

Of Wines and Fortresses in North-Eastern Romania and the Republic of Moldova / 8 days

Where old stones meet old wines, and they both get wrapped up in old tales.



Bucur's Bleating Say:

The title for this trip could be the romanticised version of Khayyám's ditty, such as: "A jug of Moldovan wine, a loaf of Romanian bread, and thou, old stones", while on the subject, this journey is nothing but a local homage to Baudelaire's: "Be always drunken. Nothing else matters: that is the only question. If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to the earth, be drunken continually. Drunken with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will. But be drunken. And it sometimes, on the stairs of a palace, or on the green side of a ditch....".

With their long standing (over 6 millennia) wine making tradition due to the good climate, appropriate soil and relief, Romania and Moldova account for around 6.5 million hectoliters a year, a significant share of wine production worldwide (Romania being the sixth largest wine producer in the world and Moldova the 11th). Furthermore, the assortment of local (among which the Fetească Neagră, Fetească Albă, Fetească Regală, Tămâioasă, Grasă de Cotnari, Băbească Neagră, Busuioacă de Bohotin, Frâncușă de Cotnari) and French or other origin (among which the Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay) grapes make the wines in the two countries very diverse and appealing. The balance between the two used to incline massively on the local grape side, but after the late 19th century phylloxera crisis eradicated or largely diminished many of the local grape varieties. Without assuming to cover the whole area, this tour instead focuses on our picks of



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

wines and medieval fortresses across the lands in North-Eastern Romania and the Republic of Moldova that were once part of the old Principality of Moldavia. And then, we have added a couple of traditional insights for a spice and local touch extra. A rich bouquet guaranteed, we dare say. And even richer if we add in Păstorel Teodoreanu's 'Confession', as well as his typical wit that had him sent behind bars for several years in 1960 for 'acting against social order', i.e. for mocking at the regime in his poetry:

*I've sang odes to dear wine and drank it all.
And, just like the Sun wipes the dew off them flowers,
I've wiped all dew there was in them carafes.
For, merry as the last minstrel on call,
Of rare wines I've shepherded quite a share
(Well, that's why they call me Little Shepherd).
And, from Grasă the sweet to Ottonel the peppered,
I've treasured and loved them all, I swear!*

De rigueur notes:

- Păstorel translates as 'Little shepherd'
- 'Grasă the sweet' stands for the Grasă de Cotnari, a day-by-day sweet wine from Cotnari Vineyards.
- 'Ottonel the peppered' stands for Muscat Ottonel.



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

DAY 1

Iași

Today we shall commence our fragrance-rich journey in Moldavia, at the heart of an old principality founded back in the 14th century and existing as such with fluctuant borders (including Bessarabia, Pokuttia, Bukovina and Hertsa at times) until 1859, when it joined Wallachia to create Romania. Let us stretch our legs and enjoy a walk in culturally rich Iași complete with its impressive Neogothic Palace of Culture, jewel-like Trei Ierarhi Church and charming National Theatre.

- Pick-up at Iași IAS Airport.
- Transfer to the city.
- City tour by car (time allowing, according to the flight data), with breaks at the Trei Ierarhi Church, Golia Monastery and the National Theatre.
- Accommodation in Iași, in a 4* hotel set in a classical, elegant property in the city centre.

DAY 2 / Not possible on Mondays (also on Tuesdays unless the Palace of Culture in Iași is opted out)

Iași - Strunga Vineyards - Neamț Fortress - Dolheștii Mici - Suceava

This morning we shall commence with a visit to the Palace of Culture and a close look at the local traditions while taking in the ethnographic collection there, before heading to the countryside just out of the bustling city. With their vineyards stretching over two rolling hills (the Calda and the Pârjolita, literally meaning 'the Warm' and 'the Sunburnt') summing up over 86 Hectares, the people at Strunga focus on white wines that make up about half their production. A total of 11 grape varieties are grown, namely the Fetească Albă, Fetească Regală, Fetească Neagră, Busuioacă de Bohotin, Tamaioasă Românească, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Muscat Ottonel, Shiraz, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, of which the Reveria Fetească Neagră, the Busuioacă de Strunga and the Chardonnay were repeatedly awarded at international events. Then, heading Westwards, we shall reach Târgu Neamț and its picturesque fortress complete with its dramatic access bridge. Perched on the Timuș Cliffs some 80 meters above the Neamț Creek, the 14th century fortress used to be part of a greater network of fortifications meant to protect the principality against the Ottoman threat. After this historic insight, we shall change direction and head Northwards, calling at Dolheștii Mici, a small (as its name says) village with very well preserved traditions. A copious meal complete with live local music, a fur coat maker and a blacksmith will provide a very good introduction to that before moving on to Suceava, where we shall not call it a day before seeing the wonderful exterior frescoes of the St. George Church, part of St. John the New Monastery, completed in 1522.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to the Palace of Culture in Iași (only the ethnographic section); according to the flight data on the last day, this visit can be done then, to have a more relaxed touring day today.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by platter of cold cuts and cheeses at the Strunga Vineyards.
- Visit to Neamț Fortress.
- Presentation of local crafts, traditional lunch joined by live local music in Dolheștii Mici.
- Visit to St. John the New Monastery in Suceava.
- Accommodation in Suceava, in a 3 or 4* modern hotel in the city centre or 4* elegant hotel out of the city.



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

DAY 3 / Not possible on Mondays

Suceava - Vlădoianu Cellars (Cotnari Vineyards) - Hermeziu Vineyards - Maxut / Iași

The day will start with a visit to the Suceava Fortress, built towards the end of the 14th century on an elevated platform overlooking the wide, homonymous valley, and that would host the Moldavian princes. We shall then go back towards Iași with two sense-enchanting breaks at two fine vineyards. First, with a two millennia old tradition in wine making, Cotnari vineyards are well known for their local white varieties: the Grasă de Cotnari, Tămâioasă Românească and Fetească Albă, joined by the Busuioacă (vinified as a rosé wine) and Fetească Neagră (for red varieties). The logo of the Cotnari Vineyards captures the Vlădoianu Castle, completed in 1901 by a landlord named Vlădoianu, former governor of the National Bank of Romania and distinguished winegrower: the very place we shall see on our tour. The second break will be at Hermeziu, a rather new winery set in 2006 on the 132 Hectare terraced lands of an important local family, the Negruzzi, that produced lawyers, politicians, writers and mayors. Their grape varieties include, apart from the local Fetească Regală, Fetească Albă, Fetească Neagră, Busuioacă de Bohotin, also imported varieties among which the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Traminer, Muscat Ottonel, Rhein Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon, all split in three classes. Then, the evening will see us either back in Iași or, if we so choose, in Maxut, a village hosting the impressive Polizu Mansion founded back in 1880 as an isolated, hilltop and rather small landlord house on the extensive, 1,000 Hectare estate that would later develop into the glamorous property it is nowadays.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to Suceava Fortress.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by lunch at the Vlădoianu Cellars (Cotnari Vineyards).
- Tour and wine tasting joined by platter of cold cuts and cheeses at the Hermeziu Vineyards.
- Accommodation in Iași, in a 4* hotel set in a classical, elegant property in the city centre; alternatively, accommodation in the 5* Polizu Mansion in Maxut (a price supplement applies).

DAY 4 / Not possible on Mondays and Tuesdays

Iași / Maxut - Mircești Vineyards - Casa Mierii Farm - Soroca

This morning we shall cross River Prut dividing Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The latter will immediately captivate us with its extensive farmlands and bucolic countryside; for good reason it has always been appreciated for its vegetables and fruits. Our first visit of the day will be at Mircești Vineyards. Located in an area also known as the "Little Tuscany of Moldova", the 15 Hectare vineyards stretch across the scenic Măgura Hill. With a climate comparable to that in South Germany (the Rhine Valley) and Northern Italy, the owners have seen to it that each variety was planted on the slope that is right for it, hence making the best use of the relatively small plot. In addition to the Pinot Noir, Saperavi, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Riesling, local varieties are also grown, such as the Fetească Neagră, Rară Neagră, Fetească Regală, Fetească Albă. Then, and also after taking in more of the Moldovan countryside, we shall reach Răciula and the local bee farm. Founded by Stegărescu Family, this provides an excellent insight into the local lifestyle. And a great taste of the local honey, one needs add. The road will then take us to Soroca in the far North-East of the Republic of Moldova, on the banks of the Dnister. The massive, apparently impenetrable fortress there was built at first in timber in 1499, just to be replaced with the strong stone one towards mid 16th century. A memorable sight to end the day with!

- Breakfast.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by platter of cold cuts and cheeses at the Mircești Vineyards.
- Visit to the farm and traditional lunch at the Casa Mierii in Răciula.



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

- Visit to the Soroca Fortress.
- Accommodation in Soroca, in a 3* modern hotel or guesthouse.

DAY 5

Soroca - Orheiul Vechi - Pomușoară Dulcișoară Vineyards - Chișinău

Changing course Southwards, we shall call at Orheiul Vechi. The village might not bring around much novelty at first, but upon approaching the apparently man-made (yet all natural!) Răut Bend, we shall definitely change our initial opinion. The two major promontories (the Peștere and the Butuceni) are joined by three smaller ones (the Potarca, the Selitra and the Scoc) that come complete with ruins of fortifications, dwellings, baths, places of worship (including cave monasteries) going back to the Tatar-Mongol (13th–14th centuries) and Moldavian Principality (15th–16th centuries) periods; yet words fail to do justice when it comes to the beauty of the place! Then, en route to Chișinău, let us visit a less impressive (at first sight!), yet highly inspiring and memorable place: the small estate of the dedicated Lupașcus that comes complete with their vineyards and mouth watering preserves, let alone cooking. A 2 (no typo, only 2) Hectare plot, a cellar going back to the early 1800s, no pesticides and herbicides, the de rigueur lot of work needed to balance the absence of the said chemicals, and nonetheless the couple's contagious cheer. At the end of the day, the estate is called 'Pomușoară dulcișoară' (En. Sweet Little Fruit) for good reason... As for the wines, they never come without a bourgeois meal and the Temelie range are both novel and luscious: the Muscat Ottonel, Merlot rosé, Merlot, Cuvée rouge, Cabernet or Cabernet rosé. The evening will see us in Chișinău, a city that comes complete with its harsh WW2 tales and where we shall definitely enjoy a panoramic tour.

- Breakfast.
- Visit to the cave monastery and fortification ruins on the promontories in Orheiul Vechi.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by lunch at the Pomușoară Dulcișoară Vineyards.
- Chișinău tour by car with breaks at the Arch of Triumph, the National Ethnography and Natural History Museum hosted in a Mudéjar style property, and at the Central Market to see the local produce.
- Accommodation in Chișinău, in an elegant 4* hotel in or near the city centre.

DAY 6 / Not possible on Mondays

Chișinău - Manuc Bey's Mansion - Mileștii Mici Vineyards - Castel Mimi Vineyards - Chișinău

Shortly after leaving Chișinău this morning, we shall arrive at the extensive estate hosting the Manuc Bey Mansion in Hâncești. Manuc Bey Mirzaian was an influential, rich Armenian living in Bucharest (where he built the quite large inn bearing his name and still standing today), that got involved in the Russian - Turkish War of 1806-1812 at the end of which he (more or rather less of his own will) decided to hastily leave Bucharest, eventually settling in Chișinău, purchasing the Hâncești Estate in 1815, trying to sell it in 1816 and dying (more or less of natural or accidental causes) the following year. His son and later on his nephew kept the property and saw to it that the mansion was built in French Classicist style, with wide windows, loggias, a terrace and wonderfully painted interiors and ceilings (the latter done by another Armenian, Hovhannes Aivazyan, later known as Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovsky, but unfortunately lost before the restoration of the mansion). After this aristocratic visit, we shall continue the day touring with the largest vineyards in the country, the Mileștii Mici, complete with their 200 kilometers of underground alleys connecting the wine storing halls (where over 1.5 million bottles are stored, a Guinness World Record). With a fine range including Cabernet, Merlot, Chardonnay, Rhein Riesling, Sauvignon and Rosé, the Milești Cabernet, among other varieties, got multiple awards. It is hard to get impressed after the visit here, but let us try with just as memorable a



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

business at the Castel Mimi Vineyards. The extensive castle founded in 1893 by Constantin Mimi (a castle that would have the estate ranked among the most beautiful 15 vineyards in the world), the cellars, the 74 Hectare vineyards and, well, the resulting wines (of foreign and local grape varieties such as the Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as the Malbec on the one hand and the Rară Neagră, Negru and Fetească Neagră - of which the Bulboaca specialty stands out - on the other hand) are just as many reasons drawing us there. A treat indeed. And such a treat!

- Breakfast.
- Visit to the Manuc Bey's Mansion in Hâncești.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by lunch at the Mileștii Mici Vineyards (according to availability, lunch could be at the Castel Mimi Vineyards, with the Mileștii Mici Vineyards being visited afterwards).
- Tour and wine tasting joined by platter of cold cuts and cheeses at the Castel Mimi Vineyards.
- Accommodation in Chișinău, in an elegant 4* hotel in or near the city centre.



DAY 7

Chișinău - Purcari Vineyards - Et Cetera Vineyards - Cricova Vineyards - Chișinău

A three vineyard day is a celebration of just as many styles and approaches. We shall commence with a well established estate, the Purcari, part of a greater group summing up 1,450 Hectares of vineyards in Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria. Nestled in a green area complete with fishing ponds and lakes and founded in 1827, Château Purcari was the most awarded wine producer in Central and Eastern Europe at Decanter London, as well as among the highest rated on Vivino. Let us just say that in 2021 the



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foișorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

Negru de Purcari was considered among the world's best, while grape varieties range from the Pinot Gris, the Traminer and the Chardonnay all the way to the Fetească Neagră, Rară Neagră and Pinot Noir. The lesser known, 40 Hectare vineyards will follow, as the Luchianov Family-run business at Et Cetera Estate will charm us from the very moment we walk around it. Because it is here that the local recipes used in the kitchen meet the small, yet very well done, selection of mostly red wines including the Carménère (an odd presence in the region!), Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească Neagră, Pinot Noir and Cuvée blanc. And then, the day - and our tour for that matter - cannot end without a visit to arguably the most celebrated and popular vineyards in the country, the Cricova, even though its fame comes mostly from the... underground. With its vineyards spanning over 53 Hectares, the Cricova Estate includes an "underground town" founded back in the 1950s, when two researchers thought of converting the old local stone quarry into wine storing and aging facilities (with the first sparkling wine production tests being done in 1947 and industrial scale production commencing 10 years later). The resulting underground galleries turned into actual streets with a total length of 120 kilometers, and these streets are even endowed with traffic lights and road signs. And, as an interesting extra at the end of our touring vineyards, Dom Pérignon's „Méthode Traditionnelle” is still used at Cricova to produce sparkling wines.

- Breakfast.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by cold cuts and cheeses at the Purcari Vineyards.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by lunch at the Et Cetera Vineyards.
- Tour and wine tasting joined by cold cuts and cheeses at the Cricova Vineyards.
- Accommodation in Chişinău, in an elegant 4* hotel in or near the city centre.

Note:

An extra day and overnight in Chişinău would allow us to also visit two excellent vineyards in the Găgăuz Region in South Moldova: the Kara Gani Vineyards and the Vinăria din Vale Vineyards. Kara Gani puts together the benefits of a rather small business and the local, Găgăuz, imprint, while the 10 Hectare vineyards are closely looked after by the owners, the Cherven Family; their Fenească Neagră and Cabernet Sauvignon are wonderful for a side-by-side test! Then, located in a natural reserve down the Lower Prut Valley, the Vinăria din Vale (literally 'the Vineyards down the Valley') was started by Davidescu Family while pursuing grandfather Ilie's interest in winemaking; the result includes no shortage of grape varieties such as foreign Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, Riesling or Muscat Ottonel, and local Feteasca Albă or Feteasca Neagră, while the line-up is completed by the Georgian Rkatsiteli and Saperavi varieties. All that in the company of the very interesting and very-very tasty Găgăuz cuisine, not to mention the local outfits and crafts. Worth the extra day and miles down the road? We dare say Yes.

DAY 8

Chişinău

Our tour of vineyards and historical sites on both banks of River Prut ends this morning, but, take our word for it, there is much more from both perspectives to discover in both countries. And we vouch for the outcome of an extended tour, whether this is about the Crâmpoşie or Negru de Drăgăşani on the Isărescu Estate in Wallachia, about the fine reds at the small Dagon Vineyards in the Prahova Valley region, about the Rhein sparkling wine cellars in Azuga in Romania, or about the area around Chişinău with its cradle of vineyards among which Asconî, Château Cojuşna or Château Vartely. All that in a region that is anything but short on historical sites, with the evocative Târgovişte, Poienari

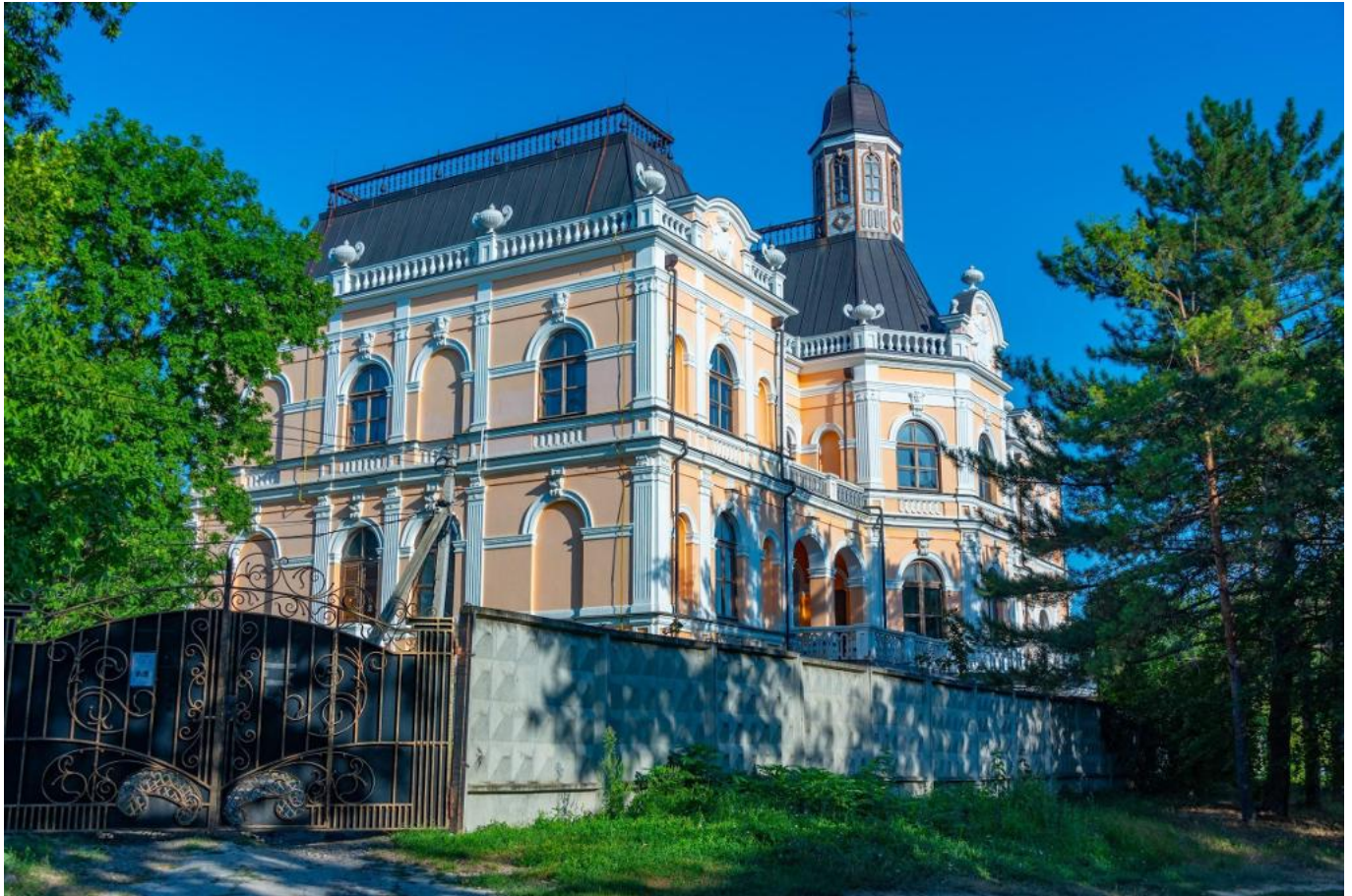


ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foişorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276

and Bender (Tighina) to balance the touring days. And then, these are just a few of the sightseeing or tasting options there are...

- Breakfast.
- Transfer to Chişinău KIV Airport for the flight out.
- End of services.



ORBIS UNUM SRL

Str. Foişorului 98, Sector 3, Bucharest, Romania
orbis-unum.com | CUI: 51880465 | Tourism Licence No.: 3276