

Enchanted Saxon Transylvania

ROMANIA

6 MAY, 1 JULY, 16 SEPT, 8 OCT
MAXIMUM GROUP SIZE 12

£2,350 PER PERSON
E-BIKES AS STANDARD

An exceptional five night guided journey by e-bike and on foot through the wild landscapes, charming Saxon villages, ancient oak and beech forests and famous wildflower meadows of southern Transylvania.

“ Prepare yourself for a treat – in the quality of the guides, the food, the wine, the places you stay and the history and antiquated rural landscapes of Transylvania. I would go back in a heartbeat. ”

Pamela Goodman, Travel Editor, House & Garden



THE SLOW CYCLIST

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Welcome to The Slow Cyclist



We believe in the power of slow travel to forge and strengthen friendships, change lives and be a force for good. That's why here at The Slow Cyclist we are dedicated to creating exceptional experiences for our guests - small, often private groups of friends or families - to share. But while we welcomed our first guests in 2015, our story began six years earlier when, in October 2009, I jumped on a bike in London and began cycling alone to Australia to watch the Ashes cricket series. It took me 412 days which means that, by any definition, I am a bona fide 'slow cyclist.' That journey embedded in me a passion for two-wheeled journeys but it was in Kigali - where I spent two years running an unlikely project to build a home for cricket in Rwanda - that the seeds of a slow travel business were planted. Since 2015 we have hosted over 2,500 wonderful people on cycling and walking holidays on three continents. Following the pandemic we are a small team of three in the UK, with a base near Shipston-on-Stour, on the edge of the Cotswolds. We love what we do. We've never wanted to get too big too fast, believing that slow, organic growth will make for better experiences for you, our guests. We never sell other people's trips. All are designed by us, always in places we've fallen for and we think you will too. Research involves several weeks - and often months - spent in-country with our local partners, seeking out the gems we think our guests will enjoy. My family and I spent much of 2016 & 2017 living in Mesendorf, a tiny Saxon village on the route you will take in Transylvania. It has become a second home for me and I hope you love it - and the rest of your journey - as much as I do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oli Broom'.

Oli Broom
Founder & Managing Director

“ One of the best holidays we have ever had. Pure magic from beginning to end. We have been riding on a high ever since returning home and have been telling everyone. ”

Nigel S.

“ The most perfect trip. I don't know how you've managed to find all the incredible behind-closed-doors secrets that you have, but there were just never ending delights. Wonderful. ”

Eliza B.

Introduction

THE JOURNEY

The Saxon villages of southern Transylvania are set in a bucolic landscape in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains in central Romania. Accompanied by our passionate and thoughtful local team of a host and two guides, you will travel through a land that has been called an 'outpost of medieval Europe,' staying in beautifully restored guest houses, eating at some of the best private tables in Romania, enjoying table picnics in remote forests and e-biking and walking along quiet back roads, tracks, trails and meadows. Above all, you will have the opportunity to move at your own pace through a land of staggering natural beauty and cultural fascination.

IS THIS JOURNEY FOR ME?

Slow Cyclists are curious travellers with a bit of juice in their legs, approaching their time with us an opportunity to explore rather than a test of fitness. That's not to say we don't pedal hard sometimes, just that we are often distracted by the food, history and people that make this place so special. When we see something interesting, we tend to stop and take it in rather than race by. If this sounds like your sort of holiday, we're pretty sure you'll love your time with us.

A FORCE FOR GOOD

You will, we hope, notice the number of locals and locally-run businesses we involve in your trip. This is central to our values and, we believe, a vital component of slow travel because it means your money is staying in the communities you travel through. In addition, we have always supported local causes. We now go further, donating 1% of our revenues to causes we care about, and that are aligned with our values. In 2022 we donated most of this allocation to Hope & Homes for Children's Ukraine Appeal.



History of Transylvania



Transylvania formed the eastern-most reaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, when it was absorbed into modern Romania. It may be famous as the home of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* but we suggest you leave your fanged preconceptions at home. Transylvania is home to some of Europe's most beguiling and wild landscapes. The Saxon Villages of Tarnava Mare (many of which you will be visiting) were first colonized by Germans - or Saxons - from the 12th Century, when King Geza II of Hungary

asked for protection from invading Ottomans and Tatars. The Saxons built fortifications. The most important towns were duly strengthened and smaller communities started by fortifying their church. Up to a quarter of a million Saxons remained for more than 800 years, retaining their language and customs. But the population began to decrease after World War II, when many returned to Austria and Germany. The migration continued under Ceausescu and today fewer than 35,000 Saxons live in Transylvania. They

still speak a dialect that is distinct from modern German and follow many of the religious and cultural customs that their families did for centuries. Their ancestral villages are shared with new neighbours: Romanians, Hungarians and Gypsies are breathing new life into abandoned houses, fields and vineyards and the result is an exhilarating fusion of cultures. It is a land of architectural, cultural and natural riches, where traditions, food and family are celebrated and visitors are welcomed with genuine warmth.

Itinerary

DAY 1 - ARRIVAL

Transfer 3.5 hours

For those arriving on the recommended flight, we provide a transfer to Copsa Mare, a tiny village in the heart of Saxon Transylvania. There we will have dinner and stay in the only Mr & Mrs Smith guest house in Romania, where a traditional dinner will be prepared for you.

DAY 2 - COPSA MARE TO MALANCRAY

Cycling 25 kms - Walking 2 hours

We will leave on bikes for Biertan to see its UNESCO fortified church. Then it's a lovely ride to Nou Sasesc, either on- or off-road depending on conditions and ability of the group. There we'll have a picnic. In the afternoon we will walk over forested ridges to Malancrav, where we will stay in a sumptuous 15th Century Hungarian mansion. Some of the group will be in simple village houses but will get the best rooms on another night. Our evening will be spent dining at the Manor house.

DAY 3 - MALANCRAY TO SIGHISOARA

Cycling 39 kms

After visiting the fortified church in Malancrav, home to some of the best frescoes in Romania, we will spend the morning cycling to Stejareni for a picnic lunch in the meadows. In the afternoon we'll climb to Breite, a sprawling Saxon planted oak forest, and continue to Sighisoara's celebrated citadel, the alleged birthplace of Vlad the Impaler. Supper is close to the citadel and you will stay at an elegantly restored Gothic townhouse.

DAY 4 - SIGHISOARA TO CRIT

Cycling 30 kms - Walking 2 hours (or 17 kms cycling)

We will walk through Sighisoara in the morning, exploring the citadel's history, before setting off on trails to Saschiz for lunch with our friends Anca and Charlie, some of the first members of Slow Food Transylvania. The trails give way to a long descent through forests into Crit, for dinner in the simple home of Rozi, Nicu and family. Nicu will cook a mean barbeque in their apple orchard. Another beautifully restored house is our home tonight.

DAY 5 - CRIT TO VISCRI

Walking 2 hours - Cycling 20 kms

We will walk to perfectly situated Mesendorf for lunch with Adi and Oana in their barn (in the autumn, if conditions allow, a truffle hunter and his dogs will accompany us). Then it is back in the saddle for an incredible ride across Transylvania's finest sheep grazing country, and a chance to taste cheese with shepherds. Our last night is in a comfortable traditional guesthouse in Viscri, the village that first attracted the Prince of Wales to the region, and where he owns a house.

DAY 6 - DEPARTURE

Cycling optional

You may opt for a pre-breakfast bike ride, to be rewarded by unsurpassed views over hills often skirted in early morning mist. After a morning spent exploring Viscri's UNESCO fortified church we will take you for a farewell lunch before we say goodbye and send you on your way to the airport.



YOUR OVERNIGHT STAYS ARE MARKED WITH A RED DOT ●

LIVI GOSLING FOR THE SLOW CYCLIST

On the Move

THE WALKING & CYCLING

The walking sections of the journey take you through a mix of pastoral and wild landscapes, from deciduous forests to high pastures and wildflower meadows. The cycling is consists of a wonderful mix of quiet tarmac roads, gravel roads, cart tracks, meadows and narrow forest trails. These subtly designed trails were funded by a UK - Romanian NGO a few years ago and some of our guides have been involved in their construction and maintenance from the start (The Slow Cyclist contributes financially to their maintenance too). They connect several villages - often taking steep hills out of the equation - and enable us to travel through incredible landscapes in all weather conditions. For some of our guests the trails take a little getting used to, but cyclists of all ages and abilities almost always find them the cycling highlight of their visit. More generally, whether you are a novice or experienced cyclist, our guides are skilled at spotting your ability and level of confidence and reacting accordingly. Transylvania is hilly and the distances we cover, although not huge, are still not inconsiderable so it is important that you have good general fitness and are comfortable riding a bicycle on dirt roads and paths, up and down hills. There will always be someone travelling at your pace; this is a journey to take time over.

“ I have nothing but praise for the The Slow Cyclist. Charming, helpful, fun and full of knowledge of the local area. A holiday to remember forever for all the right reasons! ”

Henry C.



ELECTRIC BIKES

In 2023, for the first time, our set-date trips are e-bikes only. They are hardtail (front suspension) bikes because of the mix of terrain. Around 90% of our guests used e-bikes in 2022, up from 40% in 2018. Even experienced cyclists are choosing to 'go electric' and they never regret their decision. It means we can be flexible with our routes, show you the besdt bits of the region and generally have more fun. If you would like to cycle in Transylvania using a regular bike we would be very happy to arange a private trip for you and friends or family.

FLEXIBILITY

We believe that travel is at its best when flexible. There are very few people who know the hills, villages and people in this corner of Transylvania better than us and our local guides and we are therefore particularly proud of our ability to take each day as it comes, reacting to the different abilities, tastes and personalities in the group. For that reason there will often be route changes, short-cuts and longer routes available for those who wish. With that in mind, please treat this itinerary as a guide to how your week will unfold. You will have experiences, see places and meet people that we have not listed here. It will be a journey of surprises! Finally, there may be occasions when, for good reason, we cannot fulfill every detail in this itinerary. Please treat distances as estimates as the routes may vary.

Practical Information



HOST, GUIDES & SUPPORT

Our attention to detail sets us apart. You will be accompanied by a member of The Slow Cyclist team from the UK who will act as your host. In addition, you will be looked after by two of our local guides throughout. We've developed a fantastic line-up in Transylvania over the years, each guide a local, fluent in English and with skills and interests ranging from European history to anthropology. We're sure you will become firm friends by the time you leave. Finally, your bags will be driven ahead each day and a support vehicle will be on hand (although never too close) in case you need a lift.



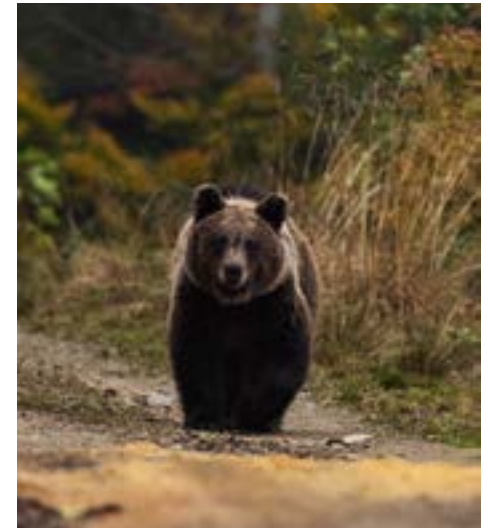
ACCOMMODATION

We avoid big, soulless hotels, preferring intimate guest houses and homes that offer charm, comfort and a beautiful location. Most will be exclusively yours, but in one or two there may be other guests. We provide our own pillows, shampoos and soaps. Lodging is based on twin or double sharing although a single supplement is available. Rooms are en-suite where possible and WiFi or a good 3G connection is available each night. If accommodation is listed in this itinerary it is as a guide; where required any substitutes will be of similar quality. In Malancrav the manor house sleeps only 9 people. Some members of the group may therefore be in village houses.



FOOD & DRINK

Transylvanian food is simple, fresh, delicious and the very definition of organic. Sometimes you'll eat out in the open (always at a table), at other times in private homes, traditional kitchens and small guest houses. Romanian wines are underrated and you will taste several fantastic labels during your stay. You will also be served plenty of homemade wine and plum and pear brandies. During the day we provide local fruit and snacks. Allergies and other preferences are noted at the time of booking. If you'd like to try out some Romanian recipes take a look at the wonderful *Carpathia* by Irina Georgescu.



WHEN TO GO?

In May the region is emerging from a long winter and it's glorious, with the forests carpeted in wildflowers. In July it's equally beautiful, with many wildflowers still in bloom. In September and October the forests explode into oranges and reds, and abundant orchards bear ripened fruit that local people use to make palinka, wine and all manner of cakes. The climate is temperate, with warm days in May, July, September and October (18-30°C). Rainfall is not uncommon at any time of year but autumn tends to be more dry than spring.



Pricing & Booking



PRICE

£2,350 per person. Included are:

- Group airport transfers (1 x arrival, 1 x departure)
- Support vehicle and luggage transfers
- TSC host & 2 x English-speaking local guides
- All accommodation, meals, snacks & drinks (single supplement £350)
- All activities
- Electric bike and helmet hire
- 100% financial security
- Donation to a local cause that is aligned with our values

Flights, personal costs, travel insurance and visas (if required) are excluded.

HOW TO BOOK & PAY

If you would like to book please visit [Find a Trip](#) on our website and choose the dates that suit. We require a 30% deposit at the time of booking. The balance is due 8 weeks before the start of your holiday.

SALES ENQUIRIES

Please call Oli Broom on +44 7540 441 485 or email oli@theslowcyclist.co.uk

POST-BOOKING

Soon after you have paid your deposit you will receive an email from us, notifying you of the receipt of funds. At this point you will be introduced to a member of our operations team in the UK who will be able to assist you with any questions in the lead up to your holiday. This may start with flight recommendations.

You will also be sent an Information Pack when you have booked and the trip details have been finalised. This will include packing and reading lists as well as a reminder of the details of your itinerary.

Getting to Transylvania



FLIGHTS & TRANSFERS

You are responsible for booking your own flights to and from Transylvania. They are not included in the cost of the trip. We will provide one transfer for the group on arrival, and another on departure. If you need to look at alternative transport options because you are arriving or leaving earlier or later, we recommend contacting Bob Peters, who helps many of our guests with their supplementary travel requirements. His contact details are bob.peters@travelcounsellors.com or +44 7894 221 703.

Outbound

We usually recommend arriving into Cluj Napoca on a Wizz Air flight from London Luton because the flights operate at sociable hours, but we will let you know when the flight schedule is released.

Return

See above.

PROTECT THE PLANET - TRAVEL BY TRAIN

We are in the process of developing a climate emergency plan that will, among other things, outline the actions we are taking to reduce carbon emissions. To see our declaration under Tourism Declares from July 2020 take a look at our website and if you're interested, do keep an eye on our blog where we will share our progress.

In the meantime, we are thrilled that increasing numbers of our guests are choosing to travel to Transylvania by train, often for environmental reasons. We understand that this may not be practical, but urge you to consider doing so if you can make it work. The most popular route seems to be London - Brussels - Frankfurt - Vienna - Budapest - Blaj - Cluj Napoca - Sighisoara, but there are others and bahn.com is the best place to begin your research. Alternatively Bob Peters will organise your journey for you (see left for contact details).



Our Values & Recommended Reading



OUR VALUES

Although it's our focus, we don't just want to run great trips. We want to be part of a generation of travellers - and travel companies - that leave behind a healthy, happy planet for our children and future generations to enjoy. Our values guide us to this end. They are:

- 1. Passionate about creating exceptional shared experiences.** It's what we do. We act with integrity, focus on the detail and make our guests happy.
- 2. Advocates for a slower future.** Our name gives us away. We believe in a considered, meaningful and ultimately more rewarding way of going about things.
- 3. Positively impact the people and communities whose lives we touch.** A vital component of any travel, but too often ignored. We work creatively to make sure everyone we work with, and every community we work alongside, benefits.
- 4. Take action to care for the natural world.** Travel is a major contributor to climate change and the worldwide loss of biodiversity. It doesn't have to be, so we take steps to mitigate our impact.

For more information on our values, or to discuss them in detail, feel free to contact Oli Broom - oli@theslowcyclist.co.uk. 1% of The Slow Cyclist revenues go to causes we care about, and that are aligned with our values. Follow our blog to keep abreast of where the money goes.

ROMANIAN READS

Along the Enchanted Way by William Blacker. A wonderful account of the author's life amongst the rural people of Maramures after the fall of communism, and later in the Saxon villages. The perfect introduction to the region, its people and their way of life.

Comrade Baron: A Journey through the Vanishing World of the Transylvanian Aristocracy by Jaap Scholten. On the night of 3 March 1949 almost all of the Transylvanian aristocracy were arrested in their beds, loaded into trucks and deported. Jaap Scholten meets those who survived in a shocking, spellbinding expose.

Transylvanian Trilogy by Miklos Banffy. Nobleman, politician, novelist: Banffy's ancestral home was in Cluj-Napoca. His fictional Transylvanian Trilogy is an unrivalled study of the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Land of Green Plums by Herta Muller. A masterpiece exploring the horrors of life under Romanian dictatorship, that won Muller the 2009 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Life Begins on Friday by Ioana Pârvulescu. Winner of the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013, this wonderful novel offers a critique of today's Romania, parodying the polite salon language of the 19th century.

Travels in Transylvania by Lucy Abel Smith. An accessible guide to the Greater Tarnava Valley; well written, and covers many of the villages you will travel through.





