

Itinerary:

Plan to arrive to Bucharest no later than the early afternoon of Aug 29. We highly recommend arriving one or several days prior to rest up before the start of the trip. Please let us know of your travel plans and if you need any assistance booking accommodations not included in the tour.

Day 1: Mon, Aug 29 – Arrival

After being picked up by our local guide & driver, we head west to the Black Sea coastline, birding along the way. ***Night in Sinoe or Mamaia***

Day 2: Tue, Aug 30 – Histria & Vadu

The wetlands at Histria & Vadu are some of the most productive in all of Europe and we will spend most of the day here. The muddy pools, ponds, extensive reedbeds, and surrounding steppe and sandy scrub attract a plethora of species including Pygmy Cormorant, White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Ferruginous Duck, Whiskered & White-winged Terns, Red-throated Pipit, and Paddyfield Warbler, among many others. As it will be the fall, shorebirds should be plentiful and we should see find good numbers of Ruff, Little Stint, Collared Pratincole, and Black-tailed Godwit, and there's always the chance for something a bit more unusual like Marsh or Broad-billed Sandpiper. This diverse area has also proven to be excellent for raptors as well with Long-legged Buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Levant Sparrowhawk, and Red-footed Falcon all possible. ***Night in Sinoe or Mamaia***

Day 3: Wed, Aug 31 – Cheia Gorge & Babadag

After checking out of our hotel, we head north toward the fantastic Danube Delta, where we will spend the next couple of days. It's not a far drive to the Delta, but we will nonetheless do some birding along the way. Our morning will be spent at the small but picturesque Cheia Gorge looking for Pied, Isabelline, and Black-eared Wheatears, Red-backed and Lesser Gray Shrikes, and European Bee-eaters, among many others. Later, we visit the Babadag Forest in search of Black, Middle Spotted, and Gray-headed Woodpeckers plus Wood and Isabelline Warblers. We'll make one final stop near the 13th century fortress of Enisala, the last remaining medieval fortress in this part of Romania, where we hope to find Sombre Tit and Thrush Nightingale. ***Night in Danube Delta***

Days 4-5: Thu, Sep 1 – Fri, Sep 2 – Danube Delta

Our next 2 days will be spent along the rich waterways in the heart of the Danube Delta, stopping at such places as Mila 23 and Fortuna Lake. The Delta covers a massive area and is an important haven for waterbirds. We will hope to see both Great White & Dalmatian Pelicans, Purple and Squacco Herons, Little, Red-necked, Eared, and Great Crested Grebes, and Ferruginous Duck in the channels, while the reedbeds should hold Great Reed Warbler, Bearded Reedling, Reed Bunting, Savi's Warbler, Eurasian Penduline-Tit and many more. Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Pygmy and Great Cormorants will be numerous and we hope to find Common Redstart, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, and Garden Warbler as well. ***Nights in Danube Delta***

Day 6: Fri, Sep 3 – Macin Hills to Southern Carpathians

This morning we leave the Delta behind for the magnificent Carpathian Mountains. A detour to the Macin Hills will see us searching for anything we may have so far missed, plus raptors which may include Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed & Booted Eagles, Levant Sparrowhawk, and if we are lucky, Saker Falcon or Imperial Eagle. The rest of the day will be spent driving to our accommodation near the scenic Piatra Craiului National Park in the Southern Carpathians. ***Night in Zarnesti***

Days 7-8: Sat, Sep 4 – Sun, Sep 5 – Transylvania and Wallachia

Over the next 2 days we explore the high elevations of the Carpathian Mountains for birds and wildlife, and we'll get to visit a few of the area's famous castles and landmarks as well. We'll look for the beautiful Wallcreeper, Alpine Swift, and Eagle and Ural Owls at several places, including Zarnesti Gorge. In the beautiful Bucegi Mountains, a smaller range that's part of the Carpathians, we hope to find Alpine Accentor, Nutcracker, Ring Ouzel, Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, Firecrest, Crested Tit and more.

On one of these afternoons, we make the short pilgrimage to the famous Bran Castle, more commonly known as 'Castle Dracula.' Although Vlad Tepes (Vlad III, 'the Impaler'), the historical figure upon which Bram Stoker's Dracula character is partially based, probably never set foot in this castle, it is the only castle in Transylvania that shares any similarity with the Castle Dracula described in Stoker's work. Historically, the castle was occupied primarily by Hungarian kings throughout much of its 700+ year history, and these kings would have been hostile to Vlad Tepes, ruler of the kingdom of Wallachia to the south. It was originally believed that Vlad Tepes was imprisoned at Castle Bran for 2 months following his capture by then-Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus, but many historians now conclude that he was actually imprisoned in a fortress in Budapest.

If there's enough interest, we also have the option to visit Poenari Castle in Wallachia, a ruined fortress which was actually one of the main strongholds of Vlad III. Perched high up in the mountains, Poenari is accessible by the famous Transfogaras Road, the most picturesque mountain road in Romania. Our access will also depend on weather conditions – in wintry weather the high mountain roads may be impassible. Participants must be both fit and willing to climb the 1,480 concrete steps to the top, but those who do will enjoy a fantastic panoramic view of the surrounding countryside.

We also have the option of visiting a wildlife blind/hide for a chance to see European Brown Bear.

Nights in Zarnesti

Day 9: Mon, Sep 6 – Hunedoara

Today we have another castle visit, this time to the fantastic Gothic-Renaissance Hunyadi Castle (also known as Corvin Castle) in Hunedoara, one of the most beautifully-restored medieval castles in Romania and one of the biggest in all of Europe. Named after John Hunyadi, a Hungarian military & political leader, as well as his son Matthias Corvinus, eventual king of Hungary, the castle and its inhabitants played a key role in Medieval Europe, most notably in stopping the Ottoman Empire's advance towards Western Europe.

Once again, legend has it that Vlad the Impaler was also imprisoned here during his exile, but there are more definitive historical connections between the two families of Hunyadi & Vlad Tepes. While the Hunyadi family was constantly at odds with the Ottomans, Vlad's family was oft aligned with them, leading to several historical conflicts which resulted in Vlad II Dracula (Vlad Tepes' father) being forced from power and eventually killed, while Vlad Tepes himself was eventually imprisoned by and later fought for Matthias Corvinus against the Ottomans.

We'll experience the castle in all its medieval splendor, from its surrounding moat and entrance bridge to its many interior rooms and halls richly adorned with fine red marble columns. ***Night in Hunedoara***

Day 10: Tue, Sept 7 – Bucegi

Today we make our way across the Transylvanian Basin towards the meeting point of the Southern and Eastern Carpathian Mountain ranges. It will be a bit of a long travel day but we will break up our drive

with a stop at Sighisoara, a beautiful medieval Saxon town which served as a royal center for Hungarian kings and princes of Transylvania. It was also a major commercial and art center from the early 13th century up until Hungary lost it after the first World War. Vlad the Impaler spent his childhood here and we will explore the well-preserved walled city, its citadel, and other famous landmarks. Continuing south, we drive through Brassov and end up back in the Bucegi Mountains. ***Night in Sinaia***

Day 11: Wed, Sept 8 – Bucegi Mountains & Peles Castle

This morning we search for any high-elevation species we may have so far missed, including Water Pipit, Alpine Accentor, Ring Ouzel, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Red Crossbill, both Goldcrest and Firecrest, and perhaps Ural Owl. In the afternoon, we visit our final castle – Peles Castle, a neo-Renaissance structure built on a medieval route that linked Transylvania and Wallachia. A newborn baby compared to other far older structures in the area, the castle's construction began in the early 1870s and would serve as the summer home to Carol I, the first King of Romania. Today, the castle is a national museum, and its 160 rooms are decorated with some of the finest examples of European art, Murano crystal chandeliers, German stained-glass windows, and Cordoba leather-covered walls. ***Night in Sinaia***

Day 12: Thu, Sept 9 – Departure

Today we bid farewell to 'The Land of Dracula' and drive back to the airport in Bucharest for our return flights. We will bird along the way if our schedule permits.

Itinerary subject to change based on weather and the whims of the guides!