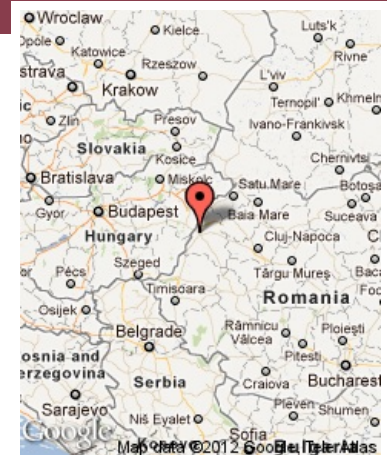


Tour of Rural Romania



Highlights

The Apuseni Mountains of Transylvania are home to a rural way-of-life unchanged in centuries and offer truly off the beaten track holidays. This fascinating seven-day tour takes you through the Country of the Moti (the Apuseni Highlands), with caves, mountain hamlets and an 800 year-old church among the many highlights.

Located in Western Romania and surrounded by the mighty Romanian Carpathians arch, part of Europe's largest mountain chain, the Apuseni Mountains offer some of the most unspoiled natural beauty this side of Europe, as well as a culture unchanged in centuries. The Transylvanian region is arguably Europe's last wild frontier – the mountains harbour the continent's highest populations of lynx, wolves and brown bears, as well as over a third of its plant species – and rural life reflects this, with forestry, hay-making and livestock-rearing the major livelihood strategies. The landscape is almost unknown in Europe: meadows of wild flowers, soaring limestone cliffs, freshwater lakes and vast cave networks! More impressive still is the scale, with gently undulating hills as far as the horizon, punctuated occasionally by the odd hay wain or traditional wooden farmhouse.

This fascinating seven-day tour takes you from Oradea, capital of Bihor Country, up to the highland Country of the Moti, the ancient inhabitants of the mountains. One day you'll travel by traditional horse-cart to a remote hamlet with traditional wooden architecture for a lesson in local woodworking, the next you'll have a chance to try your hand at pottery under the expert gaze of the village potter. The tour also includes a trip to Chiscau village, famous for its hearty pies and the nearby Bear Cave, an orgy of stalactites and stalagmites so-called due to its impressive range of Cave Bear fossils. Other highlights include a local dance show, a visit to a horn and violin workshop and having a weave on a traditional loom! You'll stop each day in one of the cosy guesthouses, where you'll be treated to some terrific cooking and a few cups of the local teas and tipples, best served on the terrace as the sun sets over the meadow.

Is it for me?

This tour is for people with a genuine interest in understanding and experiencing the culture and traditions of this remote corner of Europe. If you're not open-minded and curious by nature you probably won't get so much from this; there's loads to see and do but only if you're willing to immerse yourself in the local culture. This means not being afraid to get your hands dirty at the potter's wheel or to try some of the local delicacies. Ultimately, this kind of involvement can be really rewarding for everyone. The tours are small – between four and eight people – so there's no danger of things feeling voyeuristic. To the contrary, former guests have commented on the levels of intimacy and bonhomie between villagers and themselves, and on the reciprocal exchange of knowledge. We also hear only good things of the food and accommodation, not to mention the guides, who have made this kind of two-way cultural education their *raison d'être*.

Accommodation

Accommodation is in guest houses (ranked at 2 or 3 daisies – according to the Romanian system), mountain cabins or village families. The hosts are warm and generous, the food is mostly home-prepared from local and organic ingredients and very tasty. All the facilities have indoor bathrooms with running hot and cold water. In some occasions families share the same facility with guests (in this case it might happen that your bedroom may be accessible only through a bedroom being used by another person from the group) while in others you are accommodated in a separate facility which is exclusively for guests. All accommodation providers try to limit their negative impact on the environment and use as much as possible renewable or recyclable building materials.

Prices from

507 GBP (7 days) per person

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Most of the meals are home-prepared, based on local recipes and using products (vegetables, eggs, meat, milk) from own garden. It is not a problem at all to have vegetarian foods, the host just has to be informed in time. However, the meals in this area are mostly based on meat (usually pork) and they tend to be sometimes fat, especially during the winter period and Christmas, Easter and New Year's eve celebrations. If you would like to have another type of food during your trip, please confirm in advance. Traditional home made drinks are wine and fruit (usually plum) brandy which is quite strong. In the mountain area jams and liqueurs made from wild berries are also usual and they are totally natural – no preservatives, artificial colours or flavors. If you would like to have herbal teas, just let them know.

Itinerary

Day 1: Oradea

A brilliant architectural city is awaiting your discovery: Oradea. After a tour of the city, you will be transferred to The Country of the Moti (the ancient inhabitants of the Apuseni Mountains), the actual Highlands of the Apuseni.

Day 2: Woodwork

Have a trip by horse and cart to one of the local "living museums", a remote hamlet with traditional architecture, local crafts and hospitable people, always ready to chat with visitors. Enjoy a woodwork demonstration in one of the local workshops and a typical dinner in one of the local guesthouses.

Day 3: Pottery

The region of Bihor used to have many active pottery centres, but only some have survived. Try to catch the ancient spirit of the pottery with the help of one of the youngest potters in the area. Discover how to prepare the clay, how to work it out into nice shapes and how to prepare it for burning.

Day 4: Cave and culture

Have a visit to a local museum in Chiscau village, enjoy a handmade pie together with the hosts and visit the Bears' Cave, a show cave of breathtaking beauty.

Day 5: Living traditions in Beius Country

Visit a 800 year old church, learn about the traditional craft of lime-making and explore the Meziad cave, an impressive nature reserve. In the evening, the local dance group will offer you a traditional show, performing several Romanian and Hungarian dances from the area.

Day 6: Living traditions in Beius Country

In an old region with modern influences, you can still try yourself to use the weaving-loom, you can visit a horn violin workshop and a traditional wooden watermill, all on one day and in the same village!

Day 7: White pottery

Enjoy the last day on this trip visiting an old wooden church with religious paintings. Once reaching Vadu Crisului village, you can see a demonstration of white pottery given by a local potter. The evening will end in Oradea, where you will enjoy your farewell dinner.

Details

Getting there

There is an airport at Oradea and you can fly there (indirectly) from London and other European airports.

Price includes

Price includes all food, accommodation and transfers.

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

A reasonable interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

Below is a recommended list only - please adapt to suit your own needs/experience. Please be aware if you do not have certain vital items (e.g. walking boots, etc) the level of your hikes may be changed for your personal safety.

Recommended kit list

Short underwear top and bottoms - avoid cotton (2 sets); top (Polartec 100); bottom (Schoeller, Pile or fleece); waterproof trousers (Gore-Tex); rain parka/jacket with hood (Gore-Tex); socks (wool or synthetic - no cotton); boots (Gore-Tex or waterproof breathable material lining); low boots / sport sandals (for relaxing).

Additional items

Light torch (head torch/hand one); knife/ swiss army knife + cutlery (fork/spoon/plates); water bottle/hydration system (1 litre); small/day pack (15/20 litres); trekking rucksack (50/70 litres); trekking poles (adjustable - no ski poles); sun glasses - 100% UVA/UVB; sunscreen (factor 20); sun hat; lip protection; camera (classic or digital, plus extra film, batteries and charger); favourite snack foods (no more than 500g unless you have some special dietary needs, in which case, please consult the guide); personal toiletries; towels; personal medical kit; personal medication; repair kit - small sewing kit; mobile phone.

Additional items to bring for winter trips

Insulated jacket; gaiters - knee high; warm hat; thin gloves and thick gloves; long underwear bottom and top (1 set).