

Discover the Soul of Romania: A 17-Day Private Tour

Perfect as a Danube Cruise Extension

Discover the soul of Romania on this 17-day private journey designed as the perfect pre- or post-extension to your Danube cruise. From the elegance of Budapest to the charm of Bucharest, travel through time as you explore vibrant towns, majestic castles, remote monasteries, and living traditions. Experience local life with home-cooked meals, folklore shows, and artisan encounters. Breathtaking landscapes, such as the Bicz Gorges and the Transfăgărășan Road, complement the cultural richness. This itinerary offers a deep, personal connection to Romania's past and present — all in comfort, with handpicked experiences along the way.

Day 1: Budapest to Timișoara | Gateway to Romania

Leave the Hungarian capital behind and cross into Romania, where the journey begins in the vibrant city of **Timișoara**—a cultural jewel with a rich Austro-Hungarian legacy. Often dubbed “*Little Vienna*,” Timisoara's baroque squares, colorful facades, and lively cafes make for a charming first impression. Enjoy a guided city tour, including Victory Square, Union Square, and the Orthodox Cathedral, where the anti-communist Romanian revolution ignited in 1989.

Hotel Opera 4* or similar



Day 2: Timișoara to Sibiu | Castles and Citadels

Today, travel into the heart of Transylvania, stopping first at the imposing **Corvin Castle** in Hunedoara—one of Europe's most dramatic Gothic castles, steeped in legend and history. Continue to **Alba Iulia**, the spiritual capital of modern Romania, where the 18th-century Vauban fortress tells the story of the country's unification. In the afternoon, arrive in **Sibiu**, “the city of the eyes”, one of Transylvania's most beautiful cities, nestled in the foothills of the Carpathians.

Hotel Republique 4* or similar



Day 3: The Ultimate Road: Transfăgărășan Adventure

Begin with a walking tour of **Sibiu**, exploring its grand squares, medieval walls, and the iconic Bridge of Lies. Then, embark on a thrilling drive along the **Transfăgărășan Highway**, hailed by Top Gear as one of the world's best roads. Wind your way past alpine lakes, waterfalls, and craggy peaks. Stop at the mysterious **Cârța Monastery ruins**, a hauntingly beautiful Cistercian site, before returning to Sibiu for the evening.

Hotel Republique 4* or similar



Day 4: Sibiu to Sighișoara | Gipsy cultural exchange

Begin the morning with a visit to a **gipsy craftsman**, who shares the story of his family, his trade and his perspective on life as a Roma in today's Romania. Continue across the Târnava valley to the Renaissance **Bethlen Castle**, a partly-ruined partly-restored noble residence reflecting the rural aristocratic life of Transylvania. In the afternoon reach Dracula's birthplace: **Sighișoara**, one of Europe's best-preserved inhabited medieval citadels and a World Heritage Site. Walk its cobbled streets among the old guild towers before the town settles into its calm evening atmosphere.

Hotel Fronius 4* or similar



Day 5: Sighișoara to Cluj Napoca | Wine and mine

Depart Sighișoara and travel north through the rolling Transylvanian countryside, stopping at a **16th-century castle** for a guided visit and a carefully selected **wine tasting** held in its historic cellars. Continue to the cavernous **Turda Salt Mine**, descending into vast underground chambers carved by generations of miners and now transformed into an unusual subterranean attraction. You may even take a short boat ride on the **underground lake**. Arrive in **Cluj Napoca** in the afternoon and enjoy an introductory walk through the elegant city center, discovering its Austro-Hungarian architecture and lively squares.

Hotel Beyfin 4* or similar



Day 6: Cluj – Vadu Izei | A journey back in time: Maramureș

Travel into the heart of Maramureș, a land of wooden churches and timeless traditions, where families display their status in the community by building massive elaborate **wooden gates**, carved by hand. Their loom-woven rugs and blankets are still washed using centuries-old devices, that harvest the force of nearby rivers and streams. Visit one such **authentic place** (which is still used daily by the locals) where rugs are being washed, grains are being milled and moonshine is being distilled, all with the help of the Iza river. End the day with a **home-cooked dinner** and a **private folklore show** in a local guesthouse in Vadu Izei.

Rural family stay: Casa Covaciu or similar + traditional dinner and private folklore show



Day 7: Vadu Izei | Maramureș in depth

Day entirely dedicated to the exploration of Maramureș. Begin in nearby Săpânța, where you can marvel at the vividly painted **Merry Cemetery**, then continue to the towering wooden church of **Peri Monastery**. Visit Sighet's moving **Memorial to the Victims of Communism** and the unusual **open market**, where the fruits and vegetables are vying for space with products originating from Ukraine, only a couple of miles away. Sighet is also the birthplace of **Elie Wiesel**, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and author of the haunting *Night* — you may visit his memorial home. End your day with another **home-cooked dinner** in the same village.

Rural family stay: Casa Covaciu or similar + traditional dinner



Day 8: Vadu Izei – Gura Humorului | Into Bucovina's Painted World

Discover the graceful **Bârsana monastery**, its slender wooden spires rising towards the sky. After a beautiful **chairlift ride**, step into nature with an **easy trek** to the spectacular Horses' Waterfall, Romania's tallest. Later, stop to admire the **painted houses** of Ciocănești, uniquely adorned in a local tradition seen nowhere else in the country. In the afternoon, the journey takes you into Bucovina's rolling hills to the luminous **Voroneț Monastery**, often called the "Sistine Chapel of the East." Its celebrated frescoes — still radiant after five centuries — offer a serene and fitting close to a day that moves from living tradition to natural grandeur and finally to spiritual art.

Hotel Sentir 4* or similar



Day 9: Gura Humorului – Văratec | An Exploration of Monastic Life

Delve deeper into monastic Bucovina with visits to two more remarkable monasteries:

Moldovița and **Sucevița**, UNESCO-listed for their intricate exterior frescoes. Don't miss the delightful **Painted Egg Museum**, where the centuries-old tradition of egg-painting is being both preserved and beautifully displayed. Your day concludes at Văratec Monastery, a living spiritual community where you'll **dine with the nuns** and **sleep within the monastery walls**. A unique opportunity to glimpse into the nuns' way of life.

Unique accommodation within the walls of the Văratec monastery + dinner cooked and served by the nuns.



Day 10: Văratec – Miercurea Ciuc | Back to Transylvania

A day blending history, craftsmanship and dramatic landscapes begins at the imposing **Neamț Fortress**, standing guard over the valley for more than six centuries. From here, continue to the **Popa Museum** in Târpești, where traditional masks and folk art reveal the imagination of rural Romania. The route then winds through the spectacular **Bicaz Gorges**, sheer cliffs rising above the narrow mountain road, before the scenery softens into the Székely Land as you arrive in **Miercurea Ciuc**, a quiet Transylvanian town shaped by its Central European heritage.

Hotel Gambrinus 4* or similar



Day 11: Miercurea Ciuc – Braşov | Hungarian Cultural Heritage

Delve deeper into the Hungarian heritage of southeast Transylvania. Discover the quirky Ika Tower and Haszmann Pál **ethnographical museum** with its open-air collection of rural tools and agricultural machinery. Explore a functioning water mill that still grinds flour the old-fashioned way. Join a local family for a two-hour long **hands-on bread-making workshop** followed by a **traditional Hungarian lunch**. On route to Braşov, don't miss the impressive **Prejmer citadel**, a UNESCO site, where each local family had their own refuge-room built into the defensive wall.

Hotel Prinz Gregor 4* or similar



Day 12: Braşov – Bran – Braşov | Myths & Mountains

A day of legends and leisure begins with a visit to the iconic **Bran Castle**, famously linked to the Dracula myth, but historically tied to Queen Marie of Romania. Explore its ramparts and hidden passages before returning to Braşov. You may choose to have a relaxing afternoon or to visit the **Libearty Bear Sanctuary**, a heartwarming refuge for rescued brown bears set in a tranquil forest, outside town.

Hotel Prinz Gregor 4* or similar



Day 13: Braşov – Bucharest | From Royal Trails to City Lights

Journey south toward Bucharest, stopping at the fairy-tale **Peleş Castle** nestled in the mountains of Sinaia. One of the most spectacular castles on the continent, Peleş was the favorite project of the country's first king, who devoted it 42 years of his life and a large part of his considerable fortune. With its ornate woodwork, secret passages, and royal legacy, it's a tour highlight. Continue through the rolling countryside, towards the capital. Arrive in **Bucharest** and settle in for the capital's vibrant mix of past and present.

Hotel Capitol 4* or similar



Day 14: Bucharest | Highlights of the Capital

Take in the capital's layered identity on a guided city tour. See wide boulevards, Belle Époque architecture, and the imposing **Palace of the Parliament** — the world's heaviest building. Admire the **Arch of Triumph**, a proud symbol of Romanian unity, and enjoy an interior visit of the splendid **Romanian Atheneum**, the city's beloved concert hall. Wrap up with a culinary stroll through the lively **Obor Market**.

Hotel Capitol 4* or similar



Day 15: Constanța | To the mythic Pontus Euxinus

Today, the journey heads east to the **shores of the Black Sea**. In Constanța, the oldest continuously inhabited city in Romania, you will discover a history shaped by Greeks, Romans, and Ottoman traders. A guided walk reveals the 1911 **Art Nouveau Casino** facing the sea, the **Grand Mosque** with its panoramic minaret, and **Ovid Square**. The afternoon is free to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of the coast.

Hotel Hrisicos 4* or similar



Day 16: Danube Delta | Into Europe's Last Wilderness

Depart early toward Tulcea, the gateway to the **Danube Delta**, where Europe's great river meets the sea. Here you board a **small boat** and glide into a maze of channels, lakes, and reed islands alive with birdlife — pelicans, herons, and cormorants often appearing just meters away. The slow pace allows you to absorb the stillness of this UNESCO-protected wilderness. Midday, stop in a local riverside setting for a traditional **fish-based lunch** prepared in Delta style. In the afternoon, return to the mainland and drive back to Bucharest, arriving in the evening after a day spent in one of Europe's last true natural sanctuaries.

Hotel Capitol 4* or similar



Day 17: Departure | La Revedere, România!

After breakfast, enjoy a relaxed **private transfer** to the airport for your onward journey. Whether this tour began or ended your Danube cruise, it completes your experience with intimate insights into Romanian culture, history, and landscapes. Depart with rich stories, warm memories, and a connection to a land that's both complex and welcoming.

What's included:

- A private tour – just for you and your family or friends;
- The services of an English-speaking guide throughout the trip (guiding available in Spanish or French upon request);
- Pick-up directly from your Danube river cruise ship in Budapest;
- Transportation in a modern, comfortable vehicle, with all associated costs covered;
- 16 nights in centrally located 4-star hotels, charming B&B and monastic accommodation*;
- Daily breakfast, 3 traditional home-cooked meals, a monastic dinner and a fishermen's lunch in the Danube Delta (5 meals in total);
- A wine tasting of Romanian wines in the cellars of a 16th century castle;
- A bread-baking workshop;
- A private folklore show;
- All entrance fees and guided visits as outlined;
- A beautiful, welcoming country ready to be explored.

**Staying one night at the monastery is subject to availability and cannot be guaranteed in advance — however, it is usually not a problem to arrange, especially if requested early.*

What's not included:

- International flights or other transportation to/from the start or end of the tour;
- Meals not specifically mentioned above;
- Gratuities for your guide (at your discretion).