

### *The hidden gems of Europe*

*When you are tired of seeing how the criteria of functionalism interfere even with art, your salvation is the past. It takes you to the age when people painted their monasteries with thoroughness and faith, Saxons were imposing their principles of a beautiful and well-organized architecture, and Tzars were building impressive palaces.*

*The Medieval Age is a fascinating story, which happened differently in geographically very close areas. Even if they are neighboring countries and have had similar histories (marked by long-lasting conflicts with the Ottomans), Bulgaria and Romania looked differently in the Middle Ages and so do they in the present.*

*Bulgarians pride themselves with Sofia, Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo, where the orthodox religious architecture dominates the remains of an architecture imposed by the Ottomans during the 500 years of domination. In Veliko Tarnovo, perhaps the most charming city in Bulgaria, Ottoman-style or traditional picturesque Bulgarian houses pile like in a hive on the mountains surrounding the city. From the Tsarevets Hill (Imperial Hill) one can admire a beautiful view of the former medieval capital and walk through the ruins of the imperial palace.*

*If you drive north, Romania brings not only a change of scenery, but also a different heritage. Bucovina, an ancient Romanian land, is home to some of the most impressive monasteries. Legend has it that prince Stefan the Great swore to build a monastery after each victory against the Ottomans. The monasteries built by him do not impress with grandeur, but through the beauty of detail, the scenes painted on exterior walls and the vivid colors.*

*Beyond the Carpathians, in Transylvania, there are no painted churches and monasteries, but Saxon fortified churches and citadels instead. The German spirit is everywhere, from hidden inner courtyards, to tall houses with massive gates, and large squares and churches with high towers. On the narrow cobbled stone streets, in Sighisoara, near the Black Church in Brasov, or on a stroll through Sibiu, you will get the rare feeling that the present has faded away and you are in an old world, of centuries past.*

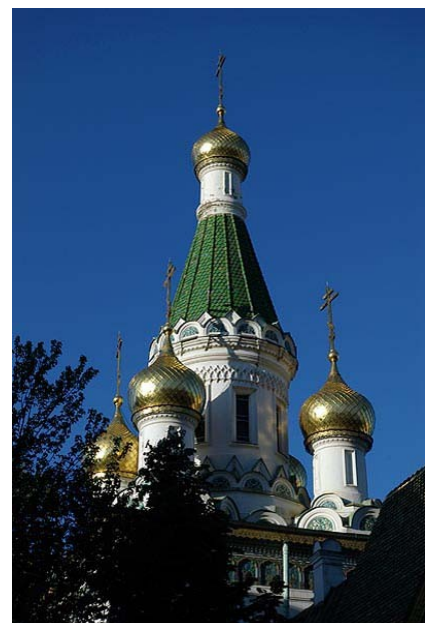
*Come to Bulgaria and Romania for a trip back in time, back to the Middle Ages!*

#### **Day 1: ARRIVAL IN SOFIA (FRI)**

*Upon arrival at Sofia airport, private transfer to Radisson BLU 5\* Hotel for accommodation in the contemporary luxury in downtown Sofia.*

#### **Day 2: SOFIA – RILA – SOFIA (SAT)**

*During this walking tour you will get acquainted with the major highlights of the city. See the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the old Byzantine church St. Sophia which gave the name of the city, the Parliament Building and the Largo square, the Monument of Liberator, the Russian church, the ruins of ancient Serdica and many more. Continue to Rila, the largest monastery on the Balkans. After lunch at local restaurant, visit Rila monastery, a national icon for Bulgarians and a wonderfully situated monument of the highest architectural and historic interest. It is protected under the shield of UNESCO and contains the remarkable frescoes and wooden Cross - are historical pieces of medieval art. Return to Sofia for accommodation at Radisson BLU 5\* Hotel. (B, L)*



### Day 3: SOFIA – PLOVDIV – BACHKOVO - SOFIA (SUN)

*In the morning, drive to Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria. Have a tour in the old town with its cobbled streets and typical national revival architecture. Visit the Ethnographic museum, inhabiting a rich merchant's house from 19th c. You will also see the Roman amphitheatre, the church of St. Konstantine and Elena. Enjoy lunch in a local restaurant. See the house of Lamartin and Jumaya mosque. Drive to nearby Bachkovo monastery to see the church of Old Vergin Mary. In the evening, you will return to Sofia Sofia for accommodation at Radisson BLU 5\* Hotel. (B, L)*



### Day 4: SOFIA – VELIKO TARNOVO – ARBANASSI – OTOPENI (MON)

*After breakfast in the hotel, drive towards the town of Veliko Tarnovo – the medieval capital of Bulgaria. See the medieval quarter of the town with a stop at the historical “Tsarevets” hill, where remains from the former capital's glory can still be seen. Have a short stroll along the old crafts street, where in authentic workshops the local masters resurrect old traditions. Proceed to Arbanassi – a small Bulgarian village interesting for its architecture. See the Konstancaliev museum house dating back to 17c. Visit the church of Nativity, whose wall paintings are considered a real masterpiece. After a home hosted lunch, proceed to Bucharest for your flight to Suceava. After the late evening flight, you will be picked up by your guide and driver from the airport and transferred to Radauti for dinner and accommodation at Gerald's 4\* Hotel. (B, L, D)*



### Day 5: RADAUTI – MOLDOVITA – SUCEVITA – SIGHISOARA (TUE)

*Today you will leave the beautiful lands of Bucovina. Visit Sucevita Monastery, the greatest monastic ensemble among the painted monasteries in Bucovina, as it has the appearance of a real fortress, with towers, buttresses and watch roads. Continue to Moldovita Monastery, built by Alexander the Kind-Hearted (1400-1432), between 1402 and 1410, but it collapsed at the beginning of the 16th century because of the very heavy rains and ground sliding; its ruins can still be seen today. Moldovita Monastery the one we can see today dates back to 1532 and is due to ruling prince Petru Rares (1532-1546). Head towards Sighisoara. En route you will stop in Piatr Fantanele for lunch at the famous Hotel Castel Dracula. Accommodation at Binderbubi 5\* Hotel in Sighisoara. (B, L)*



### Day 6: SIGHISOARA – BIERTAN – SIBIEL – SIBIU – SIGHISOARA (WED)

*Today you will visit the Saxon village of Biertan where you will see the fortress church that is one of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Sites. The church hosts the largest wing altar in Romania and was used as the residence of the Lutheran bishop of Transylvania for over 300 years. Your next stop is Sibiel Village where you will admire the Glass Icon Museum and enjoy a hearty Romanian lunch at local farmhouse. Continue to Sibiu and enjoy a comprehensive walking tour of the city, which was European Capital of Culture in 2007. Here you'll see arcaded medieval shops and houses, the Small Square, the Liar's Bridge, Huet Square and the Cathedral, where the son of Vlad the Impaler (another of Dracula's monikers) was assassinated. In the afternoon, return to Sighisoara for accommodation at Binderbubi 5\* Hotel in Sighisoara. (B, L)*





### **Day 7: SIGHISOARA – BRASOV (THU)**

*Sighisoara is the best-preserved medieval fortified town in Romania and the birthplace of Vlad the Impaler. You proceed on a walking tour of the town and visit the Church on the Hill and the famous Clock Tower Museum with its Torture and Weapons Rooms and stop in the house in which Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) was born in 1432. Continue to Brasov, fairy-tale town founded in the 12th century by the Saxon settlers. Lunch at local restaurant. The highlight of the city tour is surely a visit to the Gothic Black Church, the largest gothic style church in South-Eastern Europe and the First Romanian School Museum with an impressive collection of rare books, many of them printed or copied by handwriting right here. Dinner at local restaurant and accommodation at Aro Palace 5\* Hotel. (B, L, D)*



### **Day 8: BRASOV – BRAN – SINAIA - BUCHAREST (FRI)**

*This morning, head to Bran to visit the castle made famous by Bram Stoker's novel as the residence of the vampire count Dracula. Continue to Sinaia, one of the most beautiful mountain resorts in Romania, also known as the "Pearl of the Carpathians". After lunch in local restaurant, visit Peles Castle, an exquisite piece of architecture, which served as the summer residence of the former Romanian Royal family. Continue to Bucharest for accommodation at Athenae Palace 5\* Hilton Hotel. (B,L)*



### **Day 9: BUCHAREST – HALF DAY CITY TOUR (SAT)**

*In the morning, enjoy a half-day sightseeing tour of the Romanian capital city, once called the Little Paris of the East. During the tour you will visit the Parliament Palace, the second largest building in the world after the Pentagon. See also the Revolution Square, the Romanian Athenaeum, the National Art Museum and others. Lunch in local restaurant. Afternoon at leisure. Accommodation at Athenae Palace 5\* Hilton Hotel. (B,L)*



### **Day 10: BUCHAREST – TRANSFER TO THE AIRPORT (SUN)**

*Transfer to the airport subject to your flight. End of our services.*