Tour Code
**CZ4**

ADVENTURESABROAD

# CZECHIA, SLOVAKIA, HUNGARY & ROMANIA

**28 days**

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## Day 1 Arrive in Prague

Today we arrive in Prague and transfer to our hotel.

Today we arrive in Prague, a city that rises like a medieval dream from seven hills flanking the banks of the Vltava River. Sometimes called Prague the Golden, sometimes Prague the City of 100 Spires, this enchanting capital has earned comparisons to Florence and Rome for its breathtaking beauty. Thomas Mann declared it one of the world's most magical cities; Goethe called it the prettiest gem in the stone crown of the world.

Virtually untouched by war, Prague's architecture spans nearly every European style – Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical, Empire and Art Nouveau – creating a living museum where centuries of history unfold along cobblestoned streets. This evening, we gather with our fellow travellers for our first dinner together, beginning our extraordinary journey through Eastern Europe's most captivating capitals and countryside.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

## Day 2 Prague: Old Jewish Quarter & Wenceslas Square

The cobblestones echo with centuries of stories as we embark on our walking tour through Prague's Old Jewish Quarter and the magnificent Old Town Square, where the famous astronomical clock has been marking time for over 600 years.

We begin at the Old Jewish Cemetery, an incredible sight that leaves visitors speechless. Established in the 15th century as the second oldest Jewish cemetery in Europe, this sacred ground witnessed burials from 1439 to 1787. Today, 12,000 tombstones crowd together, leaning one against another at different angles and sizes, creating a graphic and surreal image that speaks to generations of Prague's Jewish community. We visit the Klaus Synagogue with its permanent exhibition called "Jewish Customs and Traditions," which illuminates the significance of synagogue life and Jewish festivals throughout the centuries.

We then proceed to the Old Town Square, where the astronomical clock tells one of Prague's most haunting legends. Master clockmaker Hanus of Ruze designed this 15th-century marvel, but according to legend, Prague's town councillors blinded him for fear he would create another like it for a rival city. One day near the end of his life, he asked a friend to lead him to his great creation. As the figure of Death tolled the hour, Hanus thrust his hand into the clock's apparatus; it stopped, and centuries passed before a craftsman could be found skilled enough to make it work again.

We finish our walking tour at Wenceslas Square in time for lunch (your own account), with the afternoon free to explore this cultural treasure. Prague's concert halls beckon – The Municipal House, Rudolfinium, Mozart Theatre, National Theatre, and State Theatre all host performances almost every night.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 3 Prague: Prague Castle & Old Town

Morning light illuminates the ancient stones as we travel through Prague's city centre to the magnificent Prague Castle complex. We begin our walking tour near Pohorelec Square, passing the imposing Cernin Palace as we make our way toward the castle grounds.

Our path leads us past architectural treasures that span centuries: the Strahov Monastery with its famous library, the baroque Loreta with its carillon of 27 bells, the Capuchin Monastery, and the Archbishop's Palace. Before entering the castle, we pause by the ancient walls for a city panorama that reveals Prague spread below us like a living map of European history.

We then embark on our two-hour exploration of the castle complex, entering the first courtyard with its famous fountain before proceeding to the Chapel of the Holy Cross. The magnificent St. Vitus Cathedral awaits, where we visit the choir and crypt before continuing to the third courtyard. Here we enter the Old Palace from St. George Square, then proceed toward the enchanting Golden Lane, where Franz Kafka once lived and worked.

We descend via the Old Castle Steps, with photo opportunities revealing spectacular views, before stopping at St. Nicholas Church. Then comes the highlight – crossing the ancient Charles Bridge (Karluv Most), an artistic masterpiece built by King Charles IV in 1357. For over four hundred years, this bridge was the only link between Prague's two halves, and we admire the many baroque sculptures as we walk across this living gallery of art.

Overnight in Prague.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 4 Prague - Konopiste - Karlstejn - Karlovy Vary

The Bohemian countryside unfolds before us as we depart Prague for the Renaissance chateau of Konopiste, set dramatically in a hilly wooded park. This castle, built as a stronghold at the end of the 13th century, gained its present appearance from alterations made by its last owner, Archduke Franz Ferdinand d'Este, whose assassination in Sarajevo would trigger World War I.

After exploring Konopiste's priceless interiors and learning about this tragic figure of European history, we continue to Karlstejn Castle, a Gothic fortress that once housed the imperial crown jewels. This magnificent stronghold, perched on a rocky outcrop, served as the secure treasury for the Holy Roman Empire's most precious regalia.

We then proceed eastward to the famous spa town of Karlovy Vary (once known as Karlsbad), beautifully nestled in the valley of the Tepla River. This elegant resort has been one of Europe's oldest and largest health spas for centuries, its hot medicinal spring water drawing visitors from across the continent. The thermal springs, reaching temperatures of up to 73°C (164°F), have been renowned for their healing properties since the 14th century.

Overnight in Karlovy Vary.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 5 Karlovy Vary

Elegant colonnades and graceful facades create a fairytale atmosphere as we explore Karlovy Vary on our half-day walking tour. This sophisticated spa town has long been the favourite retreat of crowned heads and international celebrities, earning its reputation as the "Salon of Europe."

As the old saying goes, "When the disorder becomes a disease, doctors prescribe the hot waters of Carlsbad." Our walking tour reveals the secrets of this healing paradise, taking us to the many springs and the graceful Mill Colonnade, where visitors have been "taking the cure" for centuries. The tradition involves sipping the mineral-rich waters from special porcelain cups while strolling the elegant promenades. A ride on the nearby funicular provides spectacular views of the surrounding landscape of beech and oak forests, where hiking trails wind through the Slavkov Forest.

The afternoon offers leisure time in this charming town, perhaps to sample the famous Karlovy Vary wafers or browse the shops selling the distinctive Bohemian crystal and local Becherovka herbal liqueur.

Overnight in Karlovy Vary.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 6 Karlovy Vary - Marianske Lanze - Cesky Krumlov

We begin our day in Marianske Lazne, where the historic centre stretches along the spa colonnade with its unique singing fountain and main avenue lined with pastel-coloured Art Deco facades. Most of the elegant state spa buildings date from the second half of the 19th century and nestle amidst thickly forested hills, creating an atmosphere of refined tranquillity.

From here, we venture into Southern Bohemia, where many towns retain their Bavarian or Austrian flavour from centuries of shared history. In the late afternoon, we arrive in the extraordinary town of Cesky Krumlov, one of Europe's most perfectly preserved medieval settlements.

Medieval arcades and etched Renaissance facades in apricot, beige, and pea-green shades surround the cobblestoned square, where rust-red, pink, and golden Baroque buildings create a painter's palette of colours. A Plague Monument (Morovy sloup) stands in the centre, while the winding River Vltava separates the Old Town from the towering castle complex. This UNESCO World Heritage site represents one of the most exquisite examples of medieval European town planning, virtually unchanged since the Renaissance.

Overnight in Cesky Krumlov.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 7 Cesky Krumlov: Castle Tour

The mighty Renaissance castle of Cesky Krumlov dominates our morning, its towers and ramparts telling the story of the powerful Lords of the Rozmberks and later the Schwarzenbergs. This vast complex, one of the largest in Central Europe, houses a rich collection of period furniture, tapestries and historical weapons, earning its place on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1992.

We explore the castle's remarkable painted tower, baroque theatre, and magnificent halls where nobility once held court. The complex tells the story of Czech aristocracy through five centuries, from Gothic foundations to Renaissance renovations to baroque additions. From the castle gardens, panoramic views reveal the red-tiled roofs of the old town spread along the horseshoe bend of the Vltava River.

The afternoon belongs to independent exploration of the historical city centre below the castle. We wander through winding alleys lined with venerable Gothic and Renaissance houses, discover small shops and atmospheric cafes, and follow pathways along the river where artists set up their easels to capture the town's timeless beauty.

Overnight in Cesky Krumlov.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 8 Cesky Krumlov - Telc, Czechia - Bratislava, Slovakia

The spectacular countryside of Southern Bohemia unfolds as we travel through a landscape of shimmering carp ponds to the medieval town of Trebon. The houses lining the narrow main square embody romantic architecture at its finest, while three gateways of the town wall have survived from the 16th century, when Trebon was an important centre of fish farming.

We then continue to the historic town of Telc, a Renaissance jewel dating from the 16th century. The historic houses surrounding the central square connect through continuous arcades, creating one of Europe's most harmonious urban spaces. UNESCO added Telc's historic centre to the World Heritage List in 1992, recognising its exceptional preservation of Renaissance town planning.

Our journey continues through the rolling hills of Southern Moravia, a region famous for its orchards and vineyards where picturesque villages, towns and chateaux punctuate the landscape. After crossing the border into Slovakia, we travel through the Small Carpathians, a thin strip of limestone hills altogether different from the soft, pine-clad hills of the Czech lands.

In the late afternoon, we arrive in Bratislava, Slovakia's capital, situated dramatically on both banks of the Danube at a promontory of the Little Carpathians. During the second half of the 20th century, an ambitious rebuilding and restoration program transformed this ancient city into a modern European capital while preserving its historical heart.

Overnight in Bratislava

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 9 Bratislava - Trencin: Castle Tour

Three different countries meet in Bratislava, where languages, traditions, and cultures create a unique microcosm of central Europe. This youthful, dynamic capital pulses with energy while remaining proud of its rich past, where tradition, nostalgia and music weave through cobblestoned streets.
Our morning city tour reveals Bratislava's main treasures: the historic Old Town with its medieval gates and towers, the Gothic Cathedral of St Martin where Hungarian kings were once crowned, and the 14th-century Tower of St Michael standing guard in the ancient city walls.

After lunch, we travel to Trencin in western Slovakia, one of the oldest Slovak cities, chronicled as early as the 11th century. Its strategic location near three Carpathian Mountain passes on the crossroads of ancient commercial routes determined the character of this significant landmark. The famous Amber Road, used by Etruscan, Greek, and later Roman merchants to transport precious amber from the Baltic region, passed directly through Trencin.

The city is dominated by Trencin Castle, Slovakia's third-largest castle complex. With extensive fortifications and several palace buildings surrounding the central medieval tower, it remains the highest point of the city. Below the castle, winding side streets and historic covered stairs lead to a charming small square, while the old town spreads around a large main square anchored by a baroque church.

Overnight in Trencin

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 10 Trencin - Bojnice - Ruzomberok - Horny Smokovec

Our journey leads us through Slovakia's heartland via Bojnice, a charming town at the upper Nitra River that ranks among Slovakia's oldest spa destinations. Here stands the famous Bojnice Castle, a romantic fairy-tale structure that has served as the backdrop for countless films. We explore both the castle's opulent interiors and the picturesque town nestled just below its walls.

We continue through Ruzomberok, situated in the scenic Vah River Valley. Founded by German colonists in 1223, this town became renowned for its guilds, industrial production, and skilled craftsmen who travelled throughout Europe plying their trades.

Our destination is Horny Smokovec, gateway to the High Tatras National Park, founded in 1948 and forming the northernmost section of the Carpathian Mountains. This geographic region shelters numerous glacial lakes and displays a distinctly alpine character, with jagged peaks rising dramatically above pristine forests. The crisp mountain air and stunning vistas create an atmosphere worlds away from the valley towns below.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 11 Pieniny National Park

We venture into Pieniny National Park, the crown jewel among central Europe's most impressive areas of natural beauty. Our exploration begins at the medieval Cerveny Klastor, once a Carthusian monastery whose red-brick walls have witnessed centuries of spiritual contemplation alongside the rushing Dunajec River, which forms a natural border between Slovakia and Poland.

The open-air museum of folk architecture in Stara Lubovna offers a fascinating glimpse into traditional mountain life. Here we walk among a precious collection of wooden houses dating from the late 19th to early 20th century, each structure relocated and carefully preserved to show how mountain families lived and worked in harmony with their challenging environment.

After lunch, we continue to Kezmarok, where we visit the remarkable German-built wooden Lutheran Church, a unique masterpiece of carpentry and artistry. This extraordinary structure, built entirely without metal nails, demonstrates the incredible skill of 17th-century craftsmen who created one of Europe's most unusual religious buildings. The church's interior, carved entirely from wood, creates an atmosphere of warm spirituality unlike any traditional stone church.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 12 Horny Smokovec - Bratislava

A scenic mountain route leads us back to Bratislava, winding through the spectacular ranges of the High Tatras to the Low Tatras. Mountain peaks and hiking trails frame our journey, while still-green forests, bubbling streams, and traditional haystacks shaped like miniature peak-roofed houses dot the landscape. The contrast between Slovakia's alpine heartland and its Danube valley capital creates a perfect showcase of this young nation's geographic diversity.

We arrive in Bratislava by mid-afternoon, with time to rest and reflect on our mountain adventures before dinner. The journey from Slovakia's highest peaks to its historic capital reveals the remarkable variety contained within this compact Central European nation.

Overnight in Bratislava

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 13 Bratislava, Slovak Republic - Budapest, Hungary

The mighty Danube guides our morning journey from Bratislava to Budapest, Hungary's magnificent capital. Hungary reveals itself as a land of beautiful monuments and romantic music, where history resonates through every cobblestone and melody.

Buda and Pest, two of the city's three historic regions, face each other across the Danube, which forms the physical and spiritual centre of the Hungarian capital. This great river serves as the city's centrepiece, its heart, and its pulse, creating an even more intimate relationship than the Seine enjoys with Paris or the Arno with Florence.

Upon arrival, we embark on a walking tour of the city's urban heart, an area filled with stately old buildings, grand avenues, and countless narrow streets that tell Budapest's thousand-year story. We take local transport to the massive neo-Gothic Parliament (Orszaghaz), the most visible building on Budapest's left bank. Built by 1,000 workers between 1885 and 1902, this magnificent structure has become the symbol of the capital with its slender towers, spacious arcades, high windows and vast central dome.

Our route continues past the Museum of Ethnography to the stately Liberty Square (Szabadsag ter), then to Roosevelt Square and the famous Chain Bridge, the oldest and most beautiful of seven road bridges spanning the Danube in Budapest. Before its construction, the river could only be crossed by ferry or by a pontoon bridge that had to be removed when ice blocks floated downstream in winter.

Overnight in Budapest

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 14 Budapest: City Tour

* Logistical note * Travellers starting their journey here in Budapest, along with those arriving from Bratislava on a longer tour option, will enjoy the following touring today:

Heroes' Square provides our dramatic starting point, where we learn about Hungary's complex thousand-year history at the imposing Vajdahunyad Castle. This eclectic structure showcases different periods of Hungarian architecture, from Romanesque to Gothic to Renaissance styles.

We then cross Margaret Bridge to Buda's hilly side, where the Citadel offers panoramic views of the entire city spread along both banks of the Danube. The vista reveals Budapest's unique geographic setting, where rolling hills meet the great plain, and architectural treasures from every era create one of Europe's most beautiful urban landscapes.

Castle Hill becomes our main focus, where we spend the remainder of the day exploring St. Matthias Church with its distinctive diamond-patterned roof and the fairytale Fisherman's Bastion with its seven towers representing the seven Magyar tribes that settled in the

Carpathian Basin. These neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque structures, though relatively recent, perfectly capture the romantic spirit of Hungarian history.

Overnight in Budapest

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 15 Budapest: At Leisure

Budapest invites personal discovery as you explore this captivating city at your own pace. Perhaps return to the elegant promenade along the Danube, where artists display their work and musicians fill the air with traditional melodies. The city's numerous museums offer deeper insights into Hungarian culture, from folk traditions to fine arts to the complex history of this resilient nation.

The coffeehouse tradition beckons – at the turn of the 20th century, Budapest boasted over 400 coffeehouses, many patronised by struggling writers who made these elegant spaces the cornerstone of the city's literary life. Today's surviving coffeehouses maintain this cultural heritage, offering the perfect setting for cake and conversation while watching Budapest's daily rhythm unfold beyond tall windows.

Alternative explorations might include the Great Market Hall, where local vendors sell everything from paprika to handcrafted items, or a stroll through the Pest side's pedestrian areas, where international brands mix with local boutiques in a vibrant commercial district.

Overnight in Budapest

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 16 Budapest - Szentendre - Holloko - Eger

The romantic Danube Bend leads us to Szentendre, a riverside town celebrated for its museums, galleries and artists. Once called Ulcisia Castra (Wolf Castle) by the Romans, today Szentendre charms visitors with its south European atmosphere, baroque architecture, churches of various faiths, narrow side streets, and cobblestone roads. Our walking tour reveals why this picturesque town has attracted artists for generations.

We then visit the UNESCO-protected village of Holloko, where approximately 650 people maintain one of Europe's best-preserved traditional settlements. The 'Old Village' contains 50 houses listed as historic monuments, their white-painted walls and red-tile roofs creating a harmonious ensemble unchanged for centuries. Throughout time, Holloko has preserved its unique ethnographic and folk art values, while atop the nearby hill, the remains of a 13th-century castle remind us of medieval Hungary's turbulent frontier history.

Our journey continues to Eger, nestled in the valley between the Bukk and Matra Hills. This historic city gained fame for three things: Egri Bikaver (Bull's Blood) wine, its magnificent medieval library, and possessing Europe's northernmost minaret – a reminder of 150 years of Turkish occupation. The narrow streets, arcaded buildings, wrought-iron gates, and baroque towers create perfect walking opportunities, while the peaks of Hungary's highest mountains provide a dramatic natural backdrop.

Overnight in Eger

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 17 Eger: Town Tour

Eger's story stretches back to the Stone Age, but the town achieved its greatest glory during the 1552 Siege of Eger, when Hungarian forces successfully defended against overwhelming Ottoman odds. During the early Middle Ages, German, Avar and Slavonic tribes inhabited the area before Hungarian settlement in the 10th century brought prosperity that peaked during the 14th-16th centuries, when winegrowing became the economic foundation for which Eger remains famous today.

Our walking tour includes the impressive Eger Castle with its museum and underground casements, where we learn about the legendary defence that inspired generations of Hungarians. The fortress walls and towers tell stories of courage and determination that echo through

Hungarian national consciousness.

We also visit the Archbishop's Palace, a baroque masterpiece that reflects the Counter-Reformation's influence in Hungary, and the Franciscan Church, whose elegant interior showcases religious art from several centuries. The Turkish Minaret, a 40-metre cylindrical tower, stands as one of Hungary's most unusual monuments – the northernmost minaret in Europe and one of the few surviving architectural reminders of Ottoman rule in Central Europe.

Overnight in Eger

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 18 Eger - Paks - Siklos - Pecs

Southern Transdanubia welcomes us with its landscape of undulating hills, forest-clad ridges and rural ambience as we depart Eger for Hungary's southwestern region. Our route leads us past Budapest and south along the Danube River, through countryside where small villages and agricultural lands create a pastoral symphony of green fields and traditional farmsteads.

After passing Paks, situated on the banks of the Danube River, we continue toward Pecs, a city selected as European Capital of Culture in 2010, sharing the title with Essen and Istanbul. This distinction reflects Pecs' role as a major art centre and university town, where intellectual and cultural life has flourished for over a thousand years.

Our walking tour of the Old Town reveals layers of history: the historic cathedral with its distinctive four towers, the synagogue representing the once-thriving Jewish community, ancient mosques from the Ottoman period, and the fourth-century Christian necropolis – a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring burial chambers decorated with remarkable early Christian murals that represent some of Europe's finest examples of late Roman and early Christian art.

Overnight in Pecs

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 19 Pecs - Villany - Pecs

The historic town of Siklos and its remarkably well-preserved medieval castle anchor our morning exploration near Hungary's southern border. Wine production began here when Romans settled at a place they called Seres, and archaeological finds prove that viticulture has thrived in this region for over two millennia.

After exploring Siklos Castle's towers, walls, and courtyards, we embark on an afternoon journey along the famous Villany-Siklos Wine Road, a 30-kilometre route covering eight villages where vineyards cascade down south-facing slopes in perfect conditions for winemaking. The Romans first recognised this area's potential, and finds uncovered at the base of the hills confirm over 2,000 years of continuous grape cultivation.

Today the Villany-Siklos wine region encompasses approximately 2,000 hectares, where Mediterranean-style red wines thrive in a climate warmer than most of Hungary. Local winemakers specialise in full-bodied reds that have gained international recognition, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and the indigenous Kadarka variety. We sample these distinctive wines while learning about traditional and modern winemaking techniques from local vintners.

Overnight in Pecs

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 20 Pecs - Lake Balaton Region - Budapest

Lake Balaton, affectionately called the "Hungarian Sea," spreads before us as we journey north to Central Europe's largest lake. This massive freshwater lake, stretching 77 kilometres in length, has served as Hungary's premier holiday destination for generations of families seeking

respite from urban life.

Our exploration focuses on the Tihany Peninsula, declared a national park in 1952 and renowned for its historical monuments, beautiful panoramas, and Mediterranean-like climate created by the lake's moderating influence. We cross the lake by ferry from Szantod to Tihany, enjoying views across the water toward distant hills where vineyards and resort towns dot the shoreline.

At Tihany, we visit the Benedictine Abbey Church, built in 1754 on the site of King Andrew I's original 11th-century church. This twin-spired, ochre-coloured baroque masterpiece dominates the peninsula's skyline. Inside, we admire the fantastic altars, pulpits and screens carved between 1753 and 1779 by Austrian lay brother Sebastian Stuhlhof – each a baroque-rococo masterpiece. King Andrew I's remains rest in a limestone sarcophagus in the atmospheric Romanesque crypt.

We also visit Balatonfured, a charming town on the lake's northern shore that played an important role in 18th-century social life. Here the first Balaton steamship began its journeys, and the first yachtsmen's association established its headquarters. For three centuries, patients have been treated with mineral water springs beneficial for diabetes and digestive ailments.

Overnight in Budapest

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 21 Budapest, Hungary - Bucharest, Romania

Romanian legend tells us that Bucharest was founded on the banks of the Dambovita River by a shepherd named Bucur, whose name literally means "joy." His enchanting flute playing reportedly dazzled the people, while his hearty wine from nearby vineyards endeared him to local traders, who gave his name to their settlement.

This morning we fly to Romania's largest city and capital, once known for its wide, tree-lined boulevards, glorious Belle Epoque buildings and reputation for high living that earned it the nickname "Little Paris" in the early 1900s. Today Bucharest pulses as a bustling metropolis where medieval streets meet communist-era boulevards and modern European districts.

After settling into our accommodations, we embark on an informal walking orientation of the city centre, where layers of history create a fascinating urban palimpsest. Romanian, Ottoman, Austrian, French, and Soviet influences blend in architecture, cuisine, and cultural traditions, while the vibrant energy of contemporary Romania emerges in cafes, galleries, and public spaces throughout the historic centre.

Overnight in Bucharest

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 22 Bucharest: City Tour - Fly to Suceava - Gura Humorului

This morning belongs to Bucharest itself. We begin at the Arc de Triomphe on Soseaua Kiseleff, a boulevard longer than the Champs-Elysees and built to give a young nation, recently free of Ottoman suzerainty, a European face. From there we tour Cotroceni Palace, still an official presidential residence, and pass the Romanian Athenaeum and University Square, scene of the 1989 revolution.

The Cathedral of National Salvation is Orthodox Christianity announced at cathedral scale. Consecrated only a few years ago beside the Palace of Parliament, it stands as a deliberate counterweight — faith reasserting itself in the shadow of the regime that once tried to erase it. The National History Museum rounds out the morning with the story of everything in between: Roman Dacia, medieval principalities, and a century of juggling larger neighbours.

In the afternoon we visit the Bucharest Village Museum, one of Europe's oldest open-air museums, where wooden churches, watermills, and farmhouses gathered from across the country preserve a rural life that outlasted every regime layered on top of it.

PLEASE NOTE: We always attempt to include the Palace of Parliament, but the building frequently closes to visitors for official functions, often without notice.

An early dinner precedes our flight north to Suceava, gateway to Bucovina.

Overnight in Gura Humorului.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 23 Bucovina: Painted Monasteries & Cacica Salt Mine

We begin at the Museum of Bucovinian Traditions in Gura Humorului, a fitting introduction to a region where Orthodox faith and folk art have always been intertwined. From here we trace the deepest historical layer of this crossroads — not empires competing for Romania, but a Moldavian civilisation confident enough, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to paint its faith on the outside of its churches for everyone to see.

At Voronet, frescoes in a blue so distinctive it carries the monastery's name cover the exterior walls floor to roofline — a nuns' monastery consecrated to St. George, built once Stephen the Great had centralised the Moldavian state and given it the confidence for this kind of statement. Sucevita, the largest and best-preserved of the painted monasteries, goes further still: an almost complete fresco cycle wraps its fortified enclosure, built in 1586, inside and out — UNESCO-protected, and rightly compared to the mural tradition of Venice's San Marco.

We break from monasteries for the Cacica Salt Mine, worked since the eighteenth century, where a small chapel carved entirely from salt sits deep beneath the surface alongside the old mining galleries.

Leaving the painted monasteries behind, we drive south to Piatra Neamt, a small city framed by the Eastern Carpathians and our base for tomorrow's mountain crossing.

Overnight in Piatra Neamt.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 24 Piatra Neamt - Bicaz Gorges & Lacu Rosu - Sighisoara

This morning's drive is one of Romania's most dramatic, through the Bicaz Gorges, where the road narrows and climbs for 5 km/3.1 mi beneath limestone walls rising 300 m/985 ft overhead — a stretch so tight in places it's known locally as the 'neck of hell.' Protected within Hasmas-Bicaz Gorges National Park, the gorge marks our crossing from Moldavia into Transylvania.

A few kilometres on, we reach Lacu Rosu, or Red Lake, formed in 1837 when an earthquake-triggered landslide dammed the Bicaz River. We stop here for lunch, the reddish sediment that names the lake visible along its shoreline against a backdrop of alpine peaks.

We continue west into Transylvania proper, arriving by evening in Sighisoara.

Overnight in Sighisoara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 25 Sighisoara - Viscri - Brasov

Sighisoara is the only inhabited medieval citadel in Europe, and this morning we explore it on foot: cobbled lanes climbing past craft-guild towers — tinsmiths, furriers, butchers — to the fourteenth-century Clock Tower, where the History Museum occupies the former Town Hall and the view stretches across Saxon rooftops unchanged in centuries. This is Transylvania's other layer of empire: German-speaking colonists, invited here by Hungarian kings eight centuries ago to farm and defend the frontier, who built towns strong enough to still be standing.

We continue to Viscri, a Saxon village so well preserved that King Charles III bought a house here decades before his coronation, drawn by the same fortified church and slow rural rhythm that first attracted Saxon settlers. Storks nest on chimney pots above houses painted in the region's traditional ochre and blue.

By late afternoon we reach Brasov, Romania's second city, tucked between two mountains in a bowl the Saxons chose for the same defensible logic as Sighisoara. We tour the Black Church, the largest Gothic structure in southeastern Europe, blackened — as the name

suggests — by a seventeenth-century fire it never fully shed.

Overnight in Brasov

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 26 Brasov: Bran Castle & Sinaia

A short drive from Brasov brings us to Bran Castle, perched on its rocky outcrop exactly where the Saxons built it in 1377 to guard the mountain pass into Wallachia. Its association with Dracula is a twentieth-century invention, but the real history needs no embellishment: a customs post and frontier fortress whose rooms and towers, linked by passages cut into the rock, controlled trade between Transylvania and the lands beyond the mountains.

From medieval frontier we jump four centuries forward, to Sinaia and Peles Castle — Romania's answer to the question of what a newly independent nation does with a German prince for a king. Built in the 1870s and 80s for Carol I, first of the Hohenzollern monarchs imported to rule a country freshly out from under Ottoman suzerainty, Peles is German Renaissance fantasy transplanted to the Carpathians: 160 rooms, decorated throughout by Carol's eccentric wife Carmen Sylva. The same confidence that filled Bucharest's boulevards at the start of our journey reaches its fullest expression here — a Western European court built, quite literally, onto a Romanian mountainside.

We also visit Pelisor, the smaller Art Nouveau residence built for Carol's successor, and climb to Sinaia Monastery, the seventeenth-century cluster of churches that gave the resort town its name.

We return to Brasov for a second night, with the evening free to explore the old town at leisure.

Overnight in Brasov

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 27 Brasov - Bucharest

We leave Brasov and Transylvania behind, retracing our path toward Bucharest and the close of a week spent among Saxon fortresses, Orthodox frescoes, and a royal family that was never quite Romanian — three different answers to the same question of how a small country survives at the edge of larger ones.

Optional: time and interest permitting, we stop en route in Targoviste, medieval capital of Wallachia and seat of the Princely Court where Vlad the Impaler took his throne in 1456 — a ruler whose reputation, like Bran Castle's borrowed vampire legend, has grown stranger over time than the facts ever were.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 28 Departure

Our journey together ends where it began, in Bucharest — a fitting close to a week spent among Saxon towns, painted monasteries, and a royal court built from someone else's blueprint. Thank you for exploring a country that absorbed centuries of larger neighbours without ever losing itself.

Drum bun — safe travels!

Departure from Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast