

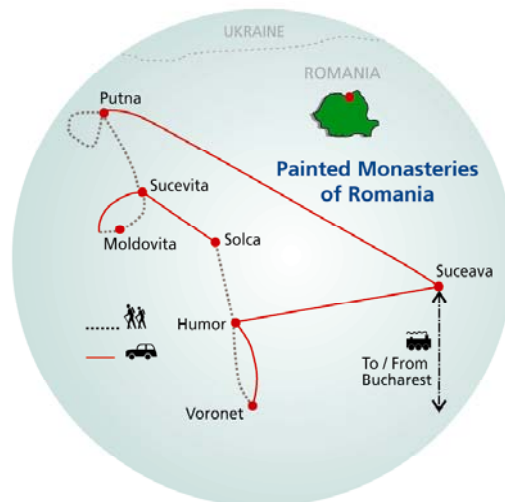
Romania: Painted Monasteries of Romania

Tour code: JMR

Revised: December 06

This holiday combines walking on the eastern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, in the province called Bucovina (Land of Beech Trees), with visits to the beautiful painted monasteries and the sights of Bucharest. Explore the landscapes of old Moldavia, on forest roads, tracks used only by horse and cart and paths passing isolated hamlets. Full and half-day walks give time to appreciate some of the most picturesque treasures of Romania, the painted monasteries and churches scattered around the countryside, many of which are protected by UNESCO as world heritage sites.

The frescos painted on both inside and outside of the famous Romanian monasteries are superbly preserved and quite unique having survived the elements since the 15th century. Each church has its special colour: Voronet-blue, Sucevita-red/green, Moldovita-yellow and Humor red-brown. The images depict biblical scenes, prayers, verses of sacred hymns and themes such as The Last Judgment and The Ladder of St. John, all featuring the colourful and detail-rich imagery of apostles, evangelists, philosophers, martyrs, angels and demons. Beside their vivid frescoes the painted monasteries are famous for the original way of depicting beliefs or events: Sucevita with its unique 'Ladder of Virtue'; Humor, featuring the devil amusingly depicted as a woman, and Moldovita, where a monumental scene of the Siege of Constantinople is displayed.



Putna, the first of the Monasteries on our route dates from 1469 and is surrounded by a fortified wall with towers. We stay for 2 nights at this monastery, giving a whole day for a walk in the surrounding hills reaching a marvellous vantage point with a birds-eye view down to the monastery. Throughout the trip the routes are a blend of hill and valley walking on mainly gentle terrain. The longest day is between Putna and Sucevita, which follows the old monastery path, including an ascent of 300m/1000ft and a distance of 18km. Walking on Day 4 takes in a view point above the second monastery of the trip, Sucevita, where the south wall has eight rows of well preserved scenes from Genesis and the lives of the saints. Sucevita boasts the greatest number of images — thousands — painted against a green background often compared to the colour of a lawn just after the rain. Panoramic mountain views start a half-day walk that encompasses the fortified monastery at Moldovita. More rural scenes the next day as the route meanders through the Polish villages founded during the rule of the Habsburgs; here horse carts loaded with hay, all cut by hand with sickles and scythes, are a common sight. The area is famed for these unspoiled villages and beautiful scenery and locally well know for the produce from the nearby vineyards of Cotnari.

The 15th Century Humor is where calligraphers and painters of miniatures practiced their craft; the monastery walls have been described as "pages of a manuscript covered with miniatures, left lying on a lawn". Last on our journey but certainly not least is Voronet, founded in 1488 by Stephen the Great and known as "The Sistine Chapel of the East"; arguably the best is saved till the end.

After a second night in Humor it is back to Bucharest where there is time to see a few of the main sights. The city has 37 museums, 18 art galleries, a Triumphal Arch on the elegant Soseaua Kiseleff, a boulevard longer than Paris' Champs-Elysees and of course the 1000 room Palace of Parliament, a magnificent building in which only Romanian materials and products were used; local marble, cherry and walnut panelling, crystal chandeliers, specially commissioned hand-woven tapestries and carpets

Accommodation & Meals

Accommodation is reserved on a half board basis on 6 nights and bed and breakfast only on 2 nights.

2 nights are spent in a 3* Hotel, 2 nights in Monastery guesthouse and 4 nights in family run guesthouses with

plenty of warm hospitality. The majority of bookings will have en suite facilities throughout the trip but supply is limited. If a room with shared facilities is all that is available then you will be told at the time of booking.

Note: On the group departures 2 nights less are spent in guesthouses and instead 2 nights are spent at a small family run hotel.

On the two nights when bed and breakfast only is included you can eat at the hotel or stroll out to find a restaurant.

Picnic lunches are not included in the tour cost but are available from hotels at extra cost; alternatively picnic materials can be bought at each of the towns and villages along the route. We indicate in the route notes where there are suitable restaurants or cafes for lunch stops, or recommend you carry food if there are none convenient to the trail.

□ **Nights 1 and 8:** The first and last nights of this trip are spent in a 3* hotel in Bucharest just a few minutes walk from the railway station. All rooms are en suite

Nights 2 and 3: In Putna the monastery guesthouse becomes home for these 2 nights. This is a fascinating place to stay but there are a few house rules; meat is not served on Wednesdays or Fridays or during Orthodox fasting (this is not a problem as organic vegetarian produce is used to prepare tasty meals). Another house rule only affects unmarried couples who must use separate bedrooms. Father Dosoftei is your English-speaking host and will do all he can (within the rules) to make your stay most enjoyable. You may even get to sample some of the homemade liqueurs and brandy!

□ **Nights 4 and 5:** Two nights in a nicely restored traditional house in Sucevita, good food and home made liqueurs. The owners are a nice friendly couple that unfortunately do not speak English but do speak some French. Here there are a limited number of en suite rooms, other rooms share a bathroom between 2 rooms. For the group departures a small family run hotel nearby may be used if there are not enough beds available in the guesthouse.

□ **Nights 6 and 7:** In Humor the English-speaking landlady welcomes you to her family run guesthouse, and not to be outdone by her compatriot in Sucevita, produces home made schnapps!

Travel Information

Season: 17 June to 15 September

Arrival: The land only arrangements begin at the first hotel in Bucharest. Clients booking a flight inclusive holiday must also make their own way from the airport to the hotel by taxi, this should cost approximately 65Lei (£13). The hotel is reserved on a bed and breakfast basis only; an evening meal is not included on this day.

During the holiday; Trains and private transport are used during the holiday to get from and back to Bucharest and also as part of the walking program. Details are given in the Sherpa route notes that are sent to you a few weeks before the start of the holiday. All the costs of this transport are included in the holiday price.

End of Tour: The tour ends at the Bucharest hotel. The taxi fare to the airport is not included in the holiday price.

Outline Itinerary

100m = 328ft. 1km = 0.62 miles.

All timings are approximate and will vary depending on your walking speed.

□ **Day 1:** Arrive Bucharest & make your way by taxi (at own expense) to the hotel - we suggest before 6.00pm.

□ **Day 2:** After breakfast make your way to the train station in time for the 11.00 train; (check time in route notes when in Bucharest). This is about a 3-minute walk from the hotel. It would be a good idea to have a pull along bag to make this easier. You could of course arrange a taxi from the hotel. On arrival at the station take the train to Suceava. It is a long way but provides a scenic view of Romania during the 6-hour journey. On arrival in Suceava you will be met by a vehicle and driver to take you to Putna an hours drive away. 7 hours will transport you from the bustle of the city to the calm remote different world of the Monastery in time to sample the organic ingredients in a wholesome supper.

Half board at Putna for 2 nights

□ **Day 3:** A circular walk from Putna. There is a choice of 2 routes. The standard 11km route, which include 200m of ascent and descent and usually takes about 4 hrs. This route follows a forestry road by the river to the isolated Sihastria Putnei monastery built on the site of an old hermitage. The route then climbs over a hill giving good views down to the village and monastery before heading back to Putna. The shorter option is very short taking just 1 ½ hours and covering 3km on a climb of 100m up a hill for views across the surrounding countryside.

□ **Day 4:** After breakfast leave your bags at the hotel ready for collection and head off to Sucevita. The walk is quite long, 17 ½ km but you have all day to complete the trail. Forestry roads are used most of the way and the climb over the hills involves about 300m of ascent. It will take about 5 ½ hours of actual walking. Warm hospitality and a traditional meal will be waiting at the end of the day.

Half board at Sucevita for 2 nights

□ **Day 5:** Circular walk Sucevita - Sucevita. - HB

a) Paths, forest and pasture, beautiful bird's eye view of the monastery. Walking time 2½ hrs, up 250 m, down 250 m.

Ask reception to confirm your time of departure on the morning of day 6.

□ **Day 6:** When you are ready to leave take your bags to reception and meet the driver who will take you to the start of the trail in Solca. There are 2 choices of route, one 14 km the other 11 km. Both routes to Humor go along horse wagon roads, crossing meadows and fields and passing through the 'Polish Villages'. The longer route climbs 200m and takes about 4 ½ hours, the shorter takes about an hour less and climbs 150m.

Half board at Humor for 2 nights

Ask reception to confirm your time of departure on the morning of day 7.

□ **Day 7:** A transfer is organised to Voronet where the first thing to do for the day is to have a look at what is probably the most stunning of the monasteries. When you have had your fill of frescos start the walk back to Humor. This will take about 4 ½ hrs, covering 14km and involving approx 350 m of ascent. Again the trail uses wagon roads and paths with nice views on the way

□ **Day 8:** We recommend an early start to allow maximum time in Bucharest in the afternoon. You can either ask for a transfer in time for the 0724 train or wait for the later train at 09.26 but remember it is a 6 hour train journey. You will be travelling with your bags. On arrival in Bucharest walk to the hotel. The afternoon is free for sightseeing at the places of most interest with you

Overnight Bucharest, B&B only

□ Day 9: Tour arrangements end after breakfast

Equipment & Clothing

If you are a regular walker you will probably already have much of the clothing and equipment required. You are recommended to use walking boots and you should have a good set of waterproofs and warm clothes as well as summer clothes. You will need a daypack large enough for the days equipment, water and lunch. A 35 litre daypack should be sufficient

What's Included

All accommodation with 8 breakfasts from day 2 onwards, 6 dinners; services of a leader (escorted tour only); baggage movements where specified.

Not Included

Airport taxi transfers
Evening meals on the 2 nights in Bucharest.
Lunches and incidental items such as drinks etc throughout the tour

Escorted Departures

Sat 30 June – Sun 08 July
Sat 04 Aug – Sun 12 Aug

Passports, Visas and Health

A full passport is required for all visitors to Romania. British Citizens do not need a visa to enter Romania. As a British passport holder you can remain in the country for up to 90 days. All other nationalities should check with the relevant authorities to establish if a visa is required
There have been a number of Hepatitis A cases in Romania. You are advised to seek medical advice about inoculations before travelling. Rabies is endemic in Romania. It has largely been confined to the rural areas. You should be wary of, and try to avoid contact with stray dogs. If bitten, you should seek medical assistance as soon as possible. You are advised to seek medical advice as you are visiting rural areas of Romania, you should consider having a course of rabies inoculations.
To seek medical advice before travelling and ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up to date check the Outdoor Travel website (see links) at: www.outdoortravel.com.au

Level of Difficulty

Grade: We grade this tour as easy; the region is hilly but there are no prolonged ascents or descents and few steep gradients. Most of the days are fairly short but day 4 is quite long for this grade of tour. Please see distances in daily itinerary above.

Fitness: This walk should present no difficulties for anyone in reasonable condition and accustomed to walking for around 4 hours during a day.

Day stages: In the region of 8km to 17½ km per day with altitude gains of up to 300m (see detailed itinerary above), 2½ to 5½ hours walking per day.

Waymarks: The trail follows in the main established paths, and tracks. Some are marked or signed and present no special difficulties in normal conditions. Other routes are not waymarked and a few paths are less obvious where the use of maps and notes becomes important. Some of the forest trails can be muddy after rain.

Climate

This trip, on the fringes of the Carpathian Mountains, operates during the summer months. During this period average daily maximum temperatures rise to about 19°C in July, a few degrees less in June and August and a little cooler still in September. In the hills it will be a little cooler and you should always be prepared for some unsettled weather with warm, waterproof and windproof clothes.

General Information

Baths: it is not the norm for en suite facilities to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main expect a shower. For details see accommodation section above.

Single Supplements: are payable for single rooms on this tour. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Luggage: When staying in hotels your luggage may have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is at reception waiting for you to take it up to your room. When travelling on the train you must take your own luggage with you, so do not pack more than you can carry.