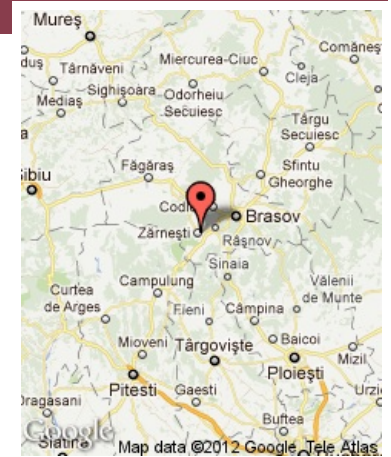


Bird and Bear Watching Holiday



Highlights

Spend seven days in Romania on a bird and bear watching trip of a life time! You'll be spotting everything from Tawny Owls to Dalmatian Pelicans. You'll also get up close and personal with bears, foxes and wild cats as well as seeing protected species of flowers, making this the ultimate wildlife adventure.

Going deep into the heart of nature and observing rare birds and beasts first-hand is a humbling and exhilarating experience. If you've got a craving for animal tracking, you could do much worse than Romania.

The largest country in Southern Europe, Romania offers the kind of biodiversity typical of a region with both mountainous and low, wetland terrains. On this seven day tour you'll get to explore these landscapes (including world-heritage site Danube Delta) on the search for beautiful and endangered birdlife.

You'll start from Zarnesti town in central Romania which will be your base for the first half of the week, staying in a 3* guesthouse with full facilities, before transferring to a four star guesthouse on the Danube on day four. Throughout the week you will spend time with local experts who specialise in showing guests the hidden beauty spots of Romania, and know the best places to for rare bird and bear watching.

It's worth mentioning that the scope of the trip is huge: rather than dedicating your time tracking one particular animal native to the area, you'll end up cramming the week with trips all over the place and seeing just about everything on the way. The focus is primarily on birdlife and you'll get to see numerous rare and protected species including honey eagles, owls, shrike and ibis, but alongside these you will also see some of the larger carnivores and learn about conservation efforts as you go.

The areas you'll visit during the tour are worth seeing even if you remove the critters from the equation. The meadows you will walk through on day two are simply great, and the boat rides which transport you around the Danube Delta are excursions in themselves.

Is it for me?

Romania is a sometimes overlooked location for nature tourism, which is surprising given its rich biodiversity and rigorous habitat protection projects. The country has some amazing attractions - the cultural history of the Transylvanian region and scenic mountain hiking to name a couple - but the strength of this particular tour lies in showing people off the beaten track and into hidden pockets of wildlife.

This is a great chance for anyone wanting to see bears in their natural habitat and also in conservation reserves, as well as seeing rare birdlife in large quantities. The local experts you'll meet on the journey are as knowledgeable as they are passionate, making this tour is a delig for anyone interested in the broad geography and nature of Romania.

Accommodation

Accommodation for the first part of the week is in the small town of Zarnesti, a three star guesthouse with en-suite facilities. The option to downgrade to either two or one star is also available. The town sits at the foot of the southern Carpathians and is frequently used as an access point by hikers and other tourists to the area. On day four the tour will transfer to a four star guesthouse in Crisan, a fishing village in the heart of the Danube Delta. The accommodation is much of the same here, but is better located as to not waste time travelling to and

Prices from

665 GBP (7 days) per person

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from the delta itself.

Food is included for the duration of the holiday and comprises mainly of local dishes (almost too diverse to summarize - an eclectic mix of various eastern European cuisines) and amazing wines (Romania is famed for its wine quality and is currently the 9th biggest global exporter.)

Itinerary

Day One: Arrival and transfer to Zarnesti (approximately three hours' drive) to a three star guesthouse where you will be accommodated in a double room with private facilities.

Day Two: The group will leave very early (around 5 am) by car, driving to the Sinca area to observe wildlife. From there the tour will move slowly by car looking for bears, red deer, roe deer, foxes, wild cats, owls, buzzards and woodpeckers. You'll also explore the terrain by foot with a guide looking for tracks these animals leave on the ground.

At midday the group will stop at a foresters' lodge for a picnic lunch and take some time out for some rest and relaxation. You will have some time for walking on your own in this amazing valley and enjoy the numerous species of birds, insects and plants.

In the afternoon the chances are good to see some impressive species of bird, including (but certainly not limited to) Ural Owls, Tawny Owls, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, White-backed Woodpecker, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Corncrake, Great Grey Shrike, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Collared Flycatcher, and Fieldfare.

In the evening you'll enjoy an early dinner in Sinca Noua village before heading out to a local bear hide (a facility where bears are attracted with food for observations) for a chance to see bears up close.

Late in the evening you drive back to the Zarnesti guesthouse to prepare for the next day.

Day Three: After breakfast you'll be driven to the beginning of Barsa Valley and start walking towards Coltii Chiliei, a shrine in a cave not far from Zarnesti. The route passes through a mountain meadow, full of flowers in spring and summer, where you can see orchids, gentians and other rare or protected species of flowers. The guide will trace the origin of this shrine back to the 1300s and explain about agricultural traditions and the impact of technology on local life.

On the way back to the guesthouse you'll stop at the Information Centre of Piatra Craiului National Park to find out more about why this area is protected. Amongst the interesting species that can be observed today include the honey buzzard, collared flycatcher, black woodpecker, red-backed shrike and black redstart.

Day Four: As the distance is appreciable, a full day's travel is required to get to your next destination: the massive Danube Delta. On the way you will stop to stretch our legs with a short break at the Muddy Volcanoes close to Buzau (approximately half way) and lunch. In the afternoon the party will continue to Tulcea then by fast boat onto your four star guesthouse in Crisan, a small fishing village located right in the centre of the Danube Delta.

Day Five: After breakfast you'll be driven by small boat to Sulina where the Danube meets the sea. On the way is a chain of beautiful lakes and channels where the group will see a great variety of birds such as white pelicans, dalmatian pelicans, glossy ibis and pigmy cormorants.

Day Six: After breakfast you will be driven by small boat to Stipoc, a beautiful isolated monastery, where there will be a guided tour explaining the rich history of the settlement and surrounding area. The rest of the day will be spent exploring more of the delta and discovering more rare bird species native to the region.

Day Seven: Transfer back to the airport and departure. Depending on your flight schedule there is roughly a four hour drive back to the airport.

Details

Getting there

Getting to Bucharest airport is the easiest path to the tour, at which point the tour operators will organise pick-up.

Price includes

Transfer to and from Bucharest airport, accommodation and full board food for the duration, transport to wildlife watching sites, guidance by local experts and visits to local sites.

Available

May—Aug

Typical Duration

1 week

Comfort level

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

Experience required

A reasonable interest is all that is needed

