



## CENTRAL EUROPE BY RAIL

DAY 1

### WELCOME TO SOFIA, BULGARIA

Upon arrival, you'll be warmly greeted and escorted to the deluxe Hotel InterContinental, wonderfully situated in the historic heart of the city overlooking the gold and green domes of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

DAY 2

### DISCOVER SOFIA

This morning's privately guided city tour begins with the architectural landmarks of Sofia's historical core. Chief among these monuments is the impressive Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. With its large gilded domes visible from many areas of the city, the cathedral of the Bulgarian Orthodox Patriarch has become one of the city's most recognized and popular symbols. You'll also see the round church of St. George, a splendidly preserved Byzantine building, and the impressive Parliament and National Theater. Traveling to the outskirts of the city, you'll also visit Boyana Church . a UNESCO World Heritage Site that was built in the 10th century and expanded 300 years later. The interior frescoes date to the 13th century and are considered to be some of the Continent's most important examples of east European medieval art. Your afternoon is at leisure to explore and enjoy as you wish. Meals B

DAY 3

### RILA MONASTERY + PLOVDIV

Depart Sofia this morning and travel with your private car, driver and guide to visit the Rila Monastery , famed for its impressive frescoes. Originally founded in the 10th century by St. John of Rila, the monastery was destroyed by fire at the beginning of the 19th century and rebuilt in the mid 1800's in classic Bulgarian Renaissance style. It is now recognized as an important symbol of the country's strong Slavic cultural identity following centuries of Ottoman rule.

Relax over lunch here in Rila and then continue to Plovdiv where you'll enjoy a guided walking tour through the Old Town with its cobbled streets and fine examples of National Revival architecture. At the unusual Trakart Museum, you'll see the amazing restoration of a Roman mosaic floor of the 2nd century. Check in to the Ramada Princess Hotel for the night. Meals B+L

DAY 4

### ONWARD TO KAZANLAK + ARBANASSI + VELIKO TARNOVO

Check out after breakfast and travel to the village of Skobelevo. On your guided tour through the Damascena Complex, you'll see how Bulgaria's famed rose oil was distilled in ancient times - and watch the modern techniques in use today. The rose was first introduced to Bulgaria by Ottoman Turks in the 1600's. Within 100 years, large quantities of rose oil were being exported to France for use by French perfume producers. Today, it's still an important part of the region's economy.





Nearby in Kazanlak, the Thracian Tomb is no longer open to visitors - a step taken to protect its Hellenistic frescoes that date from the 4th Century B.C. Next door, however, an educational center offers a remarkably accurate reconstruction of the tomb and its remarkable wall paintings. After this visit, continue to Veliko Tarnovo and check in to the Grand Yantra Hotel. Then join your guide for an afternoon walking tour here in Bulgaria's former medieval capital. Later today, you'll enjoy a pleasant evening stroll with your personal guide in the historic village of Arbanassi. Sit down to dinner in a local restaurant and then return to your hotel in Veliko Tarnovo. Meals B+D

DAY 5

### **SINAIA + BRASOV**

This morning's scenic drive takes you across the border into Romania to the charming resort town of Sinaia in the heart of the Carpathian Mountains. Tour the Sinaia Monastery and the spectacular Peles Castle, the former summer residence of the Romanian Royal family. Continue to the fairytale town of Brasov, founded in the 13th century and home to the historic Black Church, so-named after its massive Gothic walls were blackened by a fire that devastated much of the town. Enjoy an evening walking tour in Brasov and a 2-night stay at the deluxe Aro Palace Hotel. Meals B+L

DAY 6

### **EXCURSION TO BIERTAN + SIGHISOARA**

Set out after breakfast to the Transylvanian town of Biertan to visit its fortified church. Dating to the 16th century, it evidences the defensive response of the region's Saxon communities as the Ottoman Empire began to menace the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Lacking the resources to fortify the entire town, these settlements created fortresses around their churches, enclosing the storehouses to withstand long sieges.

From Biertan, continue to Sighisoara where an impressive silhouette of towers and spires will welcome you to one of Europe's best-preserved medieval towns. Your privately guided tour includes the architectural landmarks of Old Town and the Clock Tower Museum with its fascinating exhibits on medieval weapons and torture. Then tour the medieval fortified church in Viscri and watch skilled blacksmiths at work - using the traditional generations-old horseshoeing techniques still employed throughout much of this pastoral region. Then return to Brasov where your evening is free. Meals B

DAY 7

### **BRAN CASTLE + VILLAGES OF TRANSYLVANIA**

Start the day with a visit to Bran Castle, originally built in the 13th century as a stronghold of the Knights of the Teutonic Order and later made famous in Bran Stoker's novel, Dracula. In Zarnesti, you'll visit the Bear Sanctuary to learn about their work rescuing bears from captivity to live here among the forests and waterways of the sanctuary's 160-acre tract of land. In the nearby villages of Ohaba and Lisa, you'll gain further insight into the region's history and cultural traditions. Then visit the imposing Fagaras Fortress, built in 1310 on the site of an earlier 12th-century wooden fort that was burned by the Tartars in 1241. Continue to the historic town of Sibiu and check in to the comfortable Ramada Hotel for the night. Meals B

## SIBIU + COZIA MONASTERY + BUCHAREST

Once a major Saxon trading center, the 12th-century town of Sibiu retains a distinctly German ambience and still reflects the grandeur of its wealthy past. This morning's walking tour will take you through the historic district inside the city's medieval walls. Walk through Huet Square, hear the stories behind the unusually-named Liars' Bridge, and enjoy a private tour of the Evangelical Cathedral, built in the 14th century,

Then journey to the banks of the Olt River to visit the Cozia Monastery. Built in the late 1300's, it is considered to be one of Romania's oldest and most architecturally distinctive landmarks. Continue to Bucharest and check in to the deluxe Grand Continental Hotel for a 2-night stay. Meals B+D

## DISCOVER BUCHAREST

This morning's privately guided tour of Bucharest's historic landmarks takes you inside the enormous Palace of Parliament; built during the Ceausescu regime, this is one of the largest buildings in the entire world. From Revolution Square, you'll be able to take in some of the city's most impressive sites, including the Romanian Athenaeum – a handsome 19th century concert hall – and the imposing structures which once served as the headquarters for the Communist Party. It was from these rooftops that Nicolae Ceausescu fled by helicopter at the end of 1989. See the imposing Triumphal Arch and head to Herastrau Park to visit the open-air Village Museum where traditional farm houses, churches and windmills have been gathered from all across Romania to showcase traditional village life in the country's various regions. Meals B

## DEPART BUCHAREST

You'll be escorted to the airport today for your onward journey. Meals B

