



## *Treasures of Travel*

### *Jewels of the Balkans ~ Romania & Bulgaria, 2023 ~ 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 ~ Bucharest*

Upon arrival at the international airport of Bucharest, you will meet your local guide and be **transferred** to your hotel in Bucharest. After checking in at your room, if time permits, your guide will lead a brief orientation tour of the neighbourhood of the hotel. You will have dinner and **overnight in Bucharest**.

#### *Day 3 ~ Deva*

After breakfast, we'll set on our journey through Romania heading from south to northwest via spectacular gorge of the Jiu River. We'll have a short stop in **Targu Jiu**, home to the famous Romanian sculptor **Constantin Brancusi**, who spend his childhood here. His large sculptures are now the main tourist attractions of the city: *The Table of Silence*, *Stool Alley*, *The Gate of the Kiss*, and *The Endless Column*.

Our next destination is **Sarmizegetusa**, to visit the ruins of **Ulpia Traiana**, which was the Roman capital of Dacia, built by Roman Emperor Trajan some 40 km /25 miles away from already existing capital of the Dacian kingdom Sarmisegetuza Regia. The place soon became the political, administrative and religious centre of Dacia Romana, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Originally built on the ground of a camp of the Fifth Macedonian Legion, the city was populated with veterans of the Dacian wars. From the very beginning, it received the title of colonia and the status of *Ius Italicum*; its strong fortifications covered an area of 30 hectares (74 acres), with a population between 20,000 – 25,000. The city was destroyed by the Goths. Today Ulpia Traiana remains in ruins, with a partly conserved forum, an amphitheatre and remnants of several temples.

Next we'll tour the greatest Gothic-style castle in Romania, **Hunyad's Castle**, which was built by the Anjou family on the site of a former Roman camp. The castle served as a fortress until the mid-14th century when it became the residence of Transylvania's ruler, Iancu de Hunedoara. Iancu upgraded the fortress transforming it into the most stunning castle in Transylvania. The beautifully preserved structure features a sumptuous Knights' Hall, an impressive drawbridge, high buttresses, inner courtyards, a chapel and some 50 rooms with impressive medieval art. Dinner and **overnight in Deva**.

### *Day 4 ~ Bistrita*

**Sarmizegetusa Regia** is the name of the capital of pre-Roman Dacia, the most important military, religious and political center of the Dacians prior to the wars with the Roman Empire. Sarmizegetusa Regia was a complex of citadel, residential areas with dwellings and workshops as well as a sacred zone located in Orastie Mountains, at an altitude of 3,600 feet. The most remarkable of the remaining sanctuaries are: “**Sanctuarul Mare Rotund**” (**Big Rounded Sanctuary**) and “**Soarele de andezit**” (**The Andesito Sun**). Most of the archaeologists assert that the city was founded in between the 3rd and the 2nd century BC, while others believe it could be at least 600 years older than that. One of the reasons of this dispute could be the striking resemblance of the Big Rounded Sanctuary with the Stonehenge. It feels like the same architect is behind both of them, with only difference that the one from Orastie is smaller. Also, ‘The Andesito Sun’ can be easily resembled to the famous Maya calendar.

We’ll tour one of the oldest settlements in Romania, **Alba Iulia** known in ancient times as *Apulum*, which served as the largest military and economic centre during the Roman occupation. After becoming the province of Roman Empire, the original Dacian settlement became a miniature copy of Mother Rome with temples, mosaics, statues and amphitheatres. We’ll experience “The Route of the Three Fortifications” which provides unique opportunity to travel back in time thousands of years and discover three amazing fortifications from different eras built successively on the same location: The Roman Castrum built in 106 AD, the medieval Citadel dating from 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Alba Carolina Citadel from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

We’ll continue our way to **Bistrita**, the town named after the Bistrița River, which originates from Slavic word *bystrica*, meaning *the serene water*. Dinner and **overnight in Bistrita**.

### *Day 5 ~ Gura Humorului*

The road from Bistrita to the Painted Monasteries of Bucovina runs east through the Bargau Valley and across the Tihuta Pass which peaks at an altitude of 5,300 feet. The Bargau Valley encompasses some of the most beautiful unspoiled mountain scenery in the Carpathians with picturesque traditional villages located in valleys and on hillsides. We will visit 4 of the most beautifully **painted churches of Bucovina**, which are on the list of **the UNESCO world heritage sites** and were built some 400 years ago. **Humor Monastery** was built in 1530 and its interior frescoes are unsurpassed, **Moldovita** also dates from 1532, the remote location and fortifications have protected its frescoes from invaders and looters alike, **Sucevita** dates from 1595, its beautifully preserved frescoes are the last of the great painted monasteries in Bucovina, **Vornet**, built in 1488, is considered by many to be the most splendid in Bucovina, offering the magnificent fresco of Last Judgment. Dinner and **overnight in Gura Humorului**.

### *Day 6 ~ Sighisoara*

We’ll leave Bucovina in the morning and enter Transylvania -the land of the legend of Dracula. The region of Transylvania is known for the scenic beauty of its Carpathian landscape, mountainous borders, rich history, medieval towns and castles.

Sighisoara is a highly picturesque little town on top of a hill, which contributes to its natural defensiveness supplemented by impressive military engineering. Buildings range from the 13th to the 19th centuries with a fine 15th-century church with good furnishings and a superb altarpiece of 1490. We’ll explore the museum town of **Sighisoara** and check time on our watches with citadel’s clock. The Clock Tower is a sturdy building and its clock shows every day a statue which is a symbol of that day in a week. The clock was made in Switzerland by the same watchmakers who made the clock of the Tower in Prague. Founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by German immigrants and best known as the birthplace of Count Dracula, the town retains a medieval ambiance. You’ll have time to walk inside the citadel and discover its charm. Dinner and **overnight in Sighisoara**.

### *Day 7 ~ Brasov*

A medieval town founded in the 12th century by Saxon settlers, **Sibiu** became the most important of Transylvania's 'seven cities'. Charming old town with narrow lanes, medieval houses, churches, merchants guild and the Brukenthal Palace, which houses one of Romania's largest and oldest museums. In 2007 Sibiu was the European 'Capital of Culture'.

Built in 1310 on the site of a former 12th century wooden fortress (burned by the Tartars in 1241), **Fagaras** was extended between the 15th and 17th centuries and was considered one of the strongest fortifications in Transylvania. The fortress was surrounded by a deep moat which, in times of war or social unrest, could easily be filled with water from a nearby mountain brook. A bridge over the moat provided the only access point. The fortress boasts three floors and five towers. Dinner and **overnight in Brasov**.

### *Day 8 ~ Bucharest*

In the morning we'll tour **Brasov**, one of the most charming medieval towns in Romania, stroll through its old District of Schei a neighborhood of narrow cobblestone streets and red-tiled 17th century homes, with the church Sfantul Nicolae, the first Romanian school from XV century, the Biserica Neagra (Black Church), the Romania's largest church in the Gothic style and the city's ancient fortifications. Our next stop will be at the **Bran Castle**, known as Dracula's Castle, one of the most picturesque areas of Romania, built in the thirteenth century by the Teutonic knight Dietrich and restored in later periods. We'll continue to the winter ski resort of **Sinaia** at the foot of the Bucegi Mountains, where we will tour **Peles Castle**. Set dramatically in the hills above Sinaia, this 160-room palace, built in German Renaissance style, was completed in 1914 for the first Hohenzollern king of Romania, Carol I. The castle was the king's attempt to imitate the styles of his former homeland, creating a Bavarian setting in the mountains of Romania. The castle's sculpture terraces, art displays, and historic armouries make it one of Romania's most important and beautiful museums. The palace is ornately decorated, inside and out, with intricate woodcarvings and paintings of scenes from Wagner's operas. Late in the afternoon we'll head to Bucharest. Dinner and **overnight in Bucharest**.

### *Day 9 ~ Ruse (Bulgaria)*

After breakfast we will explore **Bucharest**, Romania's capital since 1459, noted for its broad, tree-lined boulevards, well-kept parks, and a mix of architectural styles that combine neoclassical structures with monumental 20th-century edifices. In the course of our tour we will see the 'Pharaonic House of the People', the world's largest civilian building, built under the Ceausescu regime, which now houses the Romanian Parliament, the Arch of Triumph, the Romanian Athenaeum and the Royal Palace.

You will be met and picked up by Bulgarian guide and driver to proceed to **Ruse** – the largest Bulgarian Danubian city, once important Roman port with the name "Sexaginta Prista" – the Harbor of 60 ships. Upon arrival we'll visit the regional museum and the central part of the city. Dinner and **overnight in Ruse**.

### *Day 10 ~ Shumen*

Our sightseeing today will start with a visit to **Sexaginta Prista fortress**. Next we'll depart to **Sboryanovo 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 )**. On the way to Shumen, we'll visit **Veliki Preslav** – the capital of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Empire (9th c). Dinner and **overnight in Shumen**.

### *Day 11 ~ Nesebur*

After breakfast we'll head 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 23meters/ 75ft high, representing early Medieval Bulgarian artistry. Next we'll proceed to the Black Sea coast and **Varna** – the Marine Capital city of Bulgaria. Varna was an inhabited place even before the Greeks established the colony of Odessos there about 580 BC. Later, under the Romans and their successors, the Slavs, Varna became a major port trading with Constantinople, Venice and Dubrovnik.

While in Varna we'll visit **the Archaeological museum**, to 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. We will continue south, along the Black Sea coast to **Nessebur for dinner and overnight**.

### *Day 12 ~ Veliko Turnovo*

In the morning we'll visit the **Old Nessebur UNESCO site** and **the Archaeological museum**.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> c AD, Messambria maintained close links with Constantinople, during the 7<sup>th</sup> c it became one of the “special” locations where out of favor politicians and courtiers were exiled from Constantinople. We'll have free time for lunch and later head to Veliko Turnovo by crossing the Balkan Mountains. En route, we'll stop at the National Revival town of **Kotel** to visit its museum of carpets.

Upon arrival in Veliko Turnovo and check in at the hotel, if not too tired, we'll walk along Samovodska Charshia Street of crafts in the **Old Veliko Turnovo**. Dinner and **overnight in Veliko Turnovo**.

### *Day 13 ~ Kazanluk*

The morning tour of the Medieval capital city of Bulgaria, picturesquely located on 4 hills above Yantra river, will take us to **Tsarevets Royal Hill** with the fortress, Baldwin tower ( the leader of the 4<sup>th</sup> Crusade, who was imprisoned here ) and the Patriarh`s complex.

After sightseeing we'll depart south to cross Shipka mountain pass ( crossing the central and highest part of the Balkan mountains ) and stop for pictures at Shipka memorial church.

We'll have free time for lunch upon arrival in Kazanluk, before we'll start touring the city, which includes visits to: **Kazanluk regional museum** as introductory to the tour of the Valley of the Thracian kings, as the area is known; and **Kaznaluk Thracian tomb** (UNESCO site, copy). Dinner and **overnight in Kazanluk**.

### *Day 14 ~ Kazanluk*

After breakfast we will continue exploring the valley and visit **Goliama Kosmatka Thracian tomb** ( the tomb of the Thracian king Sevt 3<sup>rd</sup> ) and **Ostrusha**. To the east of Kazanluk, we will tour **Karanovo mound** - the largest settlement mound on the territory of Europe. Seven consecutive archaeological cultural strata have been found in it, reflecting the stages of development of the material culture of the prehistoric society in Thrace. The strata prove that there had been settlements in the course of 4 millennia – from the 6th millennium B.C. (early New Stone Age) to the 2nd millennium B.C. (early Bronze Age). As a result of the investigations, the Karanovo chronological system has been worked out, serving as a standard in the synchronization of the European pre-historical cultures.

We'll visit **the Eastern Mound of Karanovo** with the beautifully preserved gravesite and chariot of an elite Thracian warrior.

We'll also stop in **Stara Zagora** to explore **the Neolithic Dwellings Museum**, which is built around two Neolithic houses dating back to the 6th millennium BC. 1826 artifacts were found there. The Neolithic dwellings 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.

In the evening we'll return to **Kazanluk for dinner and overnight.**

### *Day 15 ~ Plovdiv*

After breakfast, we'll depart to Plovdiv- now the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Upon arrival we'll tour the **Old Plovdiv** architectural reserve with the Ancient Amphitheatre, St. Constantine and Helena Church and the Ethnographic museum, as well as **Trsakart exhibit of Roman mosaics**.

After lunch 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 will 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 city will be European Capital of Culture in 2019.

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

**Dinner and overnight in Plovdiv.**

### *Day 16 ~ Plovdiv*

Today we'll enjoy a day tour from Plovdiv to the region of **Kurdjali** to visit the regional museum and Perperikon – the largest megalithic archeological site in the Balkans. Although excavations show that there was a settlement here in 5000 BC, the 1500 BC level is of great interest and importance as it is the only known city of the Thracians. Buildings, streets, and a water supply system are clearly visible, as is a huge altar hewn out of the rock where fire rituals would most likely have been performed. We will proceed with a visit to the **Thracian sanctuary** near Tatul Village, one of the most imposing megalithic monuments discovered in Bulgaria. The complex comprises two sarcophagi, a rectangular bed for the main altar, and a 10-foot-deep well. It dates back to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Return to **Plovdiv for dinner and overnight.**

### *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 11<sup>th</sup> 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*

Today we'll have a full day sightseeing tour of **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.

Our tour today includes sites, such as: the Archaeology museum of Sofia, St. George 4<sup>th</sup> c Rotunda, 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 ). Overnight in Sofia.

### *Day 19 ~ Depart for home*

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

### **Departure Dates: 19 days/17 nights:**

May 11 ~ 29

September 7 ~ 25

### **Tour Price:**

\$ 4,500 per person in double room based on 10 ~ 12 guests traveling together

\$900 single supplement

### **Price Includes:**

- Accommodation for 17 nights at selected 3 and 4 star hotels including service charges and taxes
- All breakfasts
- All dinners (no drinks), including one dinner with folklore performance in Sofia
- Two small bottles of water per day
- Daily private sightseeing by comfortable air-conditioned car or van with professional driver
- Professional English speaking guide
- 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.