Tour Code
SL3

ADVENTURESABROAD

SLOVAK REPUBLIC, HUNGARY & ROMANIA

21 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Bratislava

Arrive in Bratislava, capital of the Slovak Republic.

Overnight in Bratislava.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Bratislava - Trencin: Castle Tour

Bratislava is the youthful, dynamic, and bustling capital of Slovakia. It is also an historic town full of traditions, nostalgia and music, and proud of its rich past. This is where three different countries meet with their languages, traditions, and cultures producing something very pleasant and attractive, a certain microcosm of central Europe.

Our morning city tour takes us to the main sights of Bratislava, including the historic Old Town, the Gothic Cathedral of St Martin, and the 14th century Tower of St Michael in the ancient city walls.

After lunch in Bratislava we travel to Trencin in western Slovakia. Upon arrival we enjoy a walking tour of Trencin, including Trencin Castle. Together with Nitra and Bratislava, Trencin is one of the oldest of Slovak cities, chronicled as early as in the 11th century. Its strategic location near three Carpathian Mountain passes on the crossroads of commercial routes, has always determined the character of the city as a significant landmark. As early as in the ancient times, the famous Jasper Road used by the Etruscan, Greek, and later Roman merchants to transport precious jasper from the Baltic region, was crossing Trencin.

The city is dominated by Trencin Castle, which is the third-largest castle in Slovakia. Trencin Castle, with extensive fortifications, has several palace buildings that surround the central medieval tower. Today this remains the highest point of the city. Below the castle, on the hillside, is a small square that is reached by a historic covered stairs as well as by winding side streets. The old town also has a large main square, with a large baroque church and a variety of shops.

Overnight in Trencin.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Trencin - Bojnice - Ruzomberok - Horny Smokovec

Today's journey takes us via Bojnice, a small town in the center of the country at the upper Nitra River. This is one of the oldest spa towns in Slovakia and home to the famous Bojnice Castle, which we will visit during our stop here. We will take a short walk through the town itself is situated just below the castle. We will also stop today in the town of Ruzomberok situated in the Vah River Valley. Established by German colonists in 1223, Ruzomberok became renowned for its guilds, industrial production, tinkers and craftsmen.

Horny Smokovec is the gateway to the High Tatras National Park, founded in 1948 and forming the northernmost section of the Carpathian Mountains. This geographic region is home to numerous glacial lakes and has a distinctly alpine character.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Pieniny National Park

Our sightseeing for today takes us first to the Pieniny National Park, crown jewel of the most impressive areas of natural beauty in central Europe. Our visit to the park region will include a tour of the medieval Cerveny Klastor, at one time a Carthusian monastery. Adjacent to the monastery runs the Dunajec River, a natural border dividing Slovakia and Poland. From here we will continue on to the open-air museum of folk architecture in Stara Lubovna. This visit gives us the opportunity to walk amongst a collection of precious wooden houses dating from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

After lunch we continue on to the town of Kezmarok where part of our tour includes a visit to the famous German built wooden Lutheran Church, a unique work of great carpentry and artistry. From here we return to Horny Smokovec.

Overnight in Horny Smokovec.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Horny Smokovec - Bratislava

Today we journey back to Bratislava, a scenic route through the mountain ranges of the High Tatras to the Low Tatras -- mountain peaks and hiking trails, still green forests, bubbling streams, and haystacks like miniature, peak-roofed houses. We arrive in the mid-afternoon.

Overnight in Bratislava.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Bratislava, Slovak Republic - Budapest, Hungary

This morning we travel by road from Bratislava to Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Hungary is a land of beautiful monuments and romantic music. Buda and Pest, two of the city's three regions, both face the mighty Danube, which forms the physical and spiritual centre of the Hungarian capital. It is its centrepiece, its heart, and its pulse. Its relationship with the city is even more intimate than that of the Seine with Paris or the Arno with Florence.

On arrival we will embark on a walking tour of city's urban heart. This area is full of stately old buildings, grand avenues, and innumerable tiny streets. We will take local transport to the huge neo-Gothic Parliament (Orszaghaz), the most visible building of Budapest's left bank. Built by 1000 workers between 1885 and 1902, this building has now become the symbol of the capital with its slender towers, spacious arcades, high windows and vast central dome. Nearby one can see the magnificent building housing the Museum of Ethnography. Walking southeast we come to the stately and sprawling Liberty Square (Szabadsag ter). In the square's center remains a gold hammer and sickle atop a white stone obelisk, one of the few monuments to the Russian 'liberation' of Budapest in 1945. Passing by Roosevelt Square we soon come to the famous Chain Bridge, the oldest and most beautiful of the seven road bridges that span the Danube in Budapest. Before it was built, the river could be crossed only by ferry or by a pontoon bridge that had to be moved when ice blocks began floating downstream in the winter.

We continue along the pedestrian 'Promenade' with great views of Gellert Hill and Castle Hill on the opposite bank. We will stroll past the Concert Hall (Vigado), which is a curious mix of Byzantine, Moorish, Romanesque and Hungarian motifs. From here we walk to one of the liveliest places in Budapest, Vorosmarty Ter, a large square that the north end of Budapest's best known shopping street--Vaci Utca. This is a fantastic pedestrian-only area of the city that has undergone a full transformation over the last 10 years.

Eventually we will arrive at the famous 19th century Central Market Hall. This cavernous three-story market teems with people browsing stalls packed with everything from salamis and red-paprika chains to folk embroideries and souvenirs. We finish our day back at our hotel with a break before dinner.

Overnight in Budapest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Budapest: City Tour

This morning we depart for a bus tour of Budapest.

We start our day at Heroes Square and nearby Vajdahunyad Castle, where we briefly learn a bit about the history of Hungary. Our tour will continue toward Margaret Bridge over which we cross to the Buda side. Our next stop is the Citadel, a great place for panoramic views of the whole city. After a quick picture stop we continue to castle hill where we spend the rest of the day. A visit of St Matthias Church and the Fisherman's Bastions is by many seen as a highlight of the day.

After a lunch break we continue on foot to the Royal Palace, where we visit the National Gallery, dedicated exclusively to Hungarian art.

At this point you are free to continue independent exploration or return on our bus back to the hotel. Your Tour Leader can help you to plan the rest of your day.

Overnight in Budapest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Budapest: At Leisure

The day is yours to explore on your own. You may choose to return to the promenade, explore a museum, or enjoy a coffee and cake in one of the many coffeehouses. The coffeehouse has a long tradition in Budapest; at the turn of the 20th century there were more than 400 coffeehouses in the city, many of them patronized by struggling writers. The coffeehouse was a cornerstone of Budapest literary life.

Overnight in Budapest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Budapest - Szentendre - Holloko - Eger

This morning we travel by private coach to the riverside town of Szentendre, along the 'Danube Bend'. Szentendre is known for its museums, galleries and artists. Populated for well over a millennium, under the Romans it was called Ulcisia Castra, meaning Wolf Castle. Today its south European atmosphere with baroque architecture, churches of various faiths, narrow side streets, and cobblestone roads characterizes this town. You tour leader will take you on a walking tour through this gorgeous little town.

From Szentendre we continue on towards Eger. We will make a stop in the UNESCO protected village of Holloko, a small town of approximately 650 people. What sets this village apart from others is the 'Old Village' where 50 houses have been listed and declared historic monuments. Throughout time Holloko has managed to preserve its unique ethnographic and folk art values. The village itself is picturesque, with its cobbled streets and little white houses. Atop the nearby hill we can view what remains of a 13th century castle that was blown up by the Hapsburgs.

From here we continue on to Eger, situated in the Eger Valley between the Bukk and Matra Hills. Eger is famous for Red Bull's Blood (Egri Bikaver) wine, its medieval library, and for having the northernmost minaret in Europe. There are still many accessible sites and much charm to the narrow streets, arcaded buildings, wrought-iron gates, and Baroque towers and domes of the Old Town. This is the perfect walking city with something interesting at every turn. The nearby peaks of some of Hungary's highest mountains provide a natural backdrop for this city's historic monuments.

Overnight in Eger.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Eger: Town Tour

Eger has been inhabited since the Stone Age. During the early Middle Ages the area was inhabited by German, Avar and Slavonic tribes. Taken over by the Hungarians in the 10th century, Eger reached an age of prosperity during the 14th-16th centuries. Winegrowing, for which the town is still famous, began to be important at that time. During the Turkish occupation of Central Hungary, Eger became an important border fortress, successfully defended by Hungarian forces in the 1552 Siege of Eger, in the face of overwhelming odds.

Our walking tour today will include a visit to the famous castle of Eger with its museum and underground casements. We will also see the Archbishop's Palace, Franciscan Church, and Turkish Minaret.

Overnight in Eger.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Eger - Paks - Siklos - Pecs

Today we depart early for our journey from Eger to the region of Southern Transdanubia, a region of undulating hills, forest clad ridges and rural ambience.

After passing Budapest we start our route south, traveling parallel to the Danube River for much of our journey. After passing by Paks, a town in central Hungary on the banks of the Danube River, we will continue to the city of Pecs. Pecs has been selected to be the European Capital of Culture in 2010, sharing the title together with Essen and Istanbul. This is a city not to be missed; as it is a major art center and university town. Here we will take a walking tour of the Old Town, and will see the historic cathedral, synagogue, mosques and fourth-century Christian necropolis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with burial chambers decorated in murals.

Overnight in Pecs.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Pecs - Villany - Pecs

This morning we will venture towards the southern border to visit the historic town of Siklos and its well-preserved medieval castle. Wine has been produced in this region since the Romans settled here at a place they called Seres. After our visit to the castle we will break for lunch before an afternoon of sightseeing, starting with the the famous Villany-Siklos Wine Road, 30 km long and covering eight villages.

The Romans finds uncovered at the base of the hills prove that people have been growing grapes and making wine here for over 2,000 years. Today the Villany-Siklos wine region covers an area of about 2000 hectares. We return to Pecs for our overnight.

Overnight in Pecs.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Pecs - Lake Balaton Region - Budapest

Today we proceed north to the Lake Balaton Region. Lake Balaton is the largest lake in Central Europe and is often affectionately called the "Hungarian Sea".

Our day will be spent exploring this region. We will cross the lake by ferry from Szantod to Tihany. The Tihany Peninsula was declared a national park in 1952, and the peninsula is well known for its historical monuments, beautiful panorama and its Mediterranean climate. Balatonfured is a small town on the northern shore of the lake and is part of a region that was important to social life in the 18th century, even before bathing and swimming took off as a mass pastime 100 years later. This is the place where the first Balaton steamship started its trips, and the first yachtsmen's association began here. Here were built the villas of 19th-century celebrities, and the town is still the center of festivities. Patients have been treated here for three hundred years with the help of the mineral water sources, as the water is good for diabetes and digestive malfunctions.

Veszprem is a quaint and quiet town away from the lakeshore region, and here we will take a walk in the Castle Quarter.

At the end of our day we travel back to Budapest for our last night in Hungary.

Overnight in Budapest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Budapest, Hungary - Bucharest, Romania

Early this morning we fly to Bucharest.

Known for its wide, tree-lined boulevard s, glorious Belle Epoque buildings and a reputation for the high life (which in the 1900s earned its nickname of "Little Paris"), Bucharest, Romania's largest city and capital, is today a bustling metropolis.

Romanian legend has it that the city of Bucharest was founded on the banks of the Dambovita River by a shepherd named Bucur, whose name literarily means "joy." His flute playing reportedly dazzled the people and his hearty wine from nearby vineyards endeared him to the local traders, who gave his name to the place.

On arrival, after settling in a bit, your Tour Leader will take the group on an informal walking orientation of the city followed by free time.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Bucharest - Sinaia: Peles and Pelisor & Bran Castles - Sighisoara

We begin our full day of travel and activities with a morning departure by road toward Sinaia.

Upon arrival we will visit the nearby Peles and Pelisor Castles. Considered by many one of the most beautiful castles in all Europe, Peles Castle is a masterpiece of German new-Renaissance architecture. This castle was built in the final quarter of the last century for Romania's 'imported ruler' King Carol. Designed mainly in German Renaissance style, this summer residence was decorated throughout by Carol's eccentric wife Carmen Sylvan. Many valuable objects are contained within the castles 160 rooms.

Almost adjacent to Peles Castle is Pelisor ("Little Peles"). King Ferdinand, who succeeded Carol I, intended to use Peles Castle as a summer residence. Pelisor's 70 rooms feature a unique collection of turn-of-the century Viennese furniture and Tiffany and Lalique glassware, and were mostly decorated in the Art-Nouveau style by Queen Maria.

We also visit Sinaia, the "Pearl of the Carpathian Mountains". We will take a leisurely STROLL up to the 17th century Sinaia Monastery, an interesting cluster of churches and courtyards which take their name from the ancient Egyptian monastery on Mount Sinai. After a break for lunch in Sinaia we depart for Bran and Bran Castle.

Bran Castle is erroneously claimed by some to be that of Count Dracula, the world's most famous vampire. Perched atop a rocky outcrop, this strategically located castle was built in 1377 to protect nearby Brasov from invaders. The castle's rooms and towers surround an inner courtyard. Some rooms are connected through underground passages to the inner court. Bran is home to a rich collection of Romanian and foreign furniture and art items from the 14th-19th centuries. After our visit we continue to Sighisoara, arriving in time for dinner.

Overnight in Sighisoara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Sighisoara: Town Tour, Biertan & Sibiu

Sighisoara -- Schassburg in German, or Segesvar in Hungarian -- is the only inhabited Middle Ages city in Europe. Mentioned by historians as far back as 1191, Sighisoara has a long tradition in craftsmanship and trade and its fortifications and defense towers still witness for guilds as those of tinsmiths, butchers, hatters, and blacksmiths. Narrow winding streets, houses with thick walls and huge portals painted in vivid colours, towers, and churches, all old and very old (13th-16th centuries) enhance the charm of the place.

This morning we will start with a walking tour of Sighisoara. We will visit to the History Museum located in the former Town Hall. The Clock

Tower, dated from the 14th Century, reveals a marvelous view over Sighisoara. We will also see the house where Vlad Tepes once lived.

We continue on to Biertan, a former Saxon village south of Sighisoara. Here we find a fortified church from 15th century, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage, representative of the unique Transylvanian phenomenon of building rural fortified churches. Surrounded by three lines of defense walls of 12m high and towers, the church was never breached by invaders.

After time for lunch in Biertan, we continue to Sibiu. Called Hermannstadt in German, Sibiu was the most important of the 12th century Saxon settlements in Transylvania and its industrious emigres, primarily from the Rhineland, the Moselle Valley, Flanders and Saxony, erected walls around it for protection. The first wall destroyed by invaders not long after its construction, but remains of a 15th century brick wall still stand. Because of the blood shed at its walls, the Turks, after an unsuccessful onslaught, called Sibiu the "Red City." Built into the walls are defense towers that were assigned to particular guilds and medieval houses.

Upon arrival we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Sibiu, one of the oldest towns on the Transylvanian Plateau. We will wander its old quarter, where houses with immense roofs have been built within the fortifications, giving Sibiu its powerful medieval aspect. The Tartans destroyed the town's first Citadel in the 13th century and the massive Evangelical Church now occupies the site. It took 200 years to build the church in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Return to Sighisoara.

Overnight in Sighisoara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Sighisoara - Praid Salt Mine - Bistrita - Gura Humorului

Today we visit is one of the biggest salt mines in Europe. Its exploitation has been an important income source for the inhabitants of the area for hundreds of years.

We arrive in the heart of the mountains by bus through a long tunnel (1500 m). 120 m below the surface we find an underground city. The air is ionized and it is believed to have therapeutic qualities for those suffereing from respiratory ailments. Treatments are given under the supervision of a medical team that organizes gym programs and breathing exercises. Tourists have everything they need: treatment places, coffee shops, billiards, libraries, entertainment and even a place where people can pray.

After a break for lunch in Praid, we continue via Bistrita, founded in the early 13th century by German settlers and (due to its location on the main trading route with Moldavia) to become one of Transylvania's major Medieval cities. Some visitors are attracted by the fact that the town was mentioned in Bram Stoker's novel, Dracula.

We overnight in Gura Humorului, the perfect base for our explorations of the Painted Monasteries of Bucovina.

Overnight in Gura Humorului.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Bucovina Monasteries

Today is spent visiting some of the most impressive Bucovina monasteries. These triumphs of Byzantine-influenced art reflect a flowering of Moldavian civilization in the 15th and 16th centuries. The "Painted" Monasteries are a major Moldavian destination, because of the vivid and animated frescoes on their church walls. In acknowledgement of their value, the monasteries in Becoming have been declared as UNESCO protected cultural sites. The art historians compare their artistic value with the mural paintings of the San Marco church of Venice. The secrets of the Moldavian painters who prepared the colors and the techniques that made the paintings incredibly resistant are still a mystery.

We will visit Voronet, a nun monastery consecrated to St George, within walking distance from Guar Humorous town. Voronet is probably the most accomplished sample of artistic achievement in Moldavian architecture and painting. The monastery was built at a time of peace with the Turks, when Stephen had centralized the state, giving a new impetus to its economy and culture. We will also visit Humor Monastery, founded in 1530.

After a visit to the famous Marginea black ceramics centre, we visit the Sucevita Monastery, the largest and arguably the finest of the

Bukovina monasteries. The church inside the fortified monastic enclosure (1586) is almost completely covered in frescoes inside and out.

Overnight in Gura Humorului.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Gura Humorului - Cheile Bicazului - Lacu Rosu - Brasov

This morning we will depart for Brasov via a photo stop at Cheile Bicazulu (Bicaz Canyon).

The road that slices through the Bicaz Gorges is among Romania's most spectacular. The gorge twists and turns steeply uphill for 5km, cutting through sheer, 300-meter high limestone rocks. At one point, the narrow mountain road runs beneath the overhanging rocks in a section known as the 'neck of hell'. This stretch of road is protected as part of the Hasmas-Bicaz Gorges National Park.

A few kilometers west we will cross into Transylvania's Harghita County and immediately come to the resort area of Lacu Rosu or Red Lake. The alpine resort in this region sprang up in the 1970's and is still a magnet for hikers from both Transylvania and Moldavia. We'll break for lunch before continuing to Brasov.

Overnight in Brasov.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Brasov: Town Tour - Bucharest: City Tour

This morning we tour Brasov. Kronstadt in German, Brasso in Hungarian, Brasov ranks second in size after Bucharest. The Old Town lies between two mountains, surrounded like a halo by the Carpathians. In Brasov we will visit the Black Church and Museum of First Romanian School of Schei.

We depart for Bucharest, arriving in time for a break for lunch. We then begin our sightseeing program in the capital, the nation's powerhouse of cultural and economic life founded 500 years ago. During the 1930's, its tree-lined boulevards and fin de siecle architecture earned it the nickname "The Little Paris of the East". There is even an Arc de Triomphe on the handsome Soseaua Kiseleff, itself longer than the Champs Elysees and alive with blossoms in the spring.

Despite the massive reconstructions of the 1980's, Bucharest remains a 'Garden City', leafy and pleasant, with many sidewalk cafes. Our tour today will include the Cotroceni Palace and Museum where we see the 6,000 room Parliament Palace. We will also see the Triumphal Arch, the Romanian Athenaeum, and University Square. We will drive out to visit the Bucharest Village Museum. Situated in a picturesque environment on a lakeshore, this is one of the largest and oldest outdoors museums in Europe. Its exhibits, including houses, churches, water and windmills are of great historic and artistic value.

Overnight in Bucharest.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Departure

Departure from Bucharest.

DRUM BUN!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast