. Dinner and overnight in Shumen.**

Day 11 ~ Varna/region

After the morning walking tour of Shumen, we'll proceed to **Madara UNESCO site**. The most notable monument at the Madara historical, archaeological reserve is the unique stone relief known as the Madara Horseman, carved on a massive cliff some 75ft high, representing early Medieval Bulgarian artistry. Next we will depart to the small town of Ispereh, for a short lunch stop before visiting Sbornovo Archeological reserve which currently includes more than 140 archaeological and cultural monuments - the remains of ancient settlements, 5 large necropolis with 120 tombs, cultural and religious Thracian, Christian and Muslim complexes. We will visit 2 of the most interesting sites - **Demir Baba Teke and Sveshtari Thracian tomb (UNESCO site)**

Late afternoon we'll transfer to the **region of Varna**, where we will spend the next 2 nights, close to the Black Sea coast.

Day 12 ~ Varna/region

The Day will be dedicated to the Black Sea coast. We will start with a tour of **Varna** – the marine capital city of Bulgaria as well as largest seaside port. In the Archaeological Museum, we will see the oldest gold processed by human so far found on the Earth from Varna Necropolis, dating back to 4th millennium BC, the Cathedral of the Assumption, the 2nd century Thermae - the remains of the largest Roman public building in Bulgaria. Free time for lunch.

In the afternoon we'll departure to **Nessebur UNESCO town**, located on a small, picturesque peninsula to the south. According to Strabo, the town was named Messambria, (later changed to Slavic Nessebur), after the legendary founder – a Thracian by the name Melsa and the Thracian name for city “bria”. The city's history starts in the 2nd millennium BC; the Hellenic colony on this site was founded in 510 BC by Dorian settlers. Having captured Messambria in 72 – 71 BC, the Romans preserved the city intact, leaving a permanent garrison there. During the Roman era, new temples dedicated to Demeter, Asclepiad, Hecate, Isis, etc. were erected. On the northern shore of the peninsula the Temple of Zeus was built. At the big local theatre, drama, music performances and poetry readings were arranged. Since the 4th c AD, Messambria maintained close links with Constantinople, during the 7th c it became one of the “special” locations where out of favor politicians and courtiers were exiled from Constantinople.

We'll return to the hotel in **Varna Region for dinner and overnight.**

Day 13 ~ Veliko Turnovo

Today we will depart to Central Bulgaria, via the small town of **Devnya** where we will stop in order to visit the Museum of Roman mosaics.

Next we'll proceed to **Veliko Turnovo** – the medieval capital city of Bulgaria, picturesquely located on 4 hills above Yantra river. Walking city tour includes Tsarevets Citadel – the “Royal Hill” with Baldwin tower (the leader of the 4th Crusade, who was imprisoned here) and the Patriarch's complex, Gurko street with the Monument of Asenevtsi, Samovodska Charshia – the old marketplace where we will have **wine tasting with dinner at a local wine club. Overnight in Veliko Turnovo.**

Day 14 ~ Kazanlak

In the morning we'll head towards Gabrovo (Bulgarian capital of humor), crossing the highest and most picturesque part of Stara Planina – the Balkan Mountain (the mountain, which gave its name to the Balkan peninsula). We will stop at Shipka mountain pass, to the memorial peak and later at the beautiful Shipka Church. We'll arrive in Kazanluk – the centre of the Valley of roses, known as well as the Valley of the Thracian kings. Once about 75% of the world rose attar was produced here. Nowadays, Bulgaria is among the 4 largest producers of rose oil in the world, as well as # 1 producer of lavender oil.

We'll visit Goliama Kosmatka Thracian tomb (believed to be the tomb of the Thracian king Sevt 3rd) and Kazanluk Thracian tomb (UNESCO site, copy, 4th – 3rd c BC). **Dinner and overnight in Kazanlak.**

Day 15 ~ Plovdiv

We'll visit family-run rose and lavender distillery before Proceeding to **Stara Zagora** to explore the Neolithic Dwellings Museum, which is built around two Neolithic dwellings dating back to the 6th millennium BC, which are the best-preserved in Europe from this period. Kitchens, fireplaces, hand grain mills, and ceramic vessels comprise the richest inventory of 6th millennium BC prehistoric house life in Europe. Early afternoon we'll continue our journey to Plovdiv and Bachkovo Monastery, located some 30 min drive from Plovdiv. This is the 2nd largest monastery in Bulgaria, built in the 11th c and connected with the history of the 3rd Crusade. **Dinner and overnight Plovdiv.**

Day 16 ~ Plovdiv

We'll spend the whole day in Plovdiv- the 2nd largest city in Bulgaria, once was the capital city of Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. The city is the contemporary of Troy, and is much older than Athens and Rome.

Plovdiv is declared the oldest continually-inhabited city in Europe and the 6th oldest in the world.

Plovdiv was European capital of Culture in 2019.

We'll **tour the Old Plovdiv** architectural reserve with the Ancient Amphitheatre, St. Constantine and Helena Church and the Ethnographic museum. We'll continue with the tour on the longest pedestrian street in the world, defeating Copenhagen/ Denmark in 2015 with a total length of 5,300 feet. Along the street we'll see the remains of the Roman Forum, the Roman Stadium, Djumaya Mosque square, many small restaurants, cafes, fountains, souvenir and boutique shops, as well as Kapana – the artistic neighborhood of Plovdiv. The rest will be free time in Plovdiv. **Dinner and overnight in Plovdiv.**

Day 17 ~ Sofia

In the morning we'll leave Plovdiv for Sofia, following the mountain roads to **Rila Monastery UNESCO site** – the largest complex in Bulgaria, built in the 11th c and picturesquely located at 3,300 feet above sea level in Rila Mountain National Park. We'll visit the monastery's museum, yard and main church.

We'll have another stop on the way at **Boyana Church UNESCO** site before arriving in Sofia. **Dinner and overnight in Sofia.**

Day 18 ~ Sofia

We'll spend all day in Sofia – the capital city of Bulgaria, which Constantine the Great once called 'My Rome'. Sofia was originally a Thracian settlement called Serdica, named after the Thracian tribe Serdi that had populated it. Around 500 BC another tribe settled in the region, the Odrysi, known as an ethnos with their own kingdom. The sightseeing includes: St. George Rotunda from the 4th century (the oldest building preserved in Sofia), the ruins of Ancient Serdica, Arena di Serdica, Alexander Nevski Memorial Cathedral, the undergrounds museum of St. Sofia Basilica, and the Parliament Square.

You will have free afternoon for own discoveries / rest.

This evening we'll have a farewell dinner with folklore performance and Nestinari show (UNESCO protected dance with bare feet on burning coal), weather permitting. **Overnight in Sofia.**

Day 19 ~ Depart for home.

We will **transfer** you to the airport for your flight home.

Departure Dates: 19 days/17 nights:

May 9 ~ 27

September 12 ~ 30

Tour Price:

\$4,200.00 per person in double room and 9 ~ 12 guests traveling together

\$4,400.00 per person in double room and 6 ~ 8 guests traveling together

\$5,500.00 per person in double room and 3 ~ 5 guests traveling together

\$6,400.00 per person in double room and 2 guests traveling together

\$1,100.00 single supplement

Price Includes:

- Accommodation for 17 nights at selected 4 and 5 star hotels including service charges and taxes (4 star hotels in Sinaia, Sibiu, Sighisoara, Gura Humoruli, Shumen, Varna area, Veliko Turnovo and Plovdiv. 5-star hotels in Brasov, Bucharest, Kazanlak and Sofia)
- All breakfasts
- 17 dinners (dinner at the hotel in Sinaia, Sibiu, Sighisoara, Gura Humorului, homemade dinner with cooking demonstration in a local farmhouse in Sibiel, dinner in a local restaurant in Brasov, farewell dinner in a local restaurant in Bucharest, dinner at the hotel in Shumen, Varna area, dinner with wine tasting at Samovodska Charshia – Veliko Turnovo, dinner at local restaurants in Kazanluk, Plovdiv and Sofia – incl. a farewell dinner with folklore) – 3-course menu + mineral water
- Local guide in Romania and in Bulgaria (in case of up to 6 persons, the guide will also drive)
- Transport with car in case of 2 persons, minibus 6-8 seats in case 4 to 6 pax, 14+ seater minivan in case of 8 pax, all border and road taxes, parkings
- Professional English speaking guide for 7 guests and more
- Entrance fees to the sites indicated in bold on the itinerary
- All arrival and departure transfers
- Taxes for the Danube Bridge
- Taxes for Romania-Bulgaria border crossings
- Baggage handling
- Information package with itineraries, travel and visa information, and luggage tags.