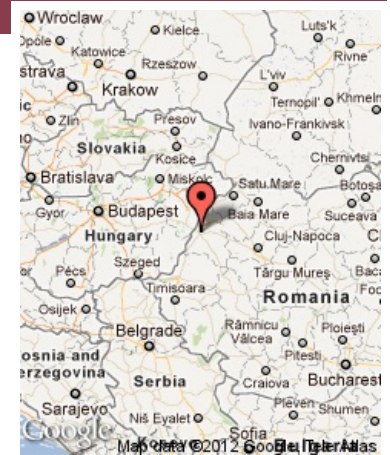


Weekend hiking adventure in Romania



Highlights

Waterfalls, gorges, caves and sheer limestone cliffs – welcome to the Defileul Crisului Repede National Reserve, home to the Cris River Adventure. These three-day hiking tours make for unique and rather unusual weekend breaks and introduce you to the history, culture and raw natural beauty of this unique region, one of the wildest in Europe!

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 three-day break takes you to the Defileul Crisului Repede National Reserve at the heart of the Apuseni. Starting from Oradea, capital of Bihor Country, you'll head to the village of Vadu Crisului, your launch pad for exploring the Cris River. After lunch at the comfortable guesthouse and a visit to some local crafts workshops, you'll be briefed on the adventure of the next two days. Your second day sees you enter the reserve, heading first to the Vama Sarii (Salt Customs), where during the Austro-Hungarian empire rafts carrying salt from the mountains had to pay a fee in order to cross the border. You'll enjoy a packed lunch near the awe-inspiring Vadu Crisului Cave, before hiking back to your guest house for a slap-up dinner. The final day starts with a trip to another cave, Unguru Mare, used as a shelter during Neolithic times. You'll then tackle a via-ferrata route, a tough but safe trail into an area of sheer walls and canyons. At the end of the route you'll reach a pinnacle from which you have a spectacular view of the meandering Cris River! This is where the tour ends, though there is the option to add an additional day for hiking around the Misidului Gorge and Zece Hotare karst plateau.

Is it for me?

This short break can be enjoyed by most people. As long as you're fairly fit and adventurous there's much to be got out of experience. Great food, comfy accommodation and a relaxed pace give the trip a leisurely feel, while the lush scenery and trekking make it feel that little bit special. It should be noted that this is a region with relatively few foreign visitors, so don't expect any home comforts; if you need specific things – medicine, cosmetics, etc. – best stock up in Oradea beforehand. And unsurprisingly there's no internet connection in the villages, so don't choose this trip if you can't bear to go without checking your emails for a day! Personally, though, we think this is one of the tour's many endearing qualities!

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

Prices from

121 GBP (3 days) per person

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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.

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 Arrive in Oradea and transfer to Pestis, a settlement where you will visit a 300-year old wooden church. Afterwards you will head to Vadu Crisului, the village that will be your base for the next days. You will have lunch at a guesthouse. Later that day, you will visit one of the last white pottery workshops and attend a pottery demonstration. Here you will have the opportunity to buy some white, un-enamelled, handmade pottery, extremely rare in Romania as well as in Europe. After meeting the local artisans, enjoy a calm stroll to the guesthouse. You will then be shown a multimedia presentation about the nature reserve - your destination for the next few days. End your first day in the Apuseni Mountains with dinner at your guesthouse.

Day 2: On the second day, the adventure begins. After breakfast, you start your journey through the nature reserve. First stop is the Vama Sarii (the Salt Customs). This is the place where, during the Austrian-Hungarian empire, rafts carrying salt with the mountains had to pay a fee in order to cross the border. Just as important is Vadu Crisului cave, one of the few caves in the country arranged for tourist access. The packed lunch, enjoyed in one of the specially arranged places within the reserve, will be a good reward for your efforts so far. Later on in the afternoon, return to the guesthouse, with only two things on your mind: a shower and a tasty local cuisine experience.

Day 3: On your final day, you will be definitely be swept away by a visit to the Unguru Mare cave, used as a shelter by people starting with the Neolithic Age. Take some time to explore the small museum which hosts the archaeological and paleontological discoveries of the area. The cave stands out also due to the presence of a mineral unique in the world, the crisit. Leaving behind the cave, you will tackle the challenge of a via-ferrata route. It is a tough but safe route into an area with vertical walls and canyons, to a pinnacle where your efforts are repaid with a view over the Great Meander of Crisul Repede River. Soon after lunch, say good-bye to the area and head back to Oradea.

Day 4: OPTIONAL! You may want to give one extra day for hiking along Misidului Gorge and up on the Zece Hotare karst plateau. Admire natural karst phenomena and traditional houses which recreate the authentic countryside landscape of the Piatra Craiului Mountains.

Details

Getting there

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

Price includes

The price includes accommodation (2 nights), all meals (starting with lunch on the first day and ending with lunch on the third day), minibus transfer from Oradea, fees for cave entrances and pottery demonstration.

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.