Day 1  
**Arrival in Vienna**

Welcome to Vienna!

Vienna is a true cosmopolitan center, where different tribes and nationalities have, for centuries, fused their cultural identities to produce the intriguing and often cynical Viennese. Around 1900, Vienna was a city of vibrant, stimulating, intellectual life, a dynamic capital of elites that did pioneering work in many fields. Otto Wagner remarked in 1905 that "in spite of unfavourable conditions, Vienna is marching at the head of cultural nations".

Overnight in Vienna.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2  
**Vienna: Walking Tour & Schonbrunn Palace**

Walking about downtown Vienna is an absolute pleasure. The Innere Stadt, in particular, is best explored on foot. Our morning WALK takes us through some of the most well-trodden tourist routes in Vienna. We will take local transport to the Staatsoper, the premiere opera and classical music venue in Vienna, and possibly the world. From here we walk, heading north on Kartner Strasse, a pedestrian-only walkway of shops, trees, cafes and buildings of historical and cultural interest. Instantly recognizable along this walk is the Gothic, glorious Stephansdom (St Stephen's Cathedral). This is the geographical and emotional heart of the city. Our stroll down Graben St. takes us past Neo-Classical architectural masterpieces; then we turn onto Kohlmarket and head to Michaelerplatz and its array of architectural sites.

After a break for lunch, we head out of the city centre to Schonbrunn Palace where we walk through the manicured gardens and enjoy the view from the Gloriet overlook. This enormous Baroque palace was built to accommodate Empress Maria Theresia and her large family. Today the park and its enclosed historic Zoological garden are enjoyed by joggers, walkers, and families with children.

+-2 hours walking plus +/-3 hour panoramic bus tour and visit to Schonbrunn

Overnight in Vienna.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3  
**Vienna: Hiking Path #5, Bisamberg**

Today we stretch our legs with a leisurely warm-up hike in the environs of Vienna.

The city of Vienna maintains a network of thirteen walking/hiking trails within the city limits (Stadtwanderwegs). Most of the trails are paved or gravel-surfaced and can be used year-round, or close to it. The trails offer beautiful views, interesting wildlife, and plenty of exercise! A bonus is that there is nearly always a restaurant, heuriger, or hutte along the way offering refreshments. What hike in Vienna would be complete without coffee and strudel?

Our chosen route today is #5, The Bisamberg, a "classic" walk named after the famous wine producing region (we'll make our way to the trailhead via the city's convenient public transit sytem). Along the way, the path passes many old wine cellars, some apparently still in use, others in a completely abandoned state, but nonetheless photogenic for it. The trail then makes a quick and easy ascent to the edge of the vineyards of the Bisamberg.

The vineyards in this area tend to face south and west, toward the Danube, and are well-known in the city for their Pinots: Pinot
Blanc, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. The vines sit in dark soil, on slopes that are not terribly steep; this modest hill is a favourite destination spot because it has the well-known Magdalena Hof tavern, about two-thirds of the way up the slope. Climbing a bit further, it has a great picnic and overlook spot. Indeed, it is one of the advertised highlights of the hike that Vienna is visible from the Falkenberg, weather permitting, of course.

The Stadtwanderweg 5 continues just inside the treeline, passing fields and more vineyards, before beginning the descent back to the city. Once at Hagenbrunnerstrasse, a small stretch of rather narrow, unimproved path leads back to a bridge over a creek, and from there to civilization. The trail comes to a close on Stammersdorferstrasse, a lovely street lined with a dozen or so wine taverns. Known as Heuriger, they are a delightful custom, dating back centuries, popular with locals (and savvy tourists). And on a good hiking day, the are filled with hikers and non-hikers alike, all enjoying the “Wein” from “Wien.”

After a charming lunch somewhere near our hiking route, we return to Vienna (public transit) with the balance of the day at leisure. Our provided meal is lunch, in order give everyone the opportunity to enjoy their evening at leisure, perhaps to attend one of the many beautiful concert venues, or even take in an opera.

Our hikes: Because some hikes can/may be adjusted at the discretion of your Tour Leader depending on things like weather and group interest, the final distances/durations of our hikes as indicated in our itinerary should be taken as guidance only. In the meantime, however, we can advise that, generally-speaking, our walks are leisurely on well-trodden pathways over undulating terrain (some walks are downhill), 2-5 hours in overall duration with plenty of breaks for refreshment, photos, and taking it all in.

Overnight in Vienna.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 4  
**Vienna, Austria - Mikulov, Czech Republic - Lednice**

This morning we say farewell to Austria, board our bus, and start off towards the Czech border. Once the domain of the Liechtenstein Princes, this 200 sq km "designed" landscape is among the largest in Europe. It was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996 for its unique composition of romantic parks complemented by two chateaux and other architectural monuments.

In one hour we will arrive in Mikulov, Czech Republic. After walking and sightseeing in the historical town centre we will hike the Holy Hill, which dominates the Mikulov skyline. After descending the Holy Hill we will continue to Valtice by bus.

The jewel in the crown of Valtice is its massive Baroque chateau, the former residence of the Lichtenstein family. Situated in the centre of a tradition wine region, the chateau was built in stages by thirteen princes and in the 18th century the residence, with its furnishings, collections, and rich inventory competed with the imperial court in Vienna itself.

We will visit the National Wine Salon, located within the chateau where we will be able to learn about and sample Moravian wines. The Wine Salon is linked to a competition in which, each year, the board selects a representative national collection of the country's best hundred wines.

From here we will walk all the way to Lednice through vineyards on the slopes of mellow hills, mirror-smooth ponds, nature reserves, bird sanctuaries, storks’ nests perched up on high trees and telephone poles. These things, plus excellent cooking and wine, are among the simple pleasures of life in South Moravia.

**DAY SUMMARY:** Valtice-Lednice (12 km/7.5 miles, undulating terrain, 3-4 hours).

This evening we will enjoy dinner at our hotel's traditional restaurant.

Overnight in Lednice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5  
**Lednice & the Palava Hills**
This morning we head to the foot of the Palava Hills and start our day’s hike in the charming wine-making village of Pavlov.

The Palava Hills, part of Palava Protected Landscape Area declared in 1976, are a 20 km long limestone ridge stretching to the very south of Moravia. It is the warmest and almost the most arid area in the Czech Republic, and therefore vines are cultivated here. A wine variety of Palava cultivated in the area was named after the hills is today very popular white that you must be sure to try!

Our path takes us past vineyards and then into forest, where an information board introduces us to the unique fauna and flora of the Nature Reserve Dvin-Kotel-Soutska. The path here starts out quite steep and can be demanding but it does not take long for us to reach the first look-out point from the ruins of the castle of Dviky. From the ruins we have sweeping views of the surrounding landscape, the Nove Mlyny reservoirs, Pavlov, and Dolni Vstonice.

After a lunch break in Klentnice village, we follow the red marked trail which brings us to the second castle ruins on our route. Siroti hrad castle was built as the gothic castle in the 13th century and, when the house died out, the castle became a possession of King Wenceslaus III in 1305. It was built on two limestock outcrops separated by deep ravine. The main part of the castle lies on the southern part; over the ravine was built a footbridge.

The trail leads us via Stolova hora tableland, which acquired the name for its shape -- the views here are amazing! Descending, we continue along the road and vineyards, passing by another geomorphological nature monument called Koii skala. Entering Turold Nature Reserve, we are on the last kilometre before the end of our hike.

After 13 km/8 mi with elevation variation of 620m, you deserve a reward in the form of the quality wine or coffee, which are always very easy to find!

Overnight in Lednice.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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**Day 6   Lednice, Czech Republic - Trencin, Slovakia**

Welcome to Slovakia! Czechoslovakia split into Czech Republic and Slovakia on Jan. 1, 1993. The Czech Republic has always been the ritzier, more romantic cousin; Slovakia is the outdoorsy nature buff. Today we cross the border with Slovakia and head for Trencin via the Skalka Pilgrimage site.

In medieval times, there was a Latin saying "Ora et labora", which encouraged people to "pray and work". These words echo in one's mind during a visit to Skalka, which is a place of deep thoughts and meditation, a world away from the city noise. It was here that the two Saints Svrad and Benedict aughted in the 11th century, and where they achieved their aim of absolute asceticism.

Skalka is only a few kilometres away from the centre of Trencin, and although it is almost impossibly quiet most of the time, it is also known as one of the oldest pilgrimage destination in Slovakia, to which about 15,000 pilgrims head each year, some from the Czech Republic and Poland.

Upon arrival in Trencin (after a break for lunch) 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. With extensive fortifications, it comprises 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.

This evening's dinner is out at a restaurant located within the rock on which the castle is situated!

Overnight in Trencin.
Day 7  
**Trencin - Bojnice Castle - Vikolinec - Tatra Region**

Today’s journey to the Tatra region 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 situated just below the castle. We will also stop in the town of Vikolinec, a remarkably intact settlement of 45 buildings with the traditional features of a central European village. It is the region’s most complete group of these kinds of traditional log houses, often found in mountainous areas.

Later today we arrive at our base for our hikes in the Tatras and exploration of Pieniny National Park.

Overnight in Tatranska Lomnica.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8  
**Hiking the High Tatras**

It has been said that in Slovakia is everything but the sea. But as soon as you start to explore the country’s nature, you won’t miss the ocean at all. Within a few hours you can exchange vast lowlands for mountains more than 2000m/6,500 ft high. A few hours more and you can trade walking in the sky with plummeting into deep gorges with picturesque brooks.

The tradition of trail marking started in the country in 1874, and markers now cover more than 10,000 kilometres of trails. This means that Slovakia is among the countries with the best network of marked hiking trails in the world. One of the treats of hiking here is the huts; these chalets offer not only an intimate atmosphere but an extraordinary culinary experience. Local specialities taste even better eaten in a cosy chalet made of stone and wood, alongside a crackling fire. The food is like Slovakia: hearty and warm -- lean bratwurst with tangy sauerkraut, thick goulash, soothing onion soup.

Today we ramp up our game, both in terms of actual elevation and the scale of the landscape we’ll experience, and in terms of the length of our hike. Our pace is leisurely, however, and the overall elevation gain/loss is not huge. It is also, arguably, our most spectacular day thus far!

To get us up into the mountains and sub-alpine, we'll begin our excursion with a cable car ride to Skalnate Pleso (1755m/5,757 ft), the starting point of our hike, situated in Skalnata Dolina (Rocky Valley) under the southern slopes of Lomnicky Stit (peak). Over rocky terrain we will follow a marked 2.7km long route to Velka Svistovka peak (2037m/6,680 ft), which should take us about 90 minutes. This is the highest point of our today's route and from here we descend the (rocky) path.

We're aiming for the hut located at Zelene Pleso (Green) lake (1.5 hours, 1550m/5,085 ft) for a break for lunch which we can purchase from the hut.

After a rest we will continue via a forested trail, 7.8 km/4.8 mi long to the Biela Voda bus stop from which we will travel back to our hotel.

**DAY SUMMARY:** 13.2 km/8.2 mi, 5 hrs actual walking at a leisurely pace plus stops, undulating terrain.

Overnight in Tatranska Lomnica.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9  
**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. The Pieniny Hills are the symbol of Zamagurie region, with the majestic "Three Crowns" peaks at their centre. Their plunging outcrops are washed by the River Dunajec, which has carved out a beautiful gorge.

After our hike yesterday, this is an easier-going day on which we float the Dunajec River on wooden rafts amid the wonderful natural scenery of the national park. Polish sources date the transport of goods and passengers on the Dunajec back to the 13th century, while the oldest reference on the Slovakian side dates back to 1708. A living reminder of the transport of timber and other goods down the Dunajec and the Vistula to the Baltic Sea is the local rafter's hat, to which the raftsman would attach one sea-shell after each journey to the sea.

Our 8 km-long route leads from Klastor down to the village of Lesnica, lasting about 90-120 minutes. This is not adrenaline "on the edge" kind of rafting like you've seen in the movies. These rafts are wooden, slow, comfy, and safe.

While here, we'll also visit the architectural gem of this area, Cerveny Klastor (the "Red Monastery"), founded in the 14th century by the Carthusians. During the 18th century, the monastery was inhabited by Camaldulian monks, including the botanist Cyprian who was, according to the legend, able to fly.

Overnight in Tatranska Lomnica.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10  
**Hiking the High Tatras**

Today we again head to the high alpine (via cable car) for a final spectacular day of hiking. This is one of the most beautiful mountain hikes in the central High Tatras; the highlight today is our route through Mala Studena dolina (Small Cold Valley), surrounded by rocky peaks.

Following a 3 km long route, we will reach a mountain hut called Zamka (1 hr, elevation 1460m/4,790 ft), from where we continue for around 1.5 hrs to Tery hut, one of the highest huts in the High Tatras (2015m/6,610 ft). From here we can admire Pa Spisskych plies (5 tarns/lakes) and views of the Tatra villages.

We continue to the small ski resort of Hrebienok, passing by the Cold Creek Waterfalls (1 hr). From here we take the funicular back down to the valley and to our hotel.

DAY SUMMARY: 13 km/8 mi, 5-6 hrs actual walking at a leisurely pace plus stops, undulating terrain.

Overnight at Tatranska Lomnica.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11  
**Tatras Region - Banska Stiavnica - Bratislava**

Today we say farewell to the Tatras and drive to Bratislava, the Slovak capital. Our route is scenic, through the mountain ranges of the High Tatras to the Low Tatras -- mountain peaks and hiking trails, still green forests, bubbling streams, and haystack-like miniature peak-roofed houses.

On the way we stop in Banska Stiavnica for a walking tour and some free time. Banska Stiavnica is located in the middle of an immense caldera created by the collapse of an ancient volcano. With a population of more than 10,000, it is a completely preserved medieval town. Because of their historical value, the town and its surroundings were proclaimed by the UNESCO to be a World Heritage Site in 1993.

We continue to Bratislava, situated on both banks of the Danube and a promontory of the Little Carpathians. During the second half of the 20th century, Bratislava finally became a Slovakian city where an ambitious rebuilding and restoration program has transformed the city.
Overnight in Bratislava.
Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12  Bratislava: City 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 fascinating microcosm of central Europe.

There is much to see in the historic Old Town, where small art and antique galleries and shops mingle with restaurants and cafes. As attractions are within walking distance of each other, our tour will be conducted on foot.

Balance of the day at leisure to enjoy Bratislava. Tonight we’ll enjoy our farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Bratislava.
Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13  Departure

Departure from Bratislava.

BON VOYAGE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast