



CICERONI
T R A V E L

A MEDIEVAL WORLD: UNSPOILT ROMANIA

SUNDAY 6 – WEDNESDAY 16 JUNE 2021 (11 DAYS)

LECTURER: JOHN OSBORNE

£2970

- Visit an utterly unspoilt part of Europe
- Amazing painted wooden churches are a testament to an age of faith, lost to the west
- Unique fortified ‘Saxon’ churches reflect military struggles of Medieval times
- Spectacular & varied scenery
- A very warm welcome from local communities
- Comfortable hotels with decent food & wine



Sucevitsa Monastery

OVERVIEW

A visit to Romania is like finding a well-worn, patched coat at the bottom of the drawer: it was grandfather’s, but oddly it is still serviceable, as well as a remarkable survival. The areas we shall be visiting - Transylvania in the centre of the country and Maramureş and Bucovina in the north – are still predominantly rural. The horse and cart is still a means of transport around the countryside, families still mow the hay with scythes, and their old-style cottages line the not-always-so-smart village streets. The Communist regime was never entirely able to collectivise the smallholdings, and we are looking at Old Europe.

Things are changing, of course: villages are reached by hard-top roads, forests are decimated by illegal logging, and the young emigrate, but environmental movements, with the leadership and support of HRH the Prince of Wales, are increasingly effective, demonstrating why and how the traditional landscape and the rural way of life should be conserved.

Transylvania was tributary once to the Ottomans in Constantinople and then to the Habsburgs in Vienna and Hungary, but the high, forested Carpathians form a natural frontier between these parts and the old Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia to the east and south. So, the Hungarian landlords and German burghers of Transylvania were able to prosper with a degree of independence, though the Romanian population had no civic status here until the end of the First World War, when Transylvania passed out of Hungarian administration and became part of the state of ‘greater’ Romania. There are still around 1.8 million ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania today.

We begin in the north, where wooden Orthodox churches survive in the hills and valleys of Maramureş. With their traditional timber construction and characteristic shingle spires and steeply pitched roofs, they have eighteenth century frescoes that are touchingly simplistic examples of devotional folk art.

A day’s drive over the Carpathians from Maramureş leads to Bucovina, where the Orthodox ‘painted monasteries’ survive, re-established now as convents. Many were founded by the ruler of this region, Stephen the Great, at the end of the fifteenth century - one foundation, it is said, for each of the victories that he achieved over the Ottoman Turks. Uniquely, the entire exteriors of these churches were decorated, as well as the interiors. The brilliant representations of the heavenly host, the ancestry of Christ, the life of Mary and the perils of the Last Judgement that cover the walls of the monastery churches at Suceviţa, Voroneţ and Moldoviţa have outlasted both foreign marauders and winter weather.

The legacy of the German communities of Transylvania, known as ‘Saxons’, is remarkable. Invited by Hungarian kings to colonize this frontier of central Europe in the twelfth century, they created well-ordered settlements, where superb gothic churches – now Protestant - and baroque town centres survive. Looking at this harmonious period architecture, we can see how the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin is linked in legend to the establishment of these towns. We shall be staying in three of them: Sighişoara, Braşov and Sibiu.

The ‘Saxon’ villages of Biertan, Viscri and Prejmer are also on our itinerary; they are amazing survivals, too, with their medieval churches fortified as well-stocked refuges for their inhabitants against centuries of threats from invading Mongols and Turks. Hugely reduced by two World Wars and Communism instead, there are now fewer than 50,000 Germans here.

Due to the amount of territory we need to traverse, we shall spend one night in each of Cluj and Sighetu Marmatiei and two nights in each of Sucevița, Sighișoara, Brasov and Sibiu, using locally rated, comfortable 3,4 and 5* hotels.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Sunday 6 June – We fly early afternoon from Luton to **Cluj** where we spend one night at the **5* Hotel Opera Plaza**. We have dinner in our hotel – wine, water and coffee are included with group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Monday 7 June – We drive through lovely countryside, the mountains and valleys of **Maramures**. We have lunch in **Baia Mare** and that afternoon we visit the wooden churches at **Surdesti** and **Desești**. We continue to **Sighetu Marmatiei** and spend one night at the **3* (Superior) Hotel Gradina Morii** and have dinner in our hotel.

Day 3: Tuesday 8 June – We drive across the spectacular Carpathian mountains to **Bucovina**. We visit the wooden churches at **Rozavlea** and **Ieud** and have lunch en route at **Borsa**. We stay two nights at the **4* Best Western Gura Humorului**, where we also have dinner.

Day 4: Wednesday 9 June – Today we see the famous painted monasteries at **Sucevița**, **Voroneț** and **Moldovița**. These are a remarkable survival, particularly as the painted exteriors seem to have survived all that nature (and man) has thrown at them. We lunch locally and this evening we eat independently in Gura.

Day 5: Thursday 10 June – We continue across the Carpathians, stopping for lunch at **Bistritsa**, visiting the Palace of Culture in **Târgu Mureș** en route. We spend two nights at the **4* Mercure Binderubi Hotel** in **Sighișoara** and dinner will be in the hotel.

Day 6: Friday 11 June – We spend the morning in **Sighișoara** on foot, visiting the Citadel, the Clock Tower and Church on the Hill, after which we have a group lunch. In the afternoon we drive to **Biertan** village and visit the fortified Saxon church. This evening we eat independently in Sighișoara.

Day 7: Saturday 12 June – On our way to Brasov we visit **Viscri** to see its fortified Saxon church; lunch is included in Viscri. We continue to **Brașov** and visit the Black Church before going to our hotel for two nights, the **5* Hotel Aro Palace**, and we have dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 8: Sunday 13 June – We visit **Prejmer**'s fortified Saxon church before spending the morning in **Brașov**, visiting the old Romanian school in the Șchei quarter and the main Square. The afternoon will be free and lunch and dinner are not included today.

Day 9: Monday 14 June – On our way to Sibiu we visit the Saxon village at **Cisnădioara**. We have lunch en route and on arrival in **Sibiu** we have an orientation walk. We spend two nights at the **5* Hilton Sibiu Hotel** and this evening we have dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 10: Tuesday 15 June – We spend the morning in **Sibiu** on foot, with visits to the Brukenthal Museum and the Evangelical and Orthodox Churches. After some free time for lunch, not included, we drive out to visit the ASTRA outdoor 'Museum of Traditional Folkloric Civilisation'. We have our final dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 11: Wednesday 16 June – There will be some free time this morning after which we drive to **Sibiul** village for lunch in a village house, followed by a visit to the Glass Icon Museum. We continue to Sibiu airport for the return flight to Luton.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2970 **Without Flights** £2795 **Deposit** £395

Single Supplement £275 (Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotels One night in each of Cluj and Sighetu Marmatiei and two nights in each of Sucevița, Sighișoara, Brasov and Sibiu, using locally rated, comfortable 3, 4 and 5* hotels

Flights WIZZ AIR

Outward: **W6 3304** London Luton **1415**, arrive Cluj-Napoca **1910**

Return: **W6 3771** Sibiu **1940**, arrive London Luton **2045**

Price includes 7 dinners & 8 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, taxes, entry fees & gratuities, services of John Osborne and our local tour manager

Not included Travel to/from Luton, 3 dinners & 2 lunches



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