

# Overseas Adventure Travel®

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide®



New! Eastern Balkan Discovery: Bulgaria  
& Romania

2026

# Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis  
Chair  
Overseas Adventure Travel

# CONTENTS

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## **EASTERN BALKAN EXPERIENCE: BULGARIA & ROMANIA**

Your Adventure at a Glance:

Where You're Going, What it Costs, and What's Included .....	<b>4</b>
Your Detailed Day-To-Day Itinerary .....	<b>6</b>
Pre-Trip Extension .....	<b>16</b>
Post-Trip Extension .....	<b>20</b>

## **ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION**

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements...	<b>24</b>
Rigors, Vaccines & General Health .....	<b>26</b>
Money Matters: Local Currency & Tipping Guidelines.....	<b>29</b>
Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch .....	<b>32</b>
Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits...	<b>35</b>
Climate & Average Temperatures.....	<b>41</b>

## **ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE**

Southeast European Culture .....	<b>44</b>
Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More .....	<b>51</b>

## **DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY**

Bulgaria .....	<b>53</b>
Romania.....	<b>54</b>
Greece.....	<b>56</b>

## **RESOURCES**

Suggested Reading .....	<b>59</b>
Suggested Films & Videos .....	<b>60</b>
Useful Websites .....	<b>62</b>
Useful Apps .....	<b>63</b>



## New! Eastern Balkan Experience: Bulgaria & Romania Small Group Adventure

**Bulgaria:** Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo | **Romania:** Bucharest, Sibiu, Brasov  
Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

**18 days starting from \$5,895**

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit [www.oattravel.com/rbg2026pricing](http://www.oattravel.com/rbg2026pricing)

Discover the lands that lay in the shadows of the Balkan and Carpathian Mountains when you journey through Bulgaria and Romania. These two southeastern European nations are steeped in history and legend—from the medieval mystery and allure of iconic locations like Bran (or “Dracula’s”) Castle in Transylvania to the current culture of this European crossroads, there are endless discoveries to be made.

### IT'S INCLUDED

- 16 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation
- 34 meals—16 breakfasts, 9 lunches, and 9 dinners
- 12 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and for your checked luggage
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

*Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.*

**Eastern Balkan Experience: Bulgaria & Romania**



## WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderate

**Pacing:** 6 locations in 18 days

**Physical requirements:** You must be able to walk 5-6 miles unassisted and participate in 4-6 hours of physical activities each day. You must be able to climb 200 steps at Parliament

**Flight time:** Travel time will be 12-21 hours and will most likely have two connections

View all physical requirements at [www.oattravel.com/rbg](http://www.oattravel.com/rbg)

## EASTERN EUROPE: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

**Unbeatable Value:** Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

**People-to-People Experiences:** Enjoy a glimpse of life in rural Bulgaria when you savor a **Home-Hosted Dinner** with a local family—a unique opportunity for true cultural connection.

**O.A.T. Exclusives:** Get a true taste of rural Romania when you visit a family-owned farm house in the countryside. Roll up your sleeves and pitch in with some of everyday chores as you learn about the farm and how it benefits the surrounding community. Then, sit down to a meal with your hosts.

## ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Depart U.S.
2-3	Sofia, Bulgaria
4-5	Plovdiv
6-7	Veliko Tarnovo
8-10	Bucharest, Romania
11-13	Sibiu
14-17	Brasov
18	Return to U.S.

## CUSTOMIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

### OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Thessaloniki & Mount Olympus

**PRE-TRIP:** 5 nights from **\$1,995**

Undiscovered Romania:  
Moldavia, Bucovina &  
Maramures Regions

**POST-TRIP:** 6 nights from **\$1,895**

### ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Thessaloniki** before your Greece pre-trip extension from **\$180** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Sofia** before your main adventure from **\$190** per room, per night

# Eastern Balkan Experience: Bulgaria & Romania

## YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

### BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

#### 5 nights in *Thessaloniki & Mount Olympus*

- Day 1** Fly to Thessaloniki, Greece
- Day 2** Arrive in Thessaloniki
- Day 3** Explore Thessaloniki
- Day 4** Thessaloniki • Archaeological Site of Pella • Edessa Waterfalls

- Day 5** Thessaloniki • Royal Tombs of Aigai • Mount Olympus
- Day 6** Thessaloniki • Optional Flavors of Thessaloniki tour
- Day 7** Transfer to Sofia, Bulgaria • Join main trip

#### Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. on your flight to Sofia, Bulgaria.

#### Day 2 Arrive in Sofia, Bulgaria

- Destination: Sofia
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Sofia or similar

**Afternoon:** Arrive in Bulgaria today after your international flight and transfer to our hotel in Sofia via private motorcoach. Our Trip Experience Leader will meet you there, and together you'll meet your fellow travelers—including those who have arrived from our pre-trip extension: *Thessaloniki & Mount Olympus*. Afterwards, set off on an orientation walk of the area with our Trip Experience Leader.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to spend as you wish.

#### Day 3 Explore Sofia

- Destination: Sofia
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Sofia or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast this morning, we'll meet our fellow travelers and sit down with our Trip Experience Leader for a Welcome Briefing. During this briefing, our Trip Experience Leader will review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur). Our Trip Experience Leader will also discuss logistics, safety and emergency procedures, and answer questions we may have.

Then, we'll kick off our Eastern Europe adventure with a walking tour of Sofia's Old Town with a local guide. Bulgaria's charming capital city boasts over 2,000 years of history—from the Romans and Ottomans to the more recent Soviet occupation. The Old Town offers visitors a look at this long and varied past with an array of ancient sites, onion-domed churches, and even the odd Communist monument.

We'll see some of the highlights of the city as we explore, such as the Roman settlement of Serdica, spread across five miles of the Bulgarian capital. The complex includes the foundations of ancient homes, an amphitheater, and the well-preserved Decumanus Maximus—Serdica's main Roman road. We may also see Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, one of the largest Eastern Orthodox cathedrals in the world. Built between 1882 and 1924, the Neo-Byzantine church was named for medieval Russian prince Saint Alexander Nevsky and honors those who died during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, when Bulgaria won its independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Our Trip Experience Leader will also help us get to know the local people a little better when we stop by the city flea market, where we'll have the opportunity to mingle with vendors and shoppers to witness the pulse of daily life firsthand. Then, after stopping by the Presidential Palace, where we might catch a glimpse of the ceremonial changing of the guards, we'll end our tour at one of Sofia's hot springs, where we'll have more opportunity to learn about local culture as we meet the people who have come here to relax.

**Lunch:** On your own in Sofia. Perhaps you'll try *shopska* salad, a traditional Bulgarian salad made with cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, peppers, and parsley, topped with grated Bulgarian white cheese.

**Afternoon:** The rest of the afternoon is free for independent exploration. You may wish to visit posh Vitosha Boulevard, known for its high-end boutiques and fashion houses as well as striking views of Vitosha Mountain in the distance.

**Dinner:** Tonight, we'll enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

#### **Day 4 Sofia • Visit Rila Monastery • Plovdiv**

- Destination: Plovdiv
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Doubletree By Hilton Plovdiv Center or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll check out of our hotel this morning and begin our transfer to Plovdiv, our next destination. Along the way, we'll visit Rila Monastery, UNESCO Heritage Site. We'll drive south of Sofia, through the mountains and beech tree forests, and arrive around two hours later to the medieval monastery, founded in the tenth century by followers of Saint Ivan of Rila for whom the structure is named. The first and largest monastery in Bulgaria, the magnificent black and white complex is both an architectural gem and an historic landmark, as it became a spiritual haven and keeper of Bulgarian culture throughout the Ottoman occupation.

But perhaps what the monastery is best known for, is its collection of vibrant fresco paintings which completely cover the walls and ceiling of the outer corridors of the church. Completed in

1846, the frescoes depict bible stories, saints, and other religious icons—created by Bulgarian muralist Zahari Zograf and his brother, the icon artist Dimitar Zograf. We'll explore the historic complex and admire its colorful paintings with a local expert as our guide.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll finish our journey to the ancient city of Plovdiv. We'll check into our hotel, the rest of the day is free to relax after our overland journey.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 5 Explore Plovdiv

- Destination: Plovdiv
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Doubletree By Hilton Plovdiv Center or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's walking tour of Plovdiv will include navigating over uneven cobble streets.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, we'll explore the ancient city of Plovdiv with a local guide.

Nestled within seven hills, Plovdiv is Europe's oldest continuously inhabited city. Cobblestone streets wind past ancient Roman ruins and beautifully preserved Ottoman-era townhouses, offering a vivid tapestry of cultures. We'll explore this rich heritage on a guided walking tour, where our discoveries will include ancient landmarks like the old Roman forum, which includes the city's oldest building—an impressive Roman Amphitheater.

The ancient theater is one of the world's best-preserved and is still used today for modern dramatic and musical performances.

**Lunch:** On your own in Plovdiv—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** The remainder of the day is on your own. You may wish to discover the city's popular Kapana neighborhood, Plovdiv's energetic creative district.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own. You may wish to head to the hotel's bar for a nightcap.

## Day 6 Plovdiv • Explore Kazanlak •

### Veliko Tarnovo

- Destination: Veliko Tarnovo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Gurko Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll check out of our hotel and begin our drive to Veliko Tarnovo. Along the way, we will stop for lunch in the rural town of Kazanlak, nestled at the foot of the Balkan Mountains and situated in the middle of Bulgaria's Valley of Roses.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Kazanlak.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll continue our journey to Veliko Tarnovo, arriving later this afternoon. We will settle into our hotel rooms, then set off for a vicinity walk of the area surrounding our hotel with our Trip Experience Leader.

**Dinner:** On your own in Veliko Tarnovo. This region is renowned for its cured meats—you may wish to seek out some dry-cured pork or traditional *Gornooryahovski sudzhuk* (sausage).

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 7 Explore Veliko Tarnovo • Home-Hosted Dinner

- Destination: Veliko Tarnovo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Gurko Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll explore Veliko Tarnovo, beginning with a guided walk along the scenic Yantra River valley toward the Patriarchal Cathedral. Along the way, we'll enjoy beautiful views of the Monument to the Asen Dynasty and learn about Veliko Tarnovo's significant role in Bulgarian history. We'll then continue to the nearby village of Arbanassi, a picturesque and historically rich settlement just a short distance from the city. Finally, we'll visit Samovodska Charshiya, a lively market square dedicated to the town's artisans, where traditional crafts and local artistry come to life.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** The afternoon is free to continue exploring on your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend suggested activities, or you might like to join them on a discovery walk toward the city's medieval fortress, a 12th-century stronghold located at the top of the fortified hill.

**Dinner:** Tonight, we'll be welcomed into the home of a local Bulgarian family for a **Home-Hosted Dinner**. This is a unique opportunity to witness a slice of authentic life in a small Bulgarian town and ask our hosts any questions we may have.

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## Day 8 Ruse • Overland to Bucharest, Romania

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Continental Bucharest or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's drive will be approximately 7 hours in total, with stops along the way.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll check out of our hotel this morning, say goodbye to Bulgaria, and begin the drive to our first destination in Romania: Bucharest. Though a long drive, it will be scenic—with stretches of road passing through Bulgaria's mountainous countryside.

**Lunch:** We'll stop en route at the Bulgarian city of Ruse to enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll arrive in Bucharest, Romania in the late afternoon. After settling into our rooms, we will join our Trip Experience Leader for a vicinity walk of the area. The balance of the afternoon is on your own; you may wish to rest after the day's journey.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own. Perhaps you'll choose to join some of your fellow travelers in the hotel's bar for a night cap.

## Day 9 Explore Bucharest • Conversation about the 1989 Romanian Revolution • Optional Ceausescu Palace tour

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Continental Bucharest or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast this morning, we will set off for a guided tour of Bucharest. This is an old city that has served as the capital of Wallachia, and later Romania, since 1659. Today, it is noted for its broad, tree-lined boulevards, well-kept parks, and mix of architectural styles that combine Neoclassical 19th-century structures with monumental 20th-century edifices (the latter built for the most part to satisfy Ceausescu). We'll discover Victory Avenue to Revolution Square, where recent events in history are inscribed.

Upon arrival at the square, we'll get a unique glimpse into the 1989 Romanian Revolution—also known as the Christmas Revolution—when a local will meet up with us to relay his personal experience of the events that ended Communist rule in Romania.

**Lunch:** On your own.

**Afternoon:** The rest of the afternoon is on your own to uncover Bucharest at your own pace.

Or, you may choose to join an optional visit to the Ceausescu Palace. Get a glimpse of what life was like near the end of Romania communist rule as we tour Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's lavish 80-room villa. Also known as The House of Ceausescu and The Spring Palace, the opulence of the dictator's private residence was just one of the many reasons he eventually fell from power—as he squandered his people's money to support his own extravagant lifestyle. While here, we'll also get a chance to sample some sweets that would have been typical during Romania's Communist era.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant in Bucharest.

**Evening:** On your own. You may wish to jot down the day's discoveries in your travel journal, or grab a drink at a nearby bar.

## Day 10 Bucharest • Palace of the Parliament

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Continental Bucharest or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's tour of Palace of the Parliament includes climbing about 150 steps.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll take a tour of the Palace of the Parliament, the seat of Romania's national government.

The Palace of the Parliament is the second largest administrative building in the world—and at a weight of around nine billion pounds, the world's heaviest building. Dive into the controversial history of how the massive palace came to be under Ceausescu's rule. After an earthquake devastated the city in 1977, Ceausescu took advantage of the land and recruited 700 architects and around 1.5 million factory workers to complete the project.

Ceausescu passed away before the massive undertaking was finally finished in 1994, but you'll have the opportunity to see the completed building when you drive to the palace for a guided tour of its storied halls. You'll stroll past lavishly decorated hallways, offices, galleries, and conference rooms—originally meant for Communist Party officials, now used by the elected government—and get a sweeping view of Bucharest's main square from the grand balcony.

**Lunch:** On your own—as your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

**Afternoon:** The rest of your afternoon is free.

**Dinner:** On your own in Bucharest.

**Evening:** Free to spend however you wish.

### **Day 11 Pitesti Prison visit • Sibiu**

- Destination: Sibiu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Ramada Sibiu Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's drive is approximately 5.5 hours in total, with stops along the way.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll begin our overland transfer to our next destination: The city of Sibiu.

Along the way, we will stop to visit the infamous Pitesti Prison. Between the years of 1949 and 1951, Pitesti Prison carried out a cruel reeducation experiment on its inmates, enforced by the Communist regime. After this sobering visit, we'll continue on our journey.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, our drive to Sibiu will resume. We'll arrive at our hotel late this afternoon, check in, and embark on an orientation walk with our Trip Experience Leader. As we take in the sights, you may notice some of the sights will be watching us as well. Staring down from the red-tiled roofs of the town's old buildings are uniquely shaped attic windows that earn Sibiu the name "the city with eyes." While created simply to ventilate the homes, the windows' uncanny resemblance to ever-watchful sets of eyes make the buildings seem to come to life.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** The evening is on your own.

### **Day 12 Explore Sibiu • Visit Astra Museum**

- Destination: Sibiu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Ramada Sibiu Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Explore the city of Sibiu on an included tour with your Trip Experience Leader this morning, then begin your drive to the open-air Astra Museum.

**Lunch:** We'll stop at a local restaurant on the way to the museum for an included lunch.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll step back in time as we begin our explorations at the Astra Museum. This immersive, interactive folk museum celebrates the rich history and enduring heritage of Romania. During our visit, you'll learn about the local culture through exhibits showcasing crafts, music, traditional clothing, and classic Romanian cuisine.

Later, we'll drive back to our hotel in Sibiu.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 13 Sibiu • Farm house visit**

- Destination: Sibiu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Ramada Sibiu Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Drive out to the Romanian countryside today for a glimpse of what life is like in the rural village of Sibiel. We'll meet a local family at their farm house and take part in their daily activities.

**Lunch:** At the farm house.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll head back to Sibiu where the balance of the day is on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Evening:** Free to spend as you wish.

## **Day 14 Controversial Topic: Preserving traditional Roma culture in the modern world • Explore Sighisoara • Brasov**

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Atria Brasov or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, we'll check out of our hotel in Sibiu and begin the drive to Brasov.

Along the way, we'll stop at the medieval fortified village of Brateiu, where we'll visit a local Roma family and discuss the **Controversial Topic** of what it's like preserving the traditional Roma way of life in today's modern world.

Then, we'll drive to our next stop, the historic town of Sighisoara.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Sighisoara.

**Afternoon:** Discover Sighisoara on an included walking tour. A UNESCO World Heritage-protected town, Sighisoara attracts visitors with its cheerful pastel buildings, fairy-tale medieval towers, and well-preserved merchant houses encircled by fortified walls. But beneath this charming exterior lurks the dark history of Romania's infamous Vlad Tepeș, the 15th-century Wallachian prince whose violent military tactics earned him his better-known monikers of Vlad the Impaler and Dracula. Sighisoara is rumored to be Vlad's birthplace, and those curious to learn more

about the inspiration for Bram Stoker's undead villain flock here to visit the house where he was allegedly born.

After your tour, spend some free time in Sighisoara before continuing our journey to Brasov. Upon arrival, we'll check into our hotel before setting off on an orientation walk with our Trip Experience Leader.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own in Brasov.

## **Day 15 Explore Brasov • Optional Vulcan Church tour**

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Atria Brasov or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll set off on a walking tour of the fascinating city of Brasov. Continuously settled since the Bronze Age, the region that is now Brasov has been enriched by people of many heritages—Romans, Saxons, and Hungarians among them—as well as by traders from all over Europe and beyond who arrived to this long-thriving economic center. You'll see some outstanding medieval architecture in Brasov, which is not far from the geographic center of Romania and is the largest city in the Transylvania region. Our walking tour will also take us through Council Square.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** Afterwards, we'll enjoy some free time to continue exploring Brasov at our own pace.

Or, you may choose to join our optional visit to Vulcan Church, a fortified basilica from the 13th century. We'll be treated to a private organ within its medieval walls, followed by free time to explore on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own in Brasov.

Or, for those on our optional tour, enjoy an included dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own. Perhaps you'll choose to join some of your fellow travelers in the hotel's bar for a night cap.

## Day 16 Brasov • Visit Bran Castle

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Atria Brasov or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we'll step back into an era of bygone, macabre figures both mythical (Count Dracula) and actual (Vlad the Impaler) when we visit Bran Castle, more famously known as Dracula's Castle.

Prince Vlad Tepes, the son of Vlad Dracul and the person who inspired Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, used this castle as headquarters for his incursions into Transylvania. This 15th-century ruler became known as "Vlad the Impaler" for his practice of impaling enemies of the kingdom, which was greatly threatened by the Ottoman Turks at the time. Stoker's work of fiction drew inspiration from this bloody practice, the family name, and the castle-dotted mountain landscape of Transylvania.

You'll see the interior and exterior of Bran Castle, which was built in 1377 to protect nearby Brasov from invaders and also served as a customs station. In 1920, the people of

Brasov, who owned the castle, offered it as a gift to Queen Maria of Romania, and the castle soon became her favorite residence. After our guided tour, you'll have time for independent exploration.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Drive back to Brasov, where the balance of the afternoon is on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Evening:** On your own. Perhaps you'll head out to a local bar to enjoy a cocktail.

## Day 17 Brasov • Visit Peles Castle

### • Bucharest

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Grand Hotel Continental Bucharest or similar

**Activity Note:** In the event Peles Castle is closed, we will instead visit Cantacuzino Castle or Pelisor Castle.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today we will bid Brasov goodbye as we drive to the city of Sinaia. With its sub-Alpine climate and the protection of surrounding mountains, Sinaia has become known as "the Pearl of the Carpathians"—the favored destination of Romanian royalty and a region rich in palaces, luxury hotels, fine dining, and skiing.

We will discover the city's rich history as we explore Peles Castle, set dramatically in the hills above Sinaia. Completed in 1914 for the first Hohenzollern king of Romania, Carol I, this 160-room palace was built in Neo-Renaissance style and represented the king's attempt to imitate the styles of his former homeland of Germany—creating a

Bavarian setting in the mountains of Romania. We'll stroll the castle's gardens and sculptured terraces as we admire the façade of one of the best-preserved royal palaces in Europe.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll head to Bucharest as our adventure draws to a close. Upon arrival, we'll check into our hotel upon arrival and settle in. Then take advantage of free time to explore Bucharest on your own.

**Dinner:** Enjoy a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to spend however you wish. You may want to prepare for your flight home tomorrow.

### **Day 18 Return to U.S. or begin post-trip extension**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** Served at the hotel, with Romanian and American options available.

**Morning:** After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight home. Or, continue on to our post-trip extension *Undiscovered Romania: Moldavia, Bucovina & Maramures Regions*.

## **END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION**

### **6 nights in *Undiscovered Romania: Moldavia, Bucovina & Maramures Regions***

**Day 1** Arrive Iasi, Romania • Overland to village of Dolhesti

**Day 2** Explore Dolhesti village • Cooking class with a local

**Day 3** Overland to Vadu Izei • Visit Painted Monastery • Water mill visit

**Day 4** Explore the Merry Cemetery • Visit Barsana Wooden Monastery

**Day 5** Overland to Cluj-Napoca

**Day 6** Explore Cluj-Napoca • Farewell Dinner

**Day 7** Return to U.S.

## OPTIONAL TOURS

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During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2-3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2-3 months following your return.

***Please note:*** *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

### **Ceausescu Palace**

(Day 9 \$95 per person)

Get a glimpse of what life was like near the end of Romania communist rule as we tour Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's lavish 80-room villa. Also known as The House of Ceausescu and The Spring Palace, the opulence of the dictator's private residence was just one of the many reasons he eventually fell from power—as he squandered his people's money to support his own extravagant lifestyle.

While here, we'll also get the chance to sample sweets that would have been typical of Romania's Communist era.

### **Vulcan Church**

(Day 15 \$115 per person)

Journey to Vulcan Church, a fortified basilica from the 13th century. Here, you'll be treated to a private organ within its medieval walls, followed by free time to explore on your own. This excursion includes dinner at a local restaurant.

# PRE-TRIP

## Thessaloniki & Mount Olympus

### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » Transfer from Thessaloniki, Greece, to Sofia, Bulgaria
- » 5 nights accommodation
- » 9 meals—5 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 1 dinners
- » 7 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

### PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Revel in Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman history ... explore the ancient ruins of Pella ... uncover the royal, Macedonian tombs of Aigai ... witness the remarkable landscape and exceptional biodiversity surrounding Mount Olympus—all this and more with the historic Greek port city of Thessaloniki as your base for discoveries.*

#### Day 1 Fly to Thessaloniki, Greece

You depart today on your overnight flight from the U.S. to Thessaloniki, Greece.

#### Day 2 Arrive in Thessaloniki

- Destination: Thessaloniki
- Accommodations: Egnatia Palace Hotel

**Morning:** You'll arrive in Thessaloniki in the morning or afternoon. An O.A.T. representative will meet you at the airport and assist with the transfer to your hotel, where you'll be joined by travelers who arrived early in Thessaloniki before their pre-trip extension.

**Lunch:** On your own—you're free to explore or enjoy a meal in the hotel restaurant as you settle in after your flight.

**Afternoon:** Following some free time, your Trip Experience Leader will take travelers for a short orientation walk around the hotel's vicinity, including where to find an ATM or local market.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader is happy to provide suggestions. Perhaps you'll enjoy a *gyro*, which consists of meat cooked on a vertical rotisserie, wrapped in pita bread, and commonly served alongside tomato, onion, fried potatoes, and tzatziki.

**Evening:** After dinner, you are free to explore or retire for the night. If you'd like local recommendations, your Trip Experience Leader can provide their top tips.

## Day 3 Explore Thessaloniki

- Destination: Thessaloniki
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Egnatia Palace Hotel

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Following a short Welcome Briefing, we'll set out to discover the Greek port city of Thessaloniki during a walking tour with our Trip Experience Leader and a local guide. Our tour will reveal the city's Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman roots, and the legacy of a storied and complex past. We'll begin our exploration of Greece's second-largest city in the historic neighborhood of Ano Poli (upper town). As we traverse its cobbled alleyways, we'll have a chance to admire the remaining walls of the Byzantine and Ottoman fortress that once occupied this area. We'll also witness the 14th-century remains of Vlatadon Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its Byzantine beginnings.

Next, we'll make our way north to the Ottoman quarter of town, a former Jewish settlement. Here we'll witness a variety of well-preserved Byzantine monuments before continuing on to the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. Upon arrival, we'll peruse the myriad artifacts on display—ranging from the Prehistoric, Archaic, Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods—all of which mostly originated from the city of Thessaloniki but also from the region of Macedonia. Our guide will accompany us throughout the museum, offering commentary and answering any questions you might have.

After our museum visit, our group will head to two local markets, starting with Kapani Market. Located in the heart of the city center since the late 15th century, Kapani contains an array of stores, from fish and meat vendors, to produce stands and spice shops. We'll then explore Modiano, an enclosed market that's home

to not only food vendors, but also *tavernas* (bars) that are popular among locals. We'll have opportunities to sample local fare at both markets before enjoying free time for the rest of the afternoon.

**Lunch:** On your own. Perhaps you'll seek out a meal at one of the *tavernas* at Modiano Market. Your Trip Experience Leader can help you decide where to go.

**Afternoon:** Later this afternoon, we'll head back to the hotel, where we'll have time to relax until dinner. If you'd rather continue exploring, your Trip Experience Leader is able to assist in planning the rest of your day. Maybe you'd like to explore Aristotelous Square, a lively area with shops, restaurants, bars, and hotels that stretch along the waterfront.

**Dinner:** Our group will reconvene this evening for a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to explore or rest in your hotel room. Your Trip Experience Leader is always available to provide suggestions.

## Day 4 Thessaloniki • Archaeological Site of Pella • Edessa Waterfalls

- Destination: Thessaloniki
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Egnatia Palace Hotel

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll spend our morning discovering the archaeological site of Pella, which became famous when King Archelaos declared it the capital of Macedonia in the fifth century BC. Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a guided tour of this fourth-century site, which consists of meticulously excavated walls and resurrected columns. With a little imagination—and the help of our expert local guide, we'll begin to see the historic market, shops, and villas come to life before our very eyes. After our tour, we'll

enter the on-site museum, which houses texts, coins, inscriptions, sculptures, vases, mosaics, and more. This collection of artifacts will further our understanding of daily life in this ancient city.

Later, we'll depart for Edessa Waterfalls. Upon arrival, we'll first have lunch before exploring the falls.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Depart for Edessa Waterfalls. These twelve natural falls were created by seismic activity dating back to the 14th century. During our time here, we'll have a chance to explore the area around the falls, and you can even walk behind the biggest fall—Karanos—where you'll have an idyllic view behind the 229-foot-tall water curtain.

Following some free time at the waterfalls, we'll return to Thessaloniki. Maybe you'll head to the seventh-century Church of Agios Dimitrios, which honors Thessaloniki's patron saint—in fact, his remains are interred in the crypt beneath the church.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions. You might want to try *souvlaki* (which literally translates to “skewer”), a Greek fast food of meat or vegetables cooked on a skewer and often paired with pita bread, sauces, and other toppings.

**Evening:** Free to explore on your own or rest for the evening. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide ideas.

## Day 5 Thessaloniki • Royal Tombs of Aigai • Mount Olympus

- Destination: Thessaloniki
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Egnatia Palace Hotel

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** This morning we'll depart for the town of Vergina, located almost 50 miles west of Thessaloniki. Here, we'll descend into the museum of Aigai, which houses royal Macedonian tombs dating back to the time of Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II. The crown jewel of the museum is the 336-BC tomb of Philip II, adorned with ivory, silver, and gold treasures. Surprisingly, the tomb was never raided throughout the millennia—and in fact, everything is on display in its original form.

Next, we'll depart for the town of Litochoro, nestled at the base of Mount Olympus.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll drive to the nature information center of Mount Olympus, where we'll learn more about this awe-inspiring area. Greece's highest mountain, Olympus is considered the home of the Greek gods in Greek mythology. Today, it's a popular hiking area for locals and tourists alike. As we explore, we'll learn about the diverse animal populations and plant species endemic to the area.

Following our tour, we'll embark on a hike to Enipeas, the river that crosses the flanks of Mount Olympus and serves as a water source for the countless pools and falls that lead back down to Litochoro. Throughout our hike, we'll enjoy breathtaking views of the mountain.

Later, head back to Thessaloniki, where you'll have free time to explore. You might wish to take a private boat ride around the Thermaic Gulf. Your Trip Experience Leader can help you plan this activity, if you wish.

**Dinner:** On your own. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for ideas.

**Evening:** You're free to relax at the hotel or continue exploring. Perhaps you'll have a drink at a local *taverna*.

## Day 6 Thessaloniki • Optional Flavors of Thessaloniki tour

- Destination: Thessaloniki
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Egnatia Palace Hotel

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today is free to explore on your own, or join our optional Flavors of Thessaloniki tour. Those travelers who wish to stay in Thessaloniki might like to stroll along the promenade or visit one of the popular museums at the harbor.

Travelers who join the optional tour will begin with a stroll through Thessaloniki's vibrant food markets. You'll discover the city's rich culinary heritage in the heart of Greece's gastronomic capital—a UNESCO City of Gastronomy and a true crossroads of cultures and flavors. As we explore, we'll meet local vendors, taste authentic regional products, and shop for fresh ingredients for our lunch, which we'll prepare together.

**Lunch:** On your own for those who remain in Thessaloniki. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions. Travelers on the optional tour will enjoy an included lunch.

**Afternoon:** Free to explore for travelers in Thessaloniki. Your Trip Experience Leader can help you plan your afternoon.

Travelers on the optional tour will have some free time to explore Thessaloniki. The rest of the day is free for you to do as you wish.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions.

**Evening:** Free to explore on your own. For your last evening in Thessaloniki, you might like to gather with your group and toast to the discoveries you made this week.

## Day 7 Transfer to Sofia, Bulgaria • Join main trip

- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Begin your transfer overland to Sofia, Bulgaria.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant en route.

**Afternoon:** Finish driving to Sofia. Upon arrival, check in to your hotel and meet the rest of your group to begin your *Eastern Balkan Experience: Bulgaria & Romania* adventure.

## OPTIONAL TOUR

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### Flavors of Thessaloniki

(Day 6 \$195 per person)

Travelers who join the optional tour will begin with a stroll through Thessaloniki's vibrant food markets. You'll discover the city's rich culinary heritage in the heart of Greece's

gastronomic capital—a UNESCO City of Gastronomy and a true crossroads of cultures and flavors. As we explore, we'll meet local vendors, taste authentic regional products, and shop for fresh ingredients for our lunch, which we'll prepare together.

## POST-TRIP

# *Undiscovered Romania: Moldavia, Bucovina & Maramures Regions*

## INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » 6 nights accommodations
- » 15 meals—6 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 5 dinners
- » 5 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

## POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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### **Day 1 Arrive Iasi, Romania • Overland to village of Dolhesti**

- Destination: Dolhesti
- Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Village Homestay in Dolhesti

**Morning:** Depart Bucharest this morning on a flight to Iasi, Romania.

**Lunch:** A boxed lunch will be provided en route.

**Afternoon:** Arrive in Iasi, then depart from the airport via private motorcoach with our Trip Experience Leader. We'll drive through the Romanian countryside until we reach the rural village of Dolhesti, arriving late this afternoon.

Dolhesti is a small commune tucked between the green hills of Moldavia. Our homestay accommodations will be simple, rustic, and comfortable, while the surrounding community is close-knit and friendly. Our 2-night stay here will provide us with a unique opportunity to see what life is truly like in rural Romania.

Later, we'll enjoy a Welcome Drink with our homestay hosts and other members of the community. Then we'll have some free time to take a leisurely stroll around the village.

**Dinner:** With our hosts in their home.

**Evening:** On your own. You may want to settle in early after your day of travel.

### **Day 2 Explore Dolhesti village • Cooking class with a local**

- Destination: Dolhesti
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Village Homestay in Dolhesti

**Breakfast:** At a village home with our hosts.

**Morning:** Today we'll walk into the village with our Trip Experience Leader and immerse ourselves in the day-to-day activities of this rural community. First, we'll meet the local cheese maker who will show us a bit of the cheese making process. Then we'll visit the

local coat maker and admire their hand-crafted wares. Much of what you will see in Dolhesti is made by hand, a necessity for remote villages.

Next, we'll head to a local garden to gather ingredients for our cooking lesson with a local cook. Our ingredients will vary depending on the time of year, and what meal the cook will be teaching us that day.

Once we've harvested what we need, we will head to the cook's home where they will show us how to prepare a traditional Moldavian meal.

**Lunch:** We'll sit down with our host and enjoy the fruits of our labors together.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll have a few hours free for independent exploration. Besides the charming village itself, Dolhesti is surrounded by nature for those looking to take a relaxing stroll.

Then, later in the afternoon, we'll re-group and walk together to Dolhesti's community center. Here we'll learn more about village life here from a community leader.

**Dinner:** Savor a hearty meal of locally-sourced cold cuts for dinner at the community center with the locals.

**Evening:** On your own.

### **Day 3 Overland to Vadu Izei • Visit Painted Monastery • Water mill visit**

- Destination: Vadu Izei
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pensiunea Covaciu Guesthouse or similar

**Breakfast:** At a village home with our hosts.

**Morning:** We'll thank our hosts and say goodbye to Dolhesti village this morning, as we embark on a full day of discoveries.

First, we'll drive to Moldovita, located in the Bucovina region of Romania. It is here we'll pay a visit to Moldovita Monastery—also known as the Painted Monastery. This is an appropriate name as the medieval building is covered with vibrant frescoes both inside and out.

Afterwards, we'll continue our journey through the Romanian countryside, arriving in the town of Argel, where we'll disembark for lunch.

**Lunch:** Included in Argel.

**Afternoon:** We'll continue our drive to our next destination: the village of Vadu Izei in Romania's Maramures County. Along the way, we'll stop to visit a working water mill. We'll meet with some of the local villagers here who will show us how this ancient technique of generating power is still used today.

Later this afternoon, we'll arrive in Vadu Izei where we will check into our bed and breakfast. Enjoy some free time to settle in and relax after the day's journey.

**Dinner:** At the bed and breakfast featuring local Romanian specialties.

**Evening:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 4 Explore the Merry Cemetery • Visit Barsana Wooden Monastery**

- Destination: Vadu Izei
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Pensiunea Covaciu Guesthouse or similar

**Breakfast:** At the bed and breakfast.

**Morning:** This morning, we'll drive to the Maramures region of Romania where we'll visit one of the country's most fascinating locations—the Merry Cemetery.

At first glance we'll see that "merry" is a very apt name for this cheerful, colorful place. The gravestones here are painted in bright colors and depict whimsical images of the dead along with amusing epitaphs—embracing a more upbeat, even comical approach towards death.

After our discoveries here, we'll take advantage of some free time to explore Sapanta, the village that is home to the Merry Cemetery. Then we'll next drive to Barsana Wooden Monastery. Built in 1720, the Wooden Monastery is the tallest in Romania. Then, we'll drive to Sighetu Marmatieu in time for lunch.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll enjoy about an hour of free time to explore Sighetu Marmatieu. You may choose to visit the old communist prison.

We'll then drive back to Vadu Izei where the balance of the afternoon will be on your own.

**Dinner:** At the bed and breakfast. Tonight, our meal will be accompanied by a traditional Maramures folk show.

**Evening:** Free to spend as you wish.

## Day 5 Overland to Cluj-Napoca

- Destination: Cluj-Napoca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: DoubleTree by Hilton Cluj

**Breakfast:** At the bed and breakfast.

**Morning:** We'll check out of our bed and breakfast this morning and begin our drive to Cluj-Napoca, stopping first in the town of Dej. Here we will witness Dej Synagogue, considered to be one of Europe's most beautiful synagogues. We will have a moment to take some photos here before heading to lunch.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Dej.

**Afternoon:** We'll continue our drive to Cluj-Napoca, the historic capital of Transylvania, arriving mid-afternoon. After checking in, the balance of the day is on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own in Cluj-Napoca—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Evening:** On your own. Perhaps you'll venture out to experience Cluj-Napoca's lively cocktail bar scene.

## Day 6 Explore Cluj-Napoca •

### Farewell Dinner

- Destination: Cluj-Napoca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: DoubleTree by Hilton Cluj

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Discover the city of Cluj-Napoca today on a walking tour with our Trip Experience Leader. This historic city has a large student population, which gives Cluj-Napoca a decidedly artistic, lively vibe. Gothic churches give way to hip cafes and creative cocktail bars. During our tour, we'll stop to witness the Cathedral of St. Michael, a Gothic-style Roman Catholic church dating back to 1487 featuring one of the tallest church towers in Transylvania.

**Lunch:** On your own in Cluj-Napoca—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Afternoon:** Enjoy a free afternoon of exploration in Cluj-Napoca. Perhaps you'd like to see some of the city's various green spaces, such as Central Park, situated on the banks of the Somesul Mic River. You could also visit the Botanical Garden, inside which you can find a rose garden lush with 250 different varieties as well as a Japanese-style garden.

**Dinner:** Gather for a Farewell Dinner in a local restaurant tonight.

**Evening:** On your own. You may wish to pack and get a good night's rest for your journey home tomorrow.

### **Day 7 Return to U.S.**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Activity Note:** Some flights today may require a very early wake-up. Please refer to your itinerary for details.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel. Travelers with earlier flights will be provided with a boxed breakfast.

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

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## Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

## Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

## Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip to Greece:** No additional passport pages are needed for this extension.
- **Post-trip to Turkey:** You will need an additional blank page, for a total of 3 passport pages.

## No Visas Required

**We'll be sending you information with detailed instructions about 100 days prior to your departure.** In the meantime, we're providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This info is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Europe (Romania, Bulgaria):** U.S. citizens will be required to fill out an online European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) visa-waiver to enter countries in the European Union. There is no confirmed start date for the ETIAS at the time of printing. The ETIAS will be valid for 3 years.

## Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or [www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org).

## Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

## Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

## Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

## RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

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### Is This Adventure Right for You?

**Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.** We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

#### PACING

- 6 locations in 18 days
- Return flights often require departing in early morning
- Air travel time will be 11–20 hours and will have at least one connection

#### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk 5–6 miles unassisted and participate in 4–6 hours of physical activities each day
- You must be able to climb 200 steps at Parliament
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

#### CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 58–82°F during cruising season
- June–August are the warmest months; July and August can reach highs of 100°F
- March and November weather can be unpredictable and change quickly

#### TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Uneven walking surfaces, including steep paths, hills, and cobblestones, which can be slippery in wet or colder conditions
- Travel by 30-passenger coach
- Two drives of 3 to 5 hours each

#### ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- Hotel rooms are smaller than those in the U.S. and offer basic amenities
- All accommodations feature private baths

## Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel) or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

## No Vaccines Required

### Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

### Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness

### Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.

- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

## Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

## Water

- Tap water in the region is safe to drink, but is processed differently than in the U.S. so it can still upset your stomach or feel “heavy”. Therefore, you might want to drink bottled water instead.
- Bottled water is readily available for purchase and is relatively inexpensive. (Bottled water is not included in the price of your tour.)
- Inspect each bottle before you buy it to make sure the cap is sealed properly.
- When in doubt about the water, salads, or ice, just ask the restaurant or your Trip Experience Leader.
- It is OK to brush your teeth with tap water.

## Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for the meal you take on your own.
- Be very careful with food sold from vendors on the street, and with uncooked foods.

# MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

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## Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not accepted in the countries on this itinerary.**
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip**; you will need local currency instead.

## Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like [www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter), your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

**Euro Countries:** European Euro (€)

**Bulgaria:** Bulgarian Lev (Лв.)

**Romania:** Romanian leu (lei)

## How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets. Or you can wait and change money on the trip instead—but it might be helpful to arrive with some local currency in case you run into a bank holiday or an “out of order” ATM.

On your trip, the easiest way is to withdraw funds from a local ATM. The ATM will give you local money and your bank at home will convert that into U.S. dollars.

You can also exchange cash at some hotels, large post offices, and money exchange offices. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). New bills (post 2014) are best.

Please note that many banks in Europe will only exchange money for their own customers. Never exchange money on the street. All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

## ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

**Bulgaria:** International ATM networks are available throughout large cities and small towns.

**Romania:** ATMs are common throughout large cities and small towns in Romania.

**Greece:** ATMs are common throughout Greece.

## Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

**Bulgaria:** Credit and debit card use is common in Bulgaria and major American credit cards are widely accepted.

**Romania:** Credit and debit card use is common in Romania.

**Greece:** Credit cards are widely accepted in Greece, but street vendors will require cash. Some small shops and restaurants may also require cash so it is always good to ask before making a purchase.

## Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

## Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$10-\$14 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader

is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*

- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1-2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** When dining as a group, your tip is included—there is no need for you to leave an additional tip. When dining on your own, you can simply round up the bill. Or if you want to leave a really nice tip for excellent service 5-10% of the check is enough.
- **Taxi drivers:** Tipping is not customary, but many locals will round up the fare and let the driver keep the change.

*Please Note:* Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and optional extensions for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your adventure. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

## AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

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### Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

#### Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner) under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

### Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

### Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: [www.rome2rio.com](http://www.rome2rio.com)

## Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

## What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner)).

## Communicating with Home from Abroad

### Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

## Calling Apps

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype or FaceTime. These services are usually less expensive than making a traditional call, but you'll need a Wi-Fi connection and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

## Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## Internet

Most hotels in Eastern Europe will have Internet services available, some for free, some for an hourly charge. WiFi service is fairly common, but may be limited to a public area, like the lobby. If you'd like to use WiFi when and where it is available, you'll need to bring your own device. Or you could choose to rely on hotel computers instead—many hotels will also offer a limited number of computers in the lobby or business center for guests to use.

## How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

**Bulgaria:** +359

**Greece:** +30

**Romania:** +40

## PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

### Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
<b>Pieces per person</b>	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
<b>Weight restrictions</b>	Varies by airline. The current standard is <b>50 lbs for checked bags</b> and <b>15 lbs for carry-ons</b> .
<b>Size Restrictions</b>	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches ( <i>length+width+depth</i> ). Generally, <b>62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches</b> .
<b>Luggage Type</b>	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p><b>Luggage rules:</b> Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>	

#### Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

## Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** One duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

## Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Footwear:** Comfortable, supportive walking shoes are essential. You'll be on your feet a lot during the trip, and walking over some rough and slippery surfaces. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction.
- **Light rain gear is recommended.** Regardless of when you travel, rainfall is a possibility. While it may not rain on your trip, we suggest you bring a waterproof shell or coat, preferably with a hood. This might be a better choice than a folding umbrella, which is usually less effective in wind. (Plus it can be tricky to try to hold onto an umbrella and take photos at the same time.)
- **Layers are key.** We suggest wearing layers, so you can adjust to warmer and cooler conditions as needed.

## Style Hints

- Dress on our trip is functional and casual. You might want to bring one slightly dressier outfit for dining on your own at nicer restaurants or for the Farewell Dinner, but that is completely up to you.

## Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each traveler's packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don't forget a reusable water bottle—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

## Recommended Clothing

- Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts.
- Trousers and/or jeans.
- Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking/ running shoes or low-cut hiking shoes, with arch support. Bring at least a couple pairs of medium- to heavy-weight socks for long walks.
- Underwear and sleepwear
- Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- Wide-brim sun hat
- Swimsuit for hotel pools or saunas

## Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

### For summer departures (June- August):

- Although high temperatures tend to be in the high 70s, temperatures can easily spike into the 80s and 90s. A few shorts and some lightweight tops will help you cope with an unexpected heat wave.
- Despite the potential for higher temperatures, you'll also want at least one piece to layer—a light sweater, a vest, or jacket—in case it gets cool at night or in case you are somewhere where the air conditioning is chilly.

### For spring and fall departures (April, May, September, October):

- Light sweater and/or a warm jacket
- Gloves and a scarf

### For winter departures (January- March, November, December):

- Winter coat, hat, warm gloves, scarf, and long underwear

## Essential Items

- Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands. Most hotels do not provide a washcloth, so you may wish to pack one.
- Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- Sunglasses, 100% UV block
- Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- Cold-water hand-wash laundry soap such as Woolite and plastic hang-up clothespins
- Light folding umbrella
- Moisturizer and sun-blocking lip balm
- Packets of pocket-size tissues
- Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser
- Electrical converter & plug adapter: see “A Word about Electricity” for details
- Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger

## Medicines & First Aid Gear

- Your own prescription medicines
- Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness

## Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to

consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

## **Electricity Abroad**

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

### **Voltage**

Electricity in this region is 220–240 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner’s guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

### **Plugs**

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you’ll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Since an E or F socket will take a C plug, you’ll only need one adapter, though it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

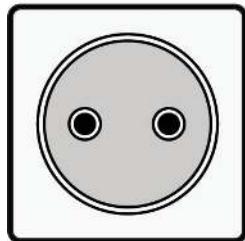
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

**Bulgaria: C**

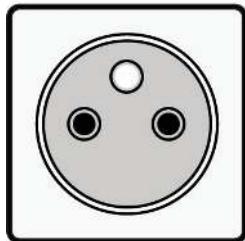
**Romania: C**

**Greece:** C, D, E and F

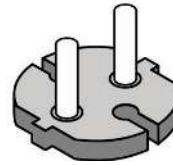
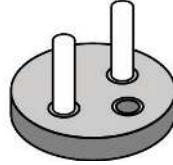
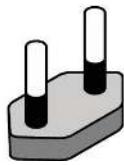
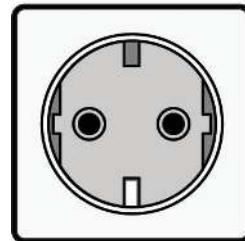
**Type C**



**Type E**



**Type F**



## Availability

Barring the occasional and unpredictable power outage, electricity is as readily available on this adventure as it is in the U.S.

## CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

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**Bulgaria:** The climate of Bulgaria is temperate continental, with very warm summers, cold winters, and four distinct seasons. Spring and fall are quite comfortable but can bring rainy days. The regions in southern Bulgaria feel a Mediterranean influence, and winters here are milder. Winters are also somewhat warmer along the coast of the Black Sea, although winds blowing down from Russia can chill the area. But during the summer the coast of the Black Sea enjoys more moderate temperatures than inland Bulgaria and pleasant breezes from the coast. Cities along the Danube, like Ruse and Vidin, have hot summers and cold winters, plus humidity can be quite high.

**Romania:** Romania's climate is temperate, with few extreme weather conditions. Mid-summer is generally quite hot, especially in the lowlands, where summer is usually dry. Spring and fall bring delightful, sunny days and comfortable temperatures. The mountains receive more precipitation than the Danube delta, with brief showers and occasional thunderstorms in the Carpathians. Winters bring cold temperatures and abundant snowfall, along with a cold wind known as the *crivat* that blows from Russia. Summer temperatures in Bucharest can reach into the 90s. During your stay in Sinaia, a mountain pass town, temperatures can fluctuate by 40 degrees or more. It can be in the upper 70s in the afternoon in July and August ... but the **average** high is around 50 degrees.

**Sibiu, Romania:** Sibiu is a city resting in the center of Romania, in the Transylvania region. Its climate is defined as moderately continental, with cold, below freezing winters and mild summers. The temperatures average a comfortable mid 70s during the summer months, but nights still bring a chill. Snow is common during the winter months, from December to mid-March.

**NOTE:** If you are taking one of our optional stopovers before or after your OAT adventure, please be aware the climate and temperatures might be different from what you experienced during your tour. To prepare for weather differences and pack appropriate clothing, we recommend the following world weather sites:

- [www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)
- [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)
- [www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

### Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

## Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	PLOVDIV, BULGARIA			VELIKO TARNOVO, BULGARIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	41 to 27	76	5	40 to 24	80	7
FEB	47 to 30	67	5	44 to 27	76	7
MAR	55 to 35	60	6	53 to 34	71	8
APR	65 to 43	53	5	63 to 43	68	9
MAY	75 to 52	53	7	71 to 51	69	10
JUN	85 to 59	50	6	77 to 59	67	9
JUL	90 to 63	45	4	82 to 63	62	7
AUG	90 to 62	46	3	84 to 63	60	5
SEP	80 to 55	48	3	74 to 55	66	6
OCT	68 to 46	59	4	63 to 46	74	6
NOV	53 to 37	69	6	54 to 38	79	6
DEC	44 to 30	76	6	43 to 29	80	8

MONTH	BUCHAREST, ROMANIA			SIBIU, ROMANIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average # Days of Rainfall
JAN	36 to 23	94 to 81	8	35 to 20	87	5
FEB	39 to 25	94 to 75	7	40 to 21	79	6
MAR	50 to 33	93 to 63	11	50 to 30	71	7
APR	62 to 42	94 to 56	14	61 to 39	67	8
MAY	72 to 51	94 to 54	14	70 to 48	68	11
JUN	79 to 58	96 to 55	14	80 to 55	71	11
JUL	82 to 60	97 to 51	11	84 to 59	71	10
AUG	82 to 59	96 to 49	10	86 to 57	72	7
SEP	75 to 52	96 to 49	10	75 to 48	76	7
OCT	63 to 43	95 to 60	11	65 to 38	78	6
NOV	47 to 33	96 to 78	11	50 to 29	80	5
DEC	38 to 27	95 to 85	10	39 to 23	86	6

MONTH	THESSALONIKI, GREECE		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
<b>JAN</b>	49 to 34	81 to 69	1.4
<b>FEB</b>	52 to 36	80 to 65	1.5
<b>MAR</b>	58 to 40	83 to 62	1.6
<b>APR</b>	66 to 46	84 to 57	1.5
<b>MAY</b>	76 to 54	85 to 54	1.8
<b>JUN</b>	90 to 63	77 to 45	1.2
<b>JUL</b>	95 to 67	74 to 42	0.9
<b>AUG</b>	100 to 67	75 to 45	0.8
<b>SEP</b>	81 to 60	79 to 51	1.1
<b>OCT</b>	70 to 51	83 to 63	1.6
<b>NOV</b>	60 to 44	84 to 72	2.1
<b>DEC</b>	52 to 37	83 to 72	2.2

## ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

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### O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

### Southeast European Culture

The term “Balkan” has been used to refer to this region, specifically Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. However, since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the term “Balkanization” has had negative connotations that the people of these new, vibrant nations are eager to overcome. So today, they prefer to define this area as “Southeastern Europe.”

The people of Southeastern Europe are mostly South Slavs, who are all descended from the same ancestors and speak closely related languages. South Slavic people identify with sub-ethnic groups such as Serbs, Croats, or Bosniaks, but their presence is not necessarily confined to specific countries, as they have historically migrated and intermingled. Remember, the states of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania are fairly recent, but the cultural pluralism within them is not.

The region has been a crossroads of cultures for millennia, a place where peoples of Slavic, Latin, Finno-Ugric, Greek and Turkish origin have settled. Where Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Habsburg, and Soviet empires have left their imprint. And where Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, and (up until the post World War II period) Judaism all meet.

With all that diversity, you will find that there are many words common across the spoken languages, similar culinary traditions, shared folk beliefs and mutual artistic, musical, literary and artisanal styles. Most important, across all South Slavic groups, family is of the utmost importance, and that includes extended family. Three generation households are common, and even when people move away (usually, for economic reasons), they retain close ties to their hometowns. It is all bound up in the concept of *narod*, which roughly means “nation” or “folk” and has mythic and romantic overtones.

South Slavic people are known to be down-to-earth, and the rhythm of daily life here is easygoing. They are passionate about sports—the most popular being soccer, followed by basketball. You'll notice that the people are very social and love to gather for long visits in cafes and village squares. There's an especially vibrant coffee culture throughout the region, a holdover from centuries of Ottoman rule. South Slavs stand close to each other and can be loud and expressive when they talk. But with strangers, they tend to be more formal. At the same time, hospitality is a point of family honor, and people will go out of their way to make you feel welcome.

## The Danube River

The Danube River is the second-longest river in Europe and the only major European river to flow from west to east. It rises in the Black Forest region of Germany and flows in a generally easterly direction for a distance of 1,766 miles before emptying, on the Romanian coast, into the Black Sea. This legendary river not only shaped the destinies of all the countries that line its banks, but influenced the whole continent as no other European river ever could.

The Danube river basin is more than 300,000 square miles and includes parts of Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldavia, and Ukraine. The river is ancient and full of history, passing through the cities of Ulm, Regensburg, and Passau in Germany; Linz and Vienna in Austria; Bratislava in Slovakia; Budapest in Hungary; Belgrade in Serbia and Galatzi and Brăila in Romania. Canals link the Danube to the Main and Rhine, providing a commercial route between the Black and North Seas.

The strategic location of this great river was recognized centuries ago by Roman emperors who sought to control it. Ruins from that period now perch on banks above the river, reminding you of the Danube's multifaceted past. Even today, the Danube continues to be one of Europe's greatest assets, in part because it provides a water link between the four national capitals on its banks: Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, and Belgrade. Back in the heyday of river transport, other great cities grew up along the Danube's banks too, serving as ports for the various cargo being carried on the river, namely salt, wood, and ores. These same products now are transferred on the railroad and highways, which run alongside the Danube's course.

There is no question that few river voyages can match the romantic appeal of a journey down the Danube. As you sail along this twisting river, stopping at fascinating ports, you'll gain an understanding of the art, music, and culture of a fabled region with a history that stretches back more than 3,000 years.

## Religion and Religious Observances

Religion in Bulgaria and Romania is not just a matter of faith, it's the single most important differentiator among the various ethnic groups. By far the dominant religion in Bulgaria is Eastern Orthodox Christianity, professed by the prevalent ethnic group, the Bulgarians, who are adherents to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Likewise, most Romanians (about 82%) identify as Romanian Orthodox Christians.

## Language

Generally your Program Director will provide you with language reference materials or may even lead a quick language lesson. We encourage you to try a few words for fun; even just "please" and "thank you" will take you a long way towards better interactions with the locals.

## Hotel Courtesy in Greece

Greek hotels do not allow food and beverages to be taken from their breakfast rooms, nor is it courteous to eat or drink food or beverages purchased elsewhere in hotel common rooms. In conformity with municipal laws to promote urban decorum, hotels do not allow hanging laundry on room balconies. Travel clotheslines, used in your bathroom, are a more private and effective solution.

## Taking Photographs

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

## Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

## Bulgarian Cuisine

Bulgarians love to bond over their shared meals. During these meals you will find that Bulgarian cuisine shares many characteristics with other Balkan countries, as well as their neighbors to the south, including Greece and Turkey. Foods like yogurt, **sirene** (a Bulgarian type of brined cheese), and sausage accompany most dishes you will encounter.

- **Topcheta:** A Bulgarian meatball soup thickened with egg yolks and yogurt.
- **Shkembe:** This traditional Bulgarian soup is made from tripe and a great hangover cure.
- **Banitsa:** A baked pastry made of layered stuffing and phyllo that can be made with eggs, sirene, and yogurt.
- **Tutmanik:** This is similar to *pita* but is made with yeast dough, milk, and white cheese.
- **Milinki:** This bread roll pastry is made with eggs and sirene.
- **Buhti:** Deep-fried dough balls, served with jam, honey, and sirene.
- **Shopska salad:** This salad has chopped cucumbers, onions, peppers, tomatoes, and is topped with sirene.
- **Tarator:** A cold soup made from cucumbers, garlic, yogurt, and dill.

- **Lukanka:** Spicy salami consisting of minced beef and pork.
- **Pulneni chushki:** Bulgarian stuffed bell peppers.
- **Bulgarian Gyuvech:** This casserole is served in a clay pot and is made with pork or beef, tomatoes, okra, mushrooms, peas, green beans, potatoes, eggplant, and onions.

## Romanian Cuisine

If you like unpretentious food with robust flavors, you'll love what arrives on your plate in Romania, whose cuisine weds fresh local ingredients with the culinary influences of Turkey, Hungary, Saxon Germany, Austria, Greece, and Russia.

Certain ingredients make a regular appearance at the Romanian table, such as *smantana*, a sour cream. It's the base for *mujdei de usteroi*, a ubiquitous garlic sauce. Perhaps, like the Romanians, you'll grow to love *lovage*, a Mediterranean herb that's a cross between parsley and celery. You can also expect to see a green pepper (raw or pickled) on the side of your plate or soup bowl. The most popular meat here is pork, especially around Christmas when it was traditional to slaughter a hog and use it, nose to tail, to make a whole array of holiday dishes. *Tochitură* is one of them (but now available year round)—a thick pork stew cooked in tomatoes and wine, and topped with a fried egg.

Romanian pastrami may be the pride of every New York deli, but here where it originated, you will find that the *pastrama* method of brining, seasoning, and smoking is applied to a whole variety of meats, including veal, mutton, beef, pork, or even goat. In fact, the pastrami that Romanian Jews first brought to New York in 1872 was originally made with cured goose breast. You'll find that here, too. Romanians like their *pastrama* thinly sliced as an appetizer; or as an entrée served with *mămăligă* (Romanian polenta) and garlic sauce.

- **Sarmale** (or *sărmăluțe*): This national dish is made from cabbage rolls stuffed with pork and rice.
- **Pastrav:** This Romanian trout is perfect for fish lovers, which is served at countryside trout farms called pastavarie.
- **salată roșii:** Or tomato salad, that includes a huge array of pickled vegetables.
- **Salată castraveti:** Cucumber salad made from thinly sliced cucumbers, onions, olive oil, salt, tarragon, and cider vinegar.
- **Salata de vinete,::** A creamy eggplant spread made from very few ingredients.
- **Ghiveci de legume:** A savory stew that can contain over 20 braised vegetables.
- **Mititei or mici:** The name means “little ones,” but these small, skinless sausages pack a big flavor punch and can be found at food stalls.
- **Covrigi:** A Romanian pretzel.

- **Papanași:** A bombshell of fried dough and sweetened curd cheese, topped with jam and cream.
- **Placinta:** These are similar to crêpes. There are savory versions but most popular are the sweet ones filled with sweet cheese, apples, sour cherries, Nutella, or jam.
- **Cozonac:** A traditional holiday sweet bread filled with walnuts, poppy seeds or cream cheese.

There are good Romanian wines to pair with your meal. But a true Romanian would advise you to “aid your digestion” with a glass of ***tuica*** plum brandy. *Pofta mare*, or “hearty appetite!”

## Greek Cuisine

A perfect Mediterranean climate. More than 6,000 islands and no mainland location more than 90 miles from the sea. Bountiful (and mostly organic) olive groves, fruit orchards, pastures, and vineyards. With all this richness, Greece has had no reason to change or complicate its cuisine in thousand of years. Here, it is the quality and freshness of simple ingredients that makes every dish a flavorful standout. So, let's start as the Greeks do, with ***mesethes***, or ***mezes***. These are frequently described as appetizers and though a specific *meze* may be offered as a first course, for most Greeks *mezes* is a separate event in and of itself. One goes out for *mezes* with friends and family, sharing various small plates of food, drinks, pastries, and conversation. You might be served one of the flavorful dishes below:

- **Pasta elias:** An olive paste to spread on breadsticks.
- **Feta:** A Greek brined white cheese that is soft and made from sheep or goat milk.
- **Kasseri:** A Greek hard cheese.
- **Sea bream:** A white fish with a rich flavor that is not too fishy. It is often served as a fillet and accompanied by baby potatoes or seasonal herbs.
- **Keftedes:** These are seasoned meatballs also accompanied by a dip.
- **Kolokythokeftedes:** Also known as zucchini fritters. These are often accompanied by ***tzatziki*** (yogurt, cucumber, and garlic dip), or ***melitzanosalata*** (eggplant dip), or ***fava*** (bean dip).
- **Dolmathakia or dolmas:** Are grape leaves rolled and stuffed with rice, pine nuts, meat, or other seasonings.
- **Moussaka:** A layered casserole of eggplant, ground lamb, tomato sauce, and potatoes covered in béchamel sauce and cheese, and spiced with cinnamon.
- **Pastitsio:** A lasagna-like dish made with pasta and ground beef or lamb, béchamel, cheese, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

- **Gyros and souvlaki:** These chunks or slices of seasoned grilled meat (usually lamb or pork) with chopped tomatoes and onions in pita bread, with lashings of *tzatziki* are sold in stalls everywhere.
- **Spanakopita:** A phyllo pastry layered with feta cheese and spinach.
- **Kakavia:** A specialty in the Aegean. This rockfish soup is made with cured sardines and various grilled whole fish drizzled with *ladholemono* (a lemon and oil dressing).
- **Arni me votana:** A lamb casserole with vegetables, beans, tomatoes, potatoes and herbs.
- **Kaimaki:** A sweet cream topped with nuts and honey that is famous in the Peloponnese
- **Pastitsada:** This signature dish of the Ionian islands is made with savory chicken or beef simmered in wine, cinnamon, garlic and spices. It's often served with *bucatini* pasta, a nod to the area's Venetian past.
- **Glyko kastano:** A chestnut pudding with honey and orange found in western Greece.
- **Revani:** A moist semolina cake with lemon and orange.
- **Eliopsomo:** A traditional Greek olive bread.
- **Tyropita:** This savory pastry is similar to *spanakopita*, but it's filling consists of cheese and eggs.

## Bucharest in Brief

Once known as the Paris of the Balkans, before World War II and decades of communism wore the sheen off the city, Bucharest has refurbished itself in recent years and now welcomes visitors to its broad boulevards, small cafés, and historic monuments. Away from downtown, Bucharest is a sprawling metropolis with identical, somewhat drab neighborhoods that make it easy to get lost. The Intercontinental Hotel towers above everything else and is a good marker for locating downtown. The twelve-story Palace of Parliament, built during the reign of Nicolae Ceausescu, houses the president's office, the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the central committee, and all the state ministries. Guided tours through this monumental, 3,100-room complex are available.

The Calea Victoriei is Bucharest's main street and most famous thoroughfare, but you may want to start at the Princely Court, the palace that was home to the 15th-century ruler who was the real-life evil inspiration for Bram Stoker's creepy classic Dracula. Here you can still see the thick fortress walls that were originally built from river stones. The huge cellars cover such a large area that surrounding shops and restaurants are often attached to the complex through a below-ground maze. South along Calea Victoriei is the Strada Lipscani, a four-block area of artisans, crafts, and shops that showcase the old Bucharest.

Bucharest has a mixed architectural heritage. Exposed to numerous invaders over the centuries it lacks much of the classic Renaissance feel that older European cities display. The older sections of Bucharest, such as Strada Lipscani, give a glimpse of Bucharest's eastern influences with their

narrow streets and crowded bazaars. Late 19th-century influences tended toward the French with the result that Bucharest seems a near modern European capital city, at least in places. In particular, the Calea Victoriei between Revolution Square and Victory Square is worth a look.

The Curtea Veche Church, a 16th-century structure, is next to the Princely Court, and nearby is the Hanul Manuc, a 19th-century hotel that remains a fine place to stop. The Stavropoleos Church, built in 1742, is a good example of the Byzantine influence in the city. The History Museum has a wonderful collection of ornaments, gold, and precious stones. Revolution Square and the palace of the Republic are reminders of the days of the country's last communist dictator, the tyrannical Nicolae Ceausescu.

The streets in Bucharest beyond Victory Square lead out of town. Note the French influence exhibited by the Arc de Triomphe, which honors the Romanian dead from World War I. The Village Museum on Soseaua Kiseleff is full of good examples of pastoral Romanian architecture through the ages. A nearby lake and park are good spots for relaxing or even hiring a boat for a small excursion.

## Local Transportation

Most sights are concentrated in the city center. Bucharest's public transit network consists of a metro system, trams, and buses. There are four subway lines with tickets sold from kiosks inside the station. Buses and maxi taxis (minibuses that stop on request) are readily available up to 11 pm. There are five maxi taxi routes in the city and tickets can be bought on board. You can hail a taxi on the street, but it is easier to have your hotel call a dispatcher. If you choose to use a taxi at a taxi stand or one you hail on the street, definitely agree on a price beforehand! In general, transportation is quite cheap in Bucharest.

## Sofia in Brief

Sofia is largest city in Bulgaria and one of the oldest in Europe. It is situated in the Sofia Valley surrounded by mountains and at the center of the Balkans. After Bulgaria gained its independence, Sofia was chosen as the capital due to its important location that connected the other regions.

After World War II the city was industrialized, and multiple manufacturing industries were built. The city has many educational institutions including the University of Sofia, which is the oldest higher learning establishment in Bulgaria. Today, the city is vibrant with historic landmarks and modern buildings.

**Local Transportation in Sofia, Bulgaria:** The central railway station is the main hub for transportation. The Sofia Metro, along with bus, tram, and trolleybus run all over the city, making it easy to navigate.

## Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

### Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

### Crafts & Souvenirs

#### Bulgaria

Traditional items include rose oil (or rose water), ceramics, *kilims* (a colorful, flat woolen rug), copper, wood carvings, woolen items, jewelry, tablecloths and lace, and bells.

#### Romania

Bucharest is renowned for its hand-woven carpets, which can be purchased from several authorized retailers in the city. For real bargains consider crystal, porcelain, ceramics, and china, of which good-quality items can be purchased at relatively low prices in local shops. Local arts and crafts can be purchased at Artizanat stores that specialize in dolls, masks, and embroidered objects made by local craftspeople.

#### Greece

Specialties include handicrafts, gold and silver jewelry, embroidered shirts and dresses, fabrics, flokati rugs of fluffy sheep wool, pottery, onyx, marble, jars containing traditional marmalade, herbs (oregano and thyme), honey bars and jars of honey, olive oil, and traditional beauty products made from olives. These are available in the main shopping area downtown around Syntagma, Omonia, and Kolonaki squares as well as in Monastiraki, the flea market, where shopping sometimes involves bargaining. Some of the best jewelry comes from Ioannina, ceramics from Sifnos and Skopelos, and embroidery from Skryos, Crete, Lefkas, and Rhodes. Thessaly and Epirus regions specialize in flokati rugs.

#### U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

## DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

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### Bulgaria

#### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 42,811 square miles
- **Capital:** Sofia
- **Language:** Bulgarian is the official language. English is usually understood in major hotels and restaurants but it is infrequently used in other settings. It is important to note that in Bulgaria, nodding the head means “no” and shaking the head means “yes.”
- **Location:** Bulgaria lies on the Black Sea in southeastern Europe, on the eastern part of the Balkans, with beautiful beaches on its coastline, the mountainous Balkan Range inland, and the fertile plains of the Danube in the north. Its borders touch Romania, Greece, Turkey, the Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia. Within the two great valleys of this country are nestled small villages where carts, not cars, are the main form of transportation.
- **Population:** 7,186,893 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Eastern Orthodox 59.4%, Muslim 7.8%, Other 1.7 %, None 3.7%, and unspecified 27.4 %
- **Time Zone:** Bulgaria is on Eastern European Time, which is seven hours ahead of Eastern Time in North America: when it is 12 noon in Washington D.C., it is 7 pm in Sofia. Daylight Saving Time is in effect from the last Sunday of March until the last Sunday of October.

## National Holidays: Bulgaria

In addition to the holidays listed below, Bulgaria celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

03/03 Liberation Day

05/01 Labor Day

05/06 St. George's Day

05/24 Culture and Literacy Day

09/06 Unification Day

09/22 Independence Day

12/24 Christmas Eve

12/25 Christmas

12/26 Second Day of Christmas

## Bulgaria: A Brief History

Bulgaria's history stretches back thousands of years. It was founded in the 7th century and is one of the oldest states on the European continent. Bulgaria is located in the Balkan peninsula. The land known as Bulgaria became part of the Roman Empire and then the Byzantine Empire that helped shape the early culture of what Bulgaria would become.

In 681, the Bulgarian state was established, by Khan Asparuh. This marked the beginning of a powerful empire. During the 9th and 10th centuries, Bulgaria adopted Christianity and became an important center for culture and literature. The First Bulgarian Empire was eventually conquered by the Byzantine Empire from 1018 to 1185. The second Bulgarian Empire was formed, but by the 14th century, it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

For 500 years, Bulgaria remained under Ottoman rule until the late 1800s. The country did not become fully independent until 1908. In the 20th century Bulgaria was involved in both World Wars and was under Soviet influence after World War II ended. By 1989 Bulgaria ended the communist rule and joined NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007. Today, Bulgaria is known for its cultural history and beautiful landscapes.

## Romania

### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 91,699 square miles
- **Capital:** Bucharest
- **Languages:** Romanian is the official language. Hungarian and German are also spoken.
- **Location:** Romania's location is sometimes described as being in central Europe or sometimes a southeastern Europe.
- **Geography:** The Carpathian Mountains cross the northern half of Romania and connect with the Transylvanian Alps near the central region of the country. Northwest of this mountainous arc is the Transylvanian plateau, and the great plains of Moldavia and

Walachia lie to the southeast. The Danube River forms the southern boundary with Bulgaria, and then flows north and then east through Romania, entering the Black Sea through its large delta just south of Ukraine.

- **Population:** 21,666,350
- **Religions:** Eastern Orthodox 81.9%, Protestant 6.4%, Roman Catholic 4.3%, other (mostly Muslim) 0.9%, none or atheist 0.2%, unspecified 6.3%
- **Time Zone:** Romania is seven hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 1pm in Bucharest.

## National Holidays: Romania

In addition to the holidays listed below, Romania celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter and Pentecost. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

01/02 Day after New Year's Day

01/24 Unification Day  
05/01 Labor Day/May Day  
08/15 St Mary's Day  
11/30 St. Andrew's Day  
12/01 National Holiday  
12/25 Christmas Day  
12/26 Second Day of Christmas

## Romania: A Brief History

The country we call “Romania” did not come to be until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and since then, its borders have fluctuated. Individual Romanians may trace their lineage to the various groups who held sway here—Greeks, Turks, Slavs, Magyars, Saxon Germans, and Russians—but the national heritage is linked to the Dacian people. They likely migrated from Thrace and settled in Romania around 3,300 BC. By 300 BC, they had formed a military democracy. But Dacia died with its last king, Decebalus, who was defeated by the Roman emperor Trajan. Today Decebalus is a Romanian national hero symbolizing freedom and resistance to imperialism.

Rome occupied Dacia for less than 200 years, but their intense Romanization program left a lasting impact. Settlers from Rome were moved here. The local language was replaced with Latin. And the Romans mingled with the Dacians. Rome withdrew in 271 AD, unable to stem the tide of new invaders: Huns, Goths, Slavs, Bulgars, and Magyars. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a fragmented feudal society had emerged, with the nobles from outside ethnic groups, and serfs who were Romanian peasants. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the first Romanian principality was formed, Wallachia, followed by Moldavia. Transylvania was a principality under the Hungarian crown.

These fiefdoms had shifting allegiances, but resisted the Ottoman Turks (even uniting briefly under Michael the Brave in 1600.) Still, they all became Ottoman vassals. When the Turks were beaten back from Vienna in 1683, Transylvania reverted to Hungarian (Hapsburg) rule. Wallachia

and Moldavia remained part of the Ottoman Empire, but after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828, they became Russian protectorates. In 1859 the two principalities united under a single prince, Alexander Ioan Cuza. The new state was named Romania, and it became a kingdom in 1881.

Romania declared its neutrality during World War I. But towards the end it sided with the Allies and by so doing, it recouped much lost territory, including Transylvania. King Carol II was crowned in 1930 and set up a dictatorship, setting the stage for a takeover by the Fascist Iron Guard in 1940. Romania signed the Axis Pact and joined the Nazi's assault on the Soviet Union. The Red Army "liberated" Romania in 1944, and a Communist government was elected in 1946.

Throughout the '50s Romania suffered a Stalinist terror during which most prewar leaders, intellectuals, and dissidents were imprisoned or killed. Even the Romanian language came under fire, as the Soviets changed street and city names and imposed a Slavic orthography. When Soviet troops withdrew in 1958, Romania's obeisance to Moscow eroded. Its independent foreign policy was exemplified in 1968, when the leader Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to send Romanian troops to support the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ceaușescu's anti-Soviet stance earned him the admiration of the West, but his regime was corrupt and repressive.

By the 1980s, Ceausescu's Romania was in severe debt and suffering severe shortages of food and fuel. When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, a Bucharest rally of 100,000 turned against him. The dictator was forced to flee by helicopter, but ended up in army custody and was executed.

Romania's transition to democracy and a market economy was difficult, and the 90s and early aughts saw several governments fall amidst public dissatisfaction. The country joined NATO in 2004, and the European Union in 2007. Though hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, Romania's economy has been relatively stable since 2011. The current Prime Minister, economist Florin Cîțu, took office in December, 2020.

## Greece

### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 50,949 square miles
- **Capital:** Athens
- **Population:** 10,775,643 (estimate)
- **Languages:** Greek
- **Geography:** The peninsula that constitutes mainland Greece is surrounded by more than 5000 islands, of which 220 are inhabited—169 have more than 150 inhabitants. The islands are divided into six groups: the Cyclades, the Ionians, the Dodecanese, the islands of the Northeastern Aegean, the Sporades and the Saronic Gulf islands. The two largest islands, Crete and Evia, do not belong to any group. Roughly four-fifths of Greece is mountainous, with most land lying over 1500m (4920ft) above sea level. Epiros and Macedonia, in northern Greece, still have extensive forests, but goat grazing, felling and forest fires have seriously denuded the rest of the country.

- **Religions:** Greek Orthodox 98%, Muslim 1.3%, other 0.7%
- **Time Zone:** Greece is on Eastern European Time, two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (seven hours ahead of Eastern Time). Summer hours operate from the last Sunday in March until the last weekend in October.

## National Holidays: Greece

In addition to the holidays listed below, Greece celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day	04/13/26 Easter Monday
01/06 Epiphany	05/01 Labor Day
03/25 Greek Independence Day	05/02/27 Easter Sunday
04/12/26 Easter Sunday	05/03/27 Easter Monday
	08/15 Dormition of the Holy Virgin
	10/28 The Ochi Day
	12/25 Christmas Day
	12/26 Synaxis of the Mother of God

## Greece: A Brief History

The glory that was Greece reached its pinnacle during the Classical period, between 500 and 300 BC. But the seeds for that golden age, which has stood for centuries as a beacon of Western civilization, were sown at least 700,000 years ago, when humans first appeared in Greece. But it was during the Bronze Age, around 3,000 BC, when three major Greek civilizations emerged.

The Cycladic culture of the Aegean islands was sustained by farming and seafaring. But the small island populations made it hard for larger, more complex societies to organize. Not so for the Minoans of Crete, who created a palace culture, a written system of language, and effective military and mercantile sectors. Had Crete not been wracked by natural disasters, the Minoans may have prevailed against the mainland Mycenaeans who landed around 1400 BC. But their star faded in 1100 BC, when the Dorians took over, and Greece entered a Dark Age.

Light dawned again around 800 B.C., when the Greeks came into contact with the Phoenicians. The Greeks borrowed their alphabet, which Homer used to record his epics. This was followed by the Persian Wars, which continued from 520 to 480 BC, and prompted some Greek city-states to form an alliance under Athens called the Delian League. When Persia was beaten in 461 BC, the leader Pericles presided over Athens' golden age. He rebuilt the city, including its iconic Acropolis. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were writing plays; and Socrates and Plato were teaching. But when the Delian League clashed with the militaristic Peloponnesian League of Sparta, a Peloponnesian war persisted for 27 years, with Sparta prevailing.

Athens was conquered by Philip II of Macedon in 360 BC. When he was assassinated, his son Alexander (the Great) was embraced by Athens. Though Alexander built an empire that reached as far east as India, his death left Greece vulnerable. By 200 BC, Rome had annexed all of Greece, but

they venerated the culture. Athens remained an important seat of learning until Justinian closed its philosophy schools in AD 529. Under Byzantine rule (AD 300–1200), many temples were modified to Christian use, and Athens became a provincial backwater.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans seized Athens and ruled for almost 400 years, during which time the Acropolis was desecrated. The Ottoman yoke was shaken off with the bloody 1829 War of Independence. Through the intervention of Britain, France, and Russia, Greece became a monarchy whose kings were largely foreigners. This helped to keep Greece out of World War I, but World War II was another story. The country was overrun by Hitler and the civilian population suffered greatly. More than half the nation's Jews were murdered.

In 1944, civil war broke out between the communist and monarchist resistance groups who had helped defeat the Nazis. It lasted for three years and took more lives than the entirety of World War II. A diaspora ensued, with many Greeks fleeing to Australia, the United States, and Canada. Greece joined NATO in 1952 and continued to be ruled as a monarchy until 1967, when former King Constantine fled Greece after a military junta. In 1974, democracy was restored and the monarchy was abolished in favor of a republic. In 1981, Greece joined the European Union.

The focus for 21<sup>st</sup> century Greece has been its economy. Integration with Europe brought a rising standard of living, but also skyrocketing costs and a serious debt crisis. This threatened to take down the EU, which provided bailouts that required strict austerity. Greeks endured record unemployment, protests, and successive governments. By 2018, Greece's credit rating improved and in 2019, the center-right New Democracy party of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis won a landslide election, and did so again in 2023.

# RESOURCES

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## Suggested Reading

### General

***The Bridge of Sighs: A Novel*** by Olen Steinhauer (2003, Mystery) Set in an unnamed Eastern European country under Soviet control, this mystery follows a young member of the state's police force on his first big case. The only trouble is that no one trusts him and his co-workers think he's a spy. This is the first of a series that also includes *The Confession* and *36 Yalta Boulevard*.

### Bulgaria

***Balkan Ghosts, A Journey through History*** by Robert D. Kaplan (History) Both old-fashioned literate traveler and journalist, Kaplan in this articulate report brings together the history, art and culture of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece with recent events to paint a portrait of the region in the 1980s. Updated with opinion pieces written in the 1990s.

### Romania

***In Search of Dracula*** by Raymond T. McNally (History) Examines the fictional vampire who made Transylvania world-famous, and traces the history of the legend and its roots in the historical Transylvanian figures of Vlad Dracul and his son, Vlad the Impaler.

***Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief*** by Ion Mihai Pacepa (1987, True Crime). A former member of the Securitate, the secret police of Communist Romania, Ion Mihai Pacepa reveals the corruption and oppression inherent in the Nicolae Ceausescu government, which ruled Romania from 1974 to the dictator's execution in 1989.

### Greece

***The Rise of Athens: The Story of the World's Greatest Civilization*** by Anthony Everitt (2017, History) This book traces the origins of modern Athens and goes well beyond it, with plenty of entertaining detail about the figures who made it great, as well as those who contributed to its demise.

***Ancient Greece: Art, Architecture, and History*** by Marina Belozerskaya and Kenneth Lapatin (2004, Art/Architecture) A lively guide to the architecture, painting, and sculpture of ancient Greece with color illustrations.

***Dinner with Persephone*** by Patricia Storace (1996, Travel Narrative) An American fluent in Greek, Storace recalls a year of living and traveling there and the complexities, heartbreak, humor, and resilience of a people rooted in their glorious past, yet uncertain of the future.

***The King Must Die*** and ***The Bull From the Sea*** by Mary Renault (1958, Fiction) Modern retellings of the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. Recommended by travelers.

**Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes** and **Greek Mythology** by Edith Hamilton (1942, Mythology) These classic introductions to Greek and Roman mythology is still used as the standard in high schools and colleges throughout the U.S. From the Olympians to the Trojan War, Hamilton presents the myths and adventure stories of the ancient world in a clear and accessible manner.

## Suggested Films & Videos

### Bulgaria

**Mila from Mars** (2004, Drama) Arguably the most-awarded film in Bulgaria's recent cinematic history, the film follows a pregnant teen who escapes from a dangerous man to a remote village in order to give birth to her child. Haunted by her troubled past, 16-year-old Mila struggles with embracing the present, and is frightened of the unknown and what will become of her future.

**Stolen Eyes** (2005, Drama) This film by Bulgarian director Radoslav Spassov pulls no punches in depicting a black period of recent Bulgarian history—the late 1980s. The film tells a story of an impossible love between a Turkish woman, Ayten, and a Bulgarian man, Ivan. The unlikely pair first meets at the “regeneration process,” (when ethnic Turks’ names were forcibly changed to Bulgarian ones.) Although they have many cultural differences, they gradually overcome their animosity and are drawn toward each other. The question is—will the people around them accept their choices?

**Letter to America** (2001, Drama) In the 2001 Bulgarian drama, a boy named Ivan is denied a visa to the United States and therefore cannot stay by the side of his dying best friend, Kamen. Ivan decides to take a journey to the Bulgarian countryside where he documents his experiences using the camera that was given to him by Kamen. After spending some time there, Ivan writes her a very special letter, detailing all the places he visits and people he meets along the way.

### Romania

**The Death of Mr. Lazarescu** (2005, Drama) In this Romanian dark comedy from director Cristi Puiu, a 63-year-old man with a history of excessive drinking starts to feel ill and calls an ambulance for help. Mr. Lazarescu continuously tries to get assistance as his health starts to deteriorate fast. This cynical medical drama reveals Mr. Lazarescu’s unpleasant journey from one hospital to the next.

**12:08 East of Bucharest** (2006, Drama) A glimpse of Eastern Europe after that Cold War is presented in this 2006 drama comedy. It’s been sixteen years since Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was overthrown, and one Romanian newsman wants to put the nation’s revolution on the air after the fact. This satirical gem from director Corneliu Porumboiu revolves around the idea of bringing ordinary citizen on air to discuss how their lives have changed post-Communist rule.

## Greece

**Mamma Mia!** (2008) and **Mamma Mia, Here We Go Again** (2018) (Musical Comedy) Yes, there is Meryl Streep and an all-star cast. Yes, there are the bouncy, nostalgic soundtracks based on hits by the 70s supergroup, ABBA. But there are also idyllic Greek islands, and whimsical fantasies about the life you could live there.

**Troy** (2004, Drama) This may not have been 2004's best film, but it was its highest grossing one, thanks to an all-star cast (Brad Pitt, Peter O'Toole, Brian Cox, Diane Kruger, and Orlando Bloom), sweeping sets, and an epic story based on Homer's *Iliad*. It concerns the motivations of the central characters as they reach their destinies during the historic battle between the Trojans, and the various Greek armies at their gates.

**My Life in Ruins** (2009, Comedy) A romantic comedy about a tour guide (Nia Vardalos) set among the ruins of classical Greece. Vardalos also wrote and starred in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

**Zorba the Greek** (1964, Comedy/Drama) This classic still stands the test of time. Anthony Quinn plays the iconic Zorba, a lusty and exuberant musician, who strikes up a friendship with an uptight Englishman (Alan Bates) during a picaresque adventure in Greece.

**The Guns of Navarone** (1961, Action) Follows six Allied and Greek soldiers as they try to disable the two German guns that are preventing the evacuation of British troops from a Greek island in WWII. But the real heavy artillery is the cast—Gregory Peck, David Niven, and Anthony Quinn all won at least one Oscar each during their distinguished careers.

## Useful Websites

### Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

[www.oattravel.com/faq](http://www.oattravel.com/faq)

### International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

### Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

### Foreign Exchange Rates

[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)  
[www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic)

### ATM Locators

[www.mastercard.com/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/atm)  
[www.visa.com/atmlocator](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator)

### World Weather

[www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)  
[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
[www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

### Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

[www.travlang.com/languages](http://www.travlang.com/languages)

### Packing Tips

[www.travelite.org](http://www.travelite.org)

### U.S. Customs & Border Protection

[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

### Transportation Security

**Administration (TSA)**  
[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

### National Passport Information Center

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

### Holidays Worldwide

[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)

# Useful Apps

## Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

## LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

## Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

## GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

## Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

## Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

## Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

## Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

## Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

### ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

## TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

## What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

## Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

## Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

## XE

Currency conversions

## SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

## Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

## Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

## Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

## Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

## Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

## Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

## Travello

Find travel friends on the road

## ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

## TripWhistle

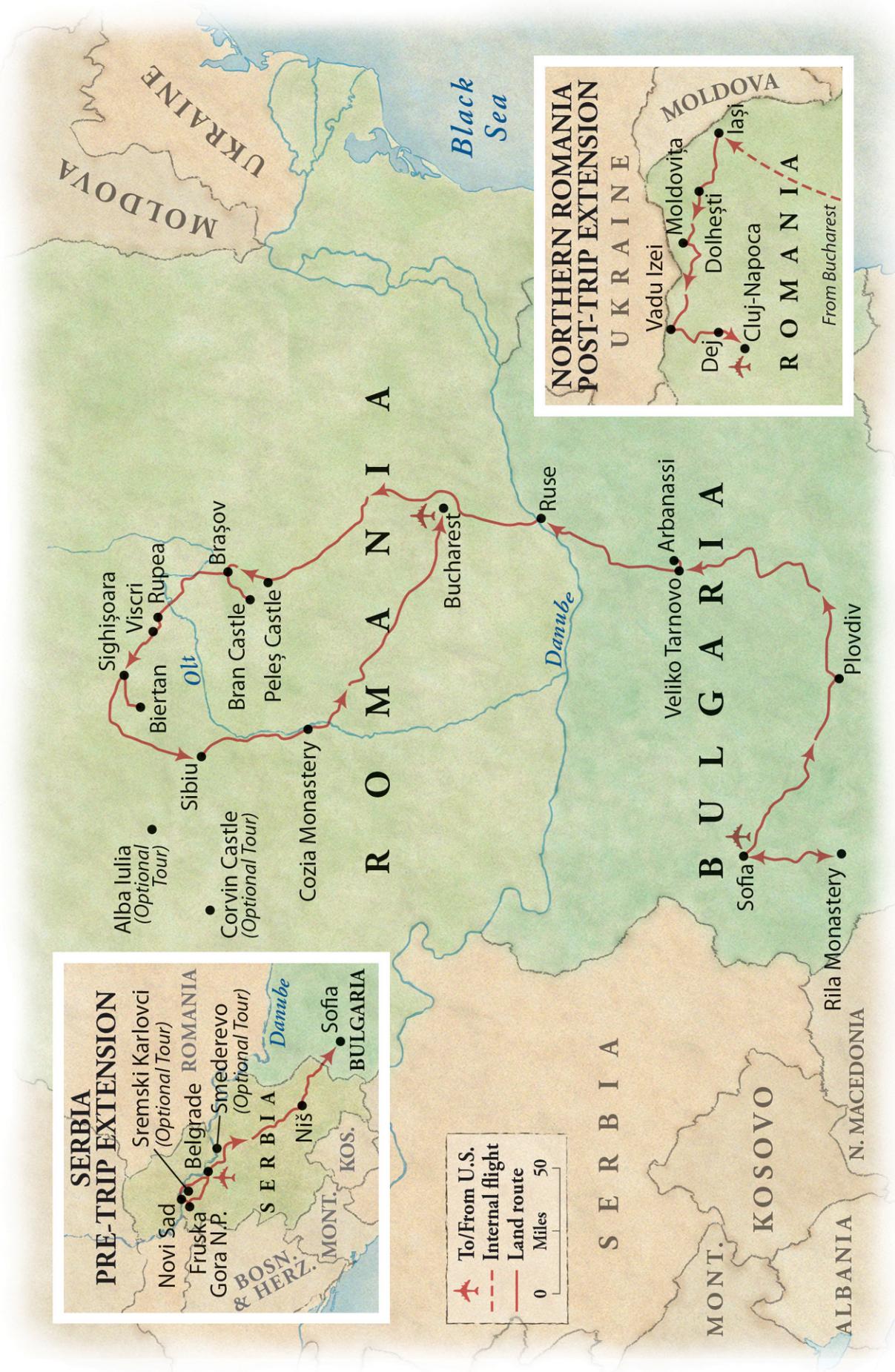
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

## GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

## Chirpey

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