

Grand Circle Cruise Line[®]

THE LEADER IN VALUE AND WORLDWIDE DISCOVERY SINCE 1958

Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



Eastern Europe to the Black Sea

2026

Grand Circle Cruise Line®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

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

When you cruise with us, you can expect an award-winning experience aboard our privately owned river ship. In addition to the convenience of unpacking just once, you will also enjoy the warm hospitality provided by our friendly, English-speaking crew, coupled with camaraderie of your fellow American travelers.

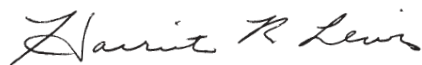
In addition, up to four **expert, local Program Directors** will accompany you from the beginning of your trip to the end. Assigned to a group of 38 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending their favorite restaurant, connecting travelers with people and culture, or providing the best ways to enhance your leisure time, your Program Director will be available to take care of all the details and ensure that you have a fun and carefree travel experience. 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.

Throughout your journey, you will experience Exclusive Discovery Series events designed to connect you with local people and culture. From sharing traditional fare and lively conversation during Home-Hosted Visits, to discussing Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, you will gain an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our low-cost Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

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 **1-800-221-2610**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Grand Circle Cruise Line

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M/S River Adagio, Budapest, Hungary

Eastern Europe to the Black Sea

Hungary: Budapest | **Croatia:** Vukovar | **Serbia:** Novi Sad, Belgrade | **Bulgaria:** Vidin, Ruse | **Romania:** Constanta, Bucharest

14 days starting from \$4,395

including airfare

Single Supplement: **\$995**

For departure dates & prices, visit
www.gct.com/lbs2026pricing

Explore five Eastern European nations—Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania—on a Danube to the Black Sea cruise that showcases Old World villages and legendary capital cities, as you spend **10 nights aboard our privately owned, 162-passenger M/S River Aria or M/S River Adagio.**

IT'S INCLUDED

- **Accommodations** for 12 nights, including 10 nights aboard our privately-owned river ship, the M/S River Aria or River Adagio
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges, unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- **33 meals:** 12 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 11 dinners—including 5 meals in local restaurants—plus onboard house beer & wine, as well as soft drinks
- **7 included tours** with personal headsets and **2 Exclusive Discovery Series events**
- **Local Program Directors, a Grand Circle Cruise Line exclusive:** Our dedicated experts are with you and your group of 38-45 travelers from beginning to end to provide an insider's knowledge and perspective
- **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- **All port charges**
- **Baggage handling** for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip

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



ITINERARY SUMMARY

1 • Depart U.S.

2-4 • Budapest, Hungary

Embark ship
Port Budapest

5 • Croatia

Ports Batina • Vukovar

6-8 • Serbia

Ports Novi Sad • Belgrade

9-10 • Bulgaria

Ports Vidin • Ruse

11-12 • Romania

Disembark ship
Port Constanta

13-14 • Bucharest • Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 2 3 4 5 Easy

Group Size

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3-4 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

Pacing

- 13 days, with 10 nights aboard our privately owned 162-passenger M/S River Aria or M/S River Adagio, and a two-night hotel stay
- 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

- Walk 1-3 miles unassisted over a period of 1-2 hours and participate in 3-4 hours of physical activities each day
- Optional activities and walks may be offered in addition to the above-mentioned activity level
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must

travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip

- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

Terrain & Transportation

- Uneven walking surfaces, including steep paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slippery in wet or colder conditions
- Travel by 162-passenger river ship, and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary

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

MAXIMIZE YOUR DISCOVERIES & VALUE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

Prague, Czech Republic

PRE-TRIP: 4 nights from **\$1,145**

Transylvania, Romania

POST-TRIP: 4 nights from **\$895**

Eastern Europe to the Black Sea

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *Prague, Czech Republic*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Prague, Czech Republic

Day 3 Explore Prague • Optional Sychrov Castle tour

Day 4 Prague • Optional *Noble Prague* tour

Day 5 Prague • Optional Terezin tour

Day 6 Prague • Bratislava, Slovakia • Budapest, Hungary

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. on your flight to Budapest, Hungary.

Day 2 Arrive in Budapest, Hungary • Embark ship

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship may be docked outside of the city center; if so, it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Morning/Afternoon: Arrive today in Budapest, where you'll be met at the airport and assisted to your private Grand Circle river ship, which will be your home throughout your Black Sea cruise. If you began your European discoveries early with our optional pre-trip extension in *Prague, Czech Republic*, you will join the main group today.

Dinner: Tonight, meet your fellow travelers over dinner in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Enjoy the company with your fellow travelers in the lounge or retire to your room for tomorrow's discoveries.

Day 3 Explore Budapest • Captain's Welcome Dinner

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The ship may be docked outside of the city center; if so, it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus. This morning's combined bus and walking tour will be approximately 3.5 hours long.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: After breakfast, join us for a briefing by your Program Director. Then set out to explore Budapest on an included city tour. You'll see Heroes' Square with its Millennial Column, set off by equestrian statues of the ninth-century Magyar leaders who conquered this region in the ninth century. The adjoining

colonnade displays more statues of kings, dukes of Transylvania, and liberty fighters who influenced the history of Hungary.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: You'll have the balance of the afternoon to relax on the ship or explore Budapest on your own. If you'd like, you have the option to join your Program Director on a discovery walk of the city.

Known as the "City of Baths," Budapest has a number of thermal baths worth visiting for a soothing dip if you choose. Fed by natural hot springs, each bathhouse is unique; some even date back to the 16th century. Or, you may wish to stroll the city's famous Castle District, home to famous sites such as the Royal Palace and the Hungarian National Gallery.

When you return to your ship, your Program Director will describe tomorrow's discoveries during your first Port Talk. These nightly events, held throughout your cruise, will give you the opportunity to prepare for the next day.

Dinner: Tonight, gather with your fellow travelers for a Welcome Drink, followed by the Captain's Welcome Dinner.

Evening: The evening is yours to do as you choose. Perhaps you'll have a drink in the lounge with fellow travelers or relax in your room.

Day 4 Budapest • Optional *Hungarian Jewish Heritage* tour

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: The *Hungarian Jewish Heritage* optional tour is not available Saturdays and on regional holidays. The Hungarian Jewish

Association also reserves the right of changing the opening hours. The ship may be docked outside of the city center; if so, it will take around 30 minutes to reach the city by bus.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Spend the day enjoying the wonders of Budapest on your own. Or, join an optional tour exploring *Hungarian Jewish Heritage*. You'll visit the Great Synagogue, the largest in Europe, designed in a Moorish style but with Byzantine, Romantic, and Gothic elements. Then you'll see the Rumbach Synagogue; and the Emanuel Memorial Tree, a memorial to Hungarian victims of the Holocaust.

Once you return to the ship, you'll hear from a local Hungarian who will come aboard to talk to us about daily life in Budapest.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to make further discoveries on your own in Budapest. Feel free to join your Program Director on an elective Discovery Walk of the surrounding area.

Then this evening, begin cruising along the Danube from Hungary to Croatia.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 5 Aljmas, Croatia • Home-Hosted Lunch • Explore Vukovar

- Destination: Vukovar
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: Due to water levels and sailing conditions, the ship may dock in Batina or Vukovar instead of Aljmas on some departures.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Enjoy a leisurely morning onboard as you sail. You may wish to bring a cup of coffee to the Sun Deck and enjoy the passing scenery.

Late this morning, you'll dock in the small village of Aljmas, you'll board a private motorcoach and transfer by motorcoach to the home of a local Croatian family.

Lunch: Enhance your appreciation for everyday Croatian life as you join a local family for a Home-Hosted Lunch, an **Exclusive Discovery Series** event.

Afternoon: After lunch, transfer by motorcoach to the city of Vukovar—Croatia's largest river port. You'll set off on a tour with your Program Director followed by time for independent exploration.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll relax in the lounge with your fellow travelers or enjoy a drink at the bar.

Day 6 Explore Novi Sad, Serbia • Serbia and the European Union discussion

- Destination: Novi Sad
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: After breakfast this morning, a local expert will come aboard to discuss some of the setbacks that Serbia has faced on its journey to join the European Union.

Then, enjoy an included tour of Novi Sad, Serbia's cultural hub, and second-largest city. The beauty of the city is in its name—Novi Sad in English translates to “new garden.” Nestled along a bend in the Danube River, Novi Sad is peppered with myriad historical and cultural monuments, verdant parks, bustling squares, a thriving pedestrian zone, and a history-rich fortress standing tall on the right bank of the river.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to further discover Novi Sad on your own. Your Program Director will offer an optional Discovery Walk of the area if you choose to partake.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 7 Explore Belgrade

- Destination: Belgrade
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: This morning's combined bus and walking tour will be approximately 3.5 hours long; our visit to the Tito Memorial includes an uphill walk and stairs. The Tito Memorial is closed on Mondays.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Cruise into Belgrade, the capital of Serbia (and former capital of Yugoslavia), one of Europe's oldest cities, and the center of political and cultural life in the country. Belgrade and the rest of Serbia are just now emerging from many years of repressive rule, with a welcoming spirit for visitors.

Enjoy a full morning in Belgrade, beginning with an included tour around this grand old city, which was built centuries ago along important east-west trade routes and used as a gateway to Western Europe from the Balkans. You'll explore the Tito Memorial, erected to honor Josip Broz Tito, who held Yugoslavia together as an independent country in the turmoil that followed World War II and the subsequent Cold War. Then, stroll through Old Belgrade's pedestrian area. After your tour, enjoy lunch onboard.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Explore the city on your own—you'll have a shuttle bus to and from the city available for your use. Your Program Director will have suggestions for various local sights and activities for learning and discovery.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Enjoy a traditional folk dance performance by a local eastern European group.

Day 8 Iron Gates • *Life Under Communism* discussion

- Destination: Iron Gates
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Today you'll cruise along one of the Danube's most scenic stretches—where once the river pounded and raged through deep gorges. This stretch of the Danube boasts the massive rock sculpture of the face of Decebalus, the last king of Dacia, as well as tranquil rocky riverbeds and a scattering of small villages. Before lunch, join us for an **Exclusive Discovery Series** discussion about *Life Under Communism* with your Program Director.

Lunch: Linger over lunch in the ship's dining room as you navigate the Danube.

Afternoon: In mid-afternoon, join the chef in the galley (the ship's kitchen) for a special tour. Later you'll pass through Iron Gate I. In the 1960s, Yugoslavia and Romania cooperated on a joint venture that raised the level of the Danube with a series of hydroelectric dams called the Iron Gates. The Danube is now placid between the Iron Gates, the craggy two-mile-long gorge now underwater.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: Relax onboard the ship this evening as you continue sailing through Iron Gate II.

Day 9 Explore Vidin, Bulgaria

- Destination: Vidin
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Activity Note: If you choose to visit Baba Vida during your free time, some walkways have rough and uneven surfaces, cobblestones, stairs with no handrails, and dark passageways.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Early this morning, your ship passes through customs at Vidin, Bulgaria's main port on the Danube yet one of the least-developed of the post-Communist cities with a small population, where you'll embark on an included walking tour this morning. As you make your way through the city, you'll see the intersection of religions with views of an orthodox Catholic church, a synagogue, and a mosque over the course of your walk. Then you'll have some free time to explore; perhaps you'll visit Baba Vida, a medieval fortress of two walls and four towers that served as the city's main defense in the Middle Ages, as well as the most important fortress of northwestern Bulgaria.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: After lunch, we'll walk from the ship to the Vidin Symphonic Orchestra, a **Grand Circle Foundation** supported site. We'll first learn how the orchestra is a leading cultural institution in Vidin and was officially registered as a state organization in 1949. Afterwards, we'll be treated to a concert.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 10 Ruse • Optional Veliko Tarnovo & Arbanassi tour

- Destination: Ruse
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning/Afternoon: Early this morning, arrive in Ruse, which is situated where the Danube forms a natural border between Romania and Bulgaria.

You may spend your day at leisure exploring Ruse independently, or you could join us for an optional excursion to discover two key Bulgarian historic sites: Veliko Tarnovo, the capital of Bulgaria from 1186 until 1394, and Arbanassi, a historical village of Bulgarian heritage. You'll enjoy time on your own in both locations to make your own discoveries.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room. Or, for those who choose the optional tour, enjoy an included traditional lunch in a local restaurant in Arbanassi.

Dinner: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nightcap at the bar or relax in the lounge.

Day 11 Danube-Black Sea Canal transit • Explore Constanta, Romania • Captain's Farewell Dinner

- Destination: Constanta
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: Early this morning, your Danube and Black Sea River Cruise begins sailing into the Danube-Black Sea Canal, a 40-mile engineering marvel begun in 1949, but not fully completed until 1987. You'll pass through the canal's lock system and cruise by the inland port towns of Murfatlar and Medgidia.

Lunch: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Afternoon: Following lunch, enjoy a guided tour of Constanta, a Romanian Black Sea port that is the country's oldest continually inhabited city. Dating back more than 2,500 years, Constanta boasts a wealth of fascinating architecture and history, as well as areas that still bear the marks of its former Communist occupation. Myth holds that Jason and the Argonauts stopped here after recovering the legendary Golden Fleece. Explore the beguiling city center, the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, the mosaic-paved Roman Edifice of Tomis, and other highlights of this beloved city.

Dinner: Tonight, celebrate your Danube River and Black Sea cruise at the Captain's Farewell Dinner.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish. Perhaps you'll enjoy one last nightcap at the bar.

Day 12 Constanta • Disembark ship • Explore Bucharest

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Sheraton Bucharest Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today is a long transfer day. We will break up our ride with lunch along the way, followed by a motorcoach tour of Bucharest before checking into your hotel.

Breakfast: Onboard in the ship's dining room.

Morning: After breakfast, disembark your ship and begin your transfer by motorcoach to Bucharest, Romania.

Lunch: Upon arrival, enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Explore Bucharest by motorcoach. 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 the late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu). You'll drive along Victory Avenue to Revolution Square, where recent events in history are inscribed. Upon arrival at the square, you'll get a unique glimpse into the 1989 revolution when a local boards the bus to relay their personal experience of the events that ended Communist rule in Romania.

Later, you have some time in the late afternoon to relax.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 13 Bucharest • Optional Palace of the Parliament tour

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sheraton Bucharest or similar

Activity Note: If you have chosen the optional post-trip extension to *Transylvania, Romania*, you'll break off from the main group in Bucharest after lunch and continue by motorcoach to the Transylvanian mountain

resort of Sinaia—about a 3.5-hour trip. Then, after your three-night extension in Brasov, you will enjoy the last day of your main itinerary in Bucharest.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning/Afternoon: Enjoy an additional day in Bucharest to make your own discoveries.

Or, join us for an optional tour of Romania's Palace of the Parliament, the seat of Romania's national government. You'll start by walking to Revolution Square, where you'll meet your motorcoach driver for a taste of traditional Romanian chocolate, and a brief discussion about the history of this imposing building.

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 the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. 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. You'll drive back to the hotel after your tour.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Dinner: This evening, gather with your fellow travelers for a Farewell Drink, followed by dinner at the hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 14 Bucharest • Return to U.S.

• Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight home.

END YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *Transylvania, Romania*

Day 1 Bucharest, Romania • Brasov

Day 2 Brasov • Explore Brasov • Optional fortified church & organ concert tour

Day 3 Brasov • Optional Bran Castle tour

Day 4 Brasov • Visit Peles Castle • Transfer to Bucharest

Day 5 Bucharest • Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with us. We will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form and swiping your credit card at the ship's front desk. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. 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.

Hungarian Jewish Heritage

(Day 4 \$80 per person)

Join us for an optional tour exploring Hungarian Jewish Heritage. The journey begins at the Great Synagogue, the largest in Europe, with its Moorish design further enhanced by Byzantine, Romantic, and Gothic elements. You'll also visit the Rumbach Synagogue, and the Emanuel Memorial Tree.

This optional tour is not available Saturdays and on regional holidays. The Hungarian Jewish Association also reserves the right of changing the opening hours.

Veliko Tarnovo & Arbanassi

(Day 10 \$125 per person)

Today, you'll travel by motorcoach to Veliko Tarnovo, the capital of Bulgaria from 1186 until 1394. This cultural center rewards visitors with views of the fortification wall atop Zarevez Hill, the cobblestoned old city, ancient ruins, and a steep ravine plunging down from two towering promontories. Continue on to Arbanassi, a historical village of Bulgarian heritage. Its 80 houses, five churches, and two monasteries reflect a unique, fortress-like architectural

style of the 17th and 18th centuries, when the village flourished. Enjoy free time to make your own discoveries, and savor typical Bulgarian fare at a local restaurant.

Please note: Today's optional tour will include cobblestones, uneven surfaces, and stairs with no handrails.

Palace of Parliament

(Day 13 \$125 per person)

Discover the Palace of the Parliament, the seat of Romania's national government. You'll start by walking to Revolution Square, where you'll meet your motorcoach driver for a taste of traditional Romanian chocolate, and a brief discussion about the history of this imposing building.

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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. You'll drive back to the hotel after your tour.

Please note: *Today's tour includes climbing around 150 steps. If the Palace of Parliament is not available today, you may instead join an optional tour to the Spring Palace, the eccentrically-decorated home of the former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.*

PRE-TRIP

Prague, Czech Republic

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 4 nights
- » **6 meals:** 4 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 1 dinner
- » **Included tours** with personal headsets:
Prague • Bratislava
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Discover Prague, the “City of 100 Spires” known for its many hilltop neighborhoods, where rows of steeples stand out against the horizon. Wander about the capital city’s twisting cobblestone streets and old neighborhoods, where ancient houses crowd each other along narrow lanes. Experience the museums and cathedrals that make Prague stand out as one of Europe’s finest cities.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Prague.

Day 2 Arrive in Prague, Czech Republic

- Destination: Prague
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Prague City or similar

Morning: Arrive today in Prague where you’ll be met at the airport by a Grand Circle representative and transferred to your hotel. Your Program Director will advise you of your check-in status and activity schedule for the day when you arrive.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: The remainder of the afternoon is yours to relax after your overseas flight, or venture out on your own explorations. You may

also choose to get acquainted with the area around your hotel during an orientation walk led by your Program Director.

Prague’s regal beauty spreads on both sides of the winding Vltava River, connected by 16 picturesque bridges. Like Rome and San Francisco, the city is built over a series of hills, and its varied architecture spans many centuries. Later, get better acquainted with your traveling companions over a Welcome Drink.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 3 Explore Prague • Optional Sychrov Castle tour

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Prague City or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast and an orientation briefing, enjoy a tour of the city—a great way to get acclimated and identify the places you may wish to revisit on your own.

Your tour will begin at the iconic Prague Castle, a 9th-century complex that has been home to past kings, emperors, and currently houses the office of the President. You'll also discover the *Staré Město*, Prague's Old Town, with its many wonderful Gothic and Baroque buildings. See the famous 15th-century astronomical clock at the Old Town Hall. Every hour, crowds assemble below to watch Christ and the twelve Apostles appear at two little windows above the clock face, followed by the skeleton of Death tolling the bell.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: You may return to your hotel—joining your Program Director on Prague's subway system—or spend the rest of the day at leisure, exploring Prague at your own pace. Perhaps you'll return to Wenceslas Square to take in the collections of the National Museum.

Or you might want to join our optional tour of Sychrov Castle, the 18th-century residence of a noble family returned to its former glory by an extensive reconstruction and restoration of the manor house's exteriors and interiors, as well as of the nearby park.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations. Or, for those who choose the optional tour, enjoy dinner in local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 4 Prague • Optional Noble Prague tour

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Prague City or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today is yours to explore as you wish. Perhaps you'll contrast your discoveries of historic Prague from the previous day with more modern aspects such as the Dancing House, whose unusual contemporary architecture is framed by the Vltava River. Or visit the *Mala Strana*, the eighth-century market town that today is a quaint neighborhood of cobbled streets, boutiques, and Baroque churches and palaces. As it was during the zenith of the Bohemian kingdom, Prague still ranks as the thriving center of the country, with an artistic community reminiscent of Paris in the 1920s.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Continue your independent explorations in Prague.

Or, you might choose to venture even further back in the city's history on our optional *Noble Prague* tour, which includes a visit to the 500-hundred-year-old Lobkovicz Palace. Your tour begins with a classical music performance at the palace—a rousing conclusion to a regal day in the Czech capital—followed by a tasting of traditional coffee and cakes. Then, we'll

join a tour of the on-site museum, where you'll view an extensive collection of artwork amassed by the Lobkowicz family—a Bohemian noble family dating back to the 14th century.

Dinner: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations. Perhaps you'll seek out some of Europe's best jazz venues, excellent opera, or innovative theater groups.

Day 5 Prague • Optional Terezin tour

- Destination: Prague
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Courtyard by Marriott Prague City or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning/Afternoon: Continue your independent explorations of Prague this morning. You might take in St. George's Church, with its tenth-century towers and the elegant Royal Gardens with their marble monuments.

Or join our optional tour for a sobering visit to Terezin, site of the World War II concentration camp of Theresienstadt. Located less than 40 miles northwest of Prague, this entire town, bordered by an 18th-century fortress, was

turned into a concentration camp by the Nazis. This powerful experience also includes a tour of the former military fortress and a visit to the Jewish Museum.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Dinner: This evening, join us for dinner at one of Prague's local restaurants.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 6 Prague • Bratislava, Slovakia • Budapest, Hungary

- Destination: Budapest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today you can sit back, relax, and enjoy the variety of scenery and the changing landscapes as you ride for most of the day in a comfortable motorcoach on your way to Budapest.

Lunch: Along your route, add another country to your list with a stop for lunch in Slovakia's quirky and charming capital, Bratislava.

Afternoon: Afterward, enjoy a walk around the city with your Program Director. You'll arrive in Budapest in the early evening to begin your *Eastern Europe to the Black Sea River Cruise Tour*.

OPTIONAL TOURS

Sychrov Castle

(Day 3 \$140 per person)

On this optional excursion, you'll visit Sychrov Castle, the 18th-century residence of a noble family. During the last ten years or so, an

extensive reconstruction and restoration of the manor house's exteriors and interiors, as well as of the nearby park, has returned the Castle of Sychrov to its former glory. After a welcome drink, enjoy an organ concert in the palace chapel, followed by a guided walk through the

grand manor, featuring magnificent woodwork and lush interiors. Relax over dinner before returning to the hotel in the late evening.

Noble Prague

(Day 4 \$140 per person)

Delight in Prague's regal side during a visit to the 16th-century Lobkowitz Palace. The palace is the property of the Lobkowitzes—a noble Jewish family with deep roots in the Czech Republic. Forced to flee their homeland during the Nazi occupation, the Lobkowitzes returned to Prague following the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Today, their home is open to the public and boasts a beautiful collection of European artwork. Your tour begins with a rousing classical music performance in the palace's event hall. Following coffee and cakes at the palace, you'll have the opportunity to peruse the museum's collection.

Terezin

(Day 5 \$100 per person)

Join our optional tour for a sobering visit to Terezin, site of the World War II concentration camp of Teresienstadt. Located less than 40 miles northwest of Prague, this entire town, bordered by an 18th-century fortress, was turned into a concentration camp by the Nazis. This powerful experience also includes a tour of the former military fortress and a visit to the Jewish Museum. Lunch will be on your own.

POST-TRIP

Transylvania, Romania

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 4 nights
- » **7 meals:** 4 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 2 dinners
- » **Included tours** with personal headsets:
Peles Castle • Brasov
- » Dedicated services of a local Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Experience the Transylvania region of Romania—a castle-dotted landscape whose well-preserved, Old-World character will evoke an era of bygone, macabre figures both mythical (Count Dracula) and actual (Vlad the Impaler), as you explore these lands from the historic city of Brasov.

Day 1 Bucharest, Romania • Brasov

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Aro Palace Hotel or similar

Morning: Enjoy a morning at leisure in Bucharest before you break away from your main trip.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Travel overland to Brasov this afternoon.

With its medieval watchtowers and Gothic spires, Brasov has long fascinated history and architecture buffs. It's also a wonderful gateway to castles in Bran and Rasnov. After you check into your room, your Program Director will lead a brief orientation tour of the neighborhood of your hotel. Spend the rest of the afternoon and evening at leisure exploring more of Brasov or simply relaxing.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 2 Brasov • Explore Brasov • Optional fortified church & organ concert tour

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Aro Palace Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll begin our day with a walking tour 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 in 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.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Enjoy time on your own to discover Brasov.

Or, join an optional tour to discover the fortified church of Vulcan, with an included organ concert and dinner. Originally constructed in the 13th century as a Romanesque basilica, the building has been destroyed and rebuilt over the centuries, with a bell tower and wooden galleries built in the 16th century and its ornate baptismal font added in the mid-17th century.

You'll drive to the church from your hotel with your Program Director late this afternoon for an introductory tour of the church's impressive exterior and interior. Then, settle in for a musical performance, featuring the reverberating tones of the church's organ.

Dinner: If you chose to join today's optional tour, dinner is included in the cost of the tour. Otherwise, dinner is on your own in Brasov tonight.

Evening: The evening is on your own.

Day 3 Brasov • Optional Bran Castle tour

- Destination: Brasov
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Aro Palace Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The day is yours to relax and to explore Brasov on your own. Perhaps you'll hike or take a cable car ride to Mount Tampa and enjoy the views.

Lunch: On your own—ask your Program Director for local restaurant recommendations.

Afternoon: Continue exploring Brasov on your own.

Or come with us on an optional tour to Bran Castle, often referred to 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 an included dinner, you return to your hotel, arriving later this evening.

Dinner: On your own for those who choose not to join the optional tour.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 4 Brasov • Visit Peles Castle • Transfer to Bucharest

- Destination: Bucharest
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sheraton Bucharest or similar

Activity Note: You'll complete the remainder of your main trip (Day 13) this afternoon. If Peles Castle is closed, we will instead visit Pelisor Castle.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Tour 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—creating a Bavarian setting in the mountains of Romania.

The castle's sculptured terraces, art displays, and historic armories make it one of Romania's most important and beautiful museums. The palace is ornately decorated, inside and out, with intricate woodcarvings and paintings of scenes from Wagner's operas. Fortunately, as you'll see, it is one of the best-preserved royal palaces in Europe.

Lunch: Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: This afternoon we'll transfer to Bucharest. Check into your hotel before setting off to make your own discoveries this afternoon. 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 Neo-classical structures with monumental 20th-century edifices (the latter built for the most part to satisfy the late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu).

Perhaps you'll visit the *Arc de Triomphe* commemorating the exploits of World War I soldiers, and drive along Victory Avenue to Revolution Square, where recent events in history are inscribed.

Dinner: This evening, join your fellow travelers for a farewell drink and dinner at your hotel.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 5 Bucharest • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: After breakfast, you are transferred to the airport for your flight home.

OPTIONAL TOURS

Fortified Church & Organ Concert

(Day 2 \$135 per person)

Discover the Fortified Church of Vulcan today. Originally constructed in the 13th century as a Romanesque basilica, the building has been destroyed and rebuilt over the centuries, with a bell tower and wooden galleries built in the 16th century, and its ornate baptismal font added in

the mid-17th century. You'll drive to the church from your hotel with your Program Director late this afternoon for an introductory tour of the Church's impressive exterior and interior, before sitting down for a musical performance, featuring the reverberating tones of the

church's organ. Afterwards, you'll walk to a local restaurant after the concert for dinner, included in the cost of the tour.

Bran Castle

(Day 3 \$145 per person)

Bran Castle is often referred to 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. This optional tour includes dinner.

YOUR RHINE, MOSEL, MAIN, AND DANUBE RIVER SHIPS

Sail aboard our privately owned 140- to 162-passenger vessels

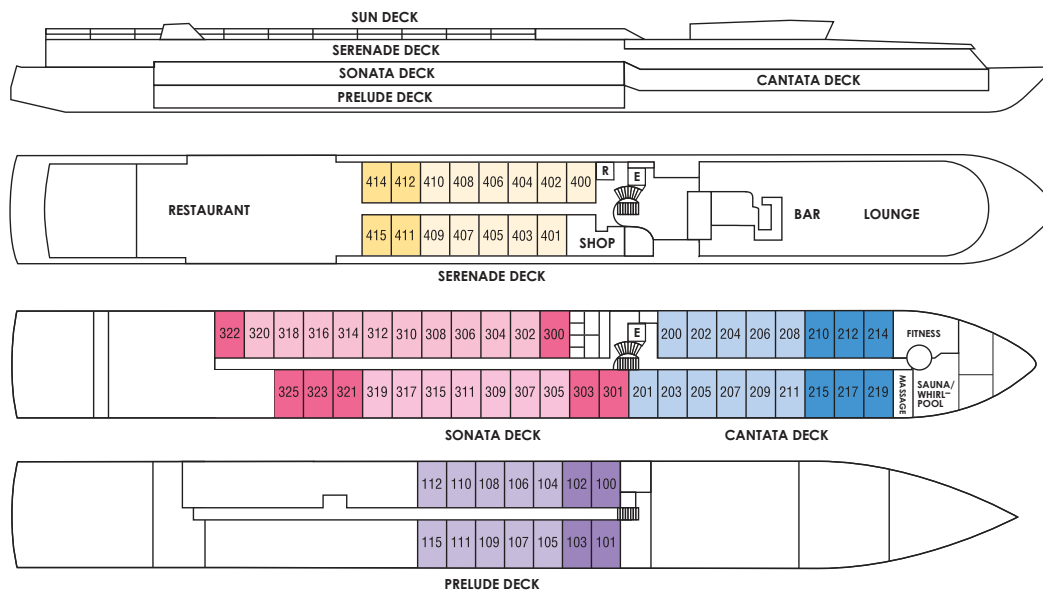
Grand Circle Cruise Line's Rhine, Mosel, Main, and Danube ships were designed specifically to create an unforgettable European river cruise experience for American travelers. Explore storybook landscapes with up to four groups of no more than 38-45 travelers, each with one of our dedicated, local Grand Circle Program Directors, and enjoy the attentive onboard service of our top-notch English-speaking ship crew.



SHIPBOARD FEATURES

- **Dining room with single, open seating:** Enjoy regionally-inspired cuisine in your ship's dining room.
- **Bar & lounge:** Relax with friends old and new.
- **Complimentary beverages:** Enjoy house beer and house wine—as well as soft drinks—at any time of day while onboard.
- **Complimentary wireless Internet access:** Connect online in cabins and common areas.
Please note: Wireless Internet access may be limited at certain points throughout your River Cruise.
- **Sun Deck:** Sit outside and enjoy the view as your ship glides past the European countryside.
- **English-speaking crew:** Our staff is dedicated to your comfort, and all shipboard announcements are made in English.
- **Smoking/non-smoking:** Smoking is not permitted indoors, but is permitted on the Sun Deck.
- **Shipboard security:** State-of-the-art shipboard radar ensures safe navigation at night and in low visibility; safe docking space; onboard security staff; state-of-the-art fire safety system; and secured entryway doors.

M/S RIVER HARMONY



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 366 ft.

Passenger capacity: 140

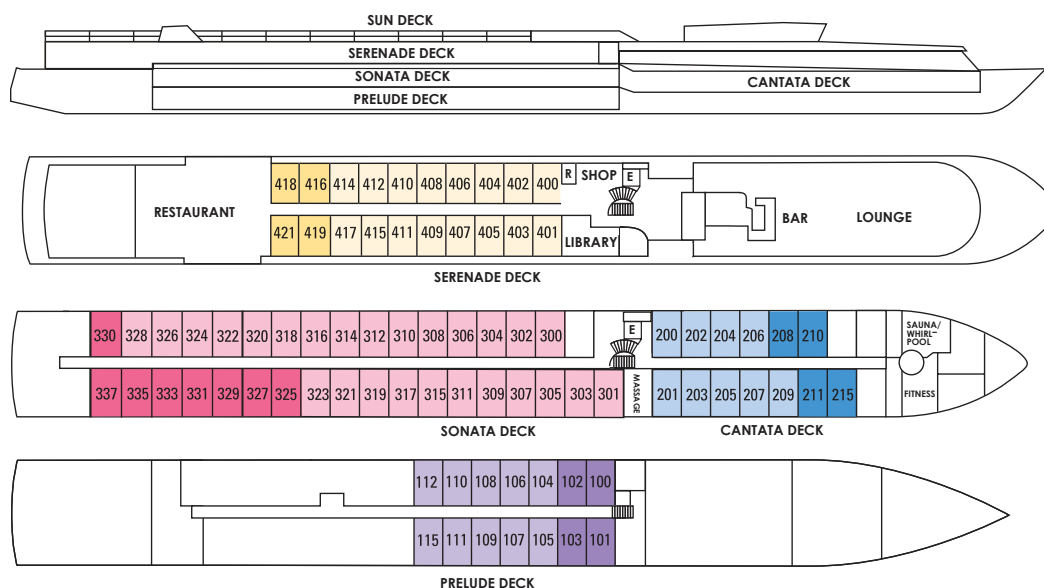
International crew: 34

Decks: 4

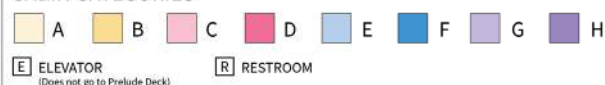
Number of cabins: 70—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S RIVER ARIA & M/S RIVER ADAGIO



CABIN CATEGORIES



Registry: Malta

Width: 38 ft.

Length: 418 ft.

Passenger capacity: 162

International crew: 38

Decks: 4

Number of cabins: 82—all outside

Elevator: Yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

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** 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 vacation.

- **Main trip only:** You will need 6 blank passport pages.
- **Extensions to Romania or Prague:** No additional pages needed.

Visa Required

We’ll provide you information with instructions, application forms, and fees 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 (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania):** U.S. citizens will require an online visa-waiver to enter countries in the European Union. There is no set timeline for when this requirement will start – we will contact all impacted travelers before their departure once the start date is confirmed.
- **Serbia:** No visa needed.

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**.

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).

Requirements for the Czech Republic

You will need to bring additional documentation for the Czech Republic, so please read carefully.

According to the U.S. State Department and Czech Embassy, all foreign tourists must be able to provide proof of medical coverage, if asked. ***Not all travelers will be asked—in fact, most travelers won't—and even some local officials are unaware of this rule.*** But occasionally, travelers are asked at passport control or by medical personnel. And if that happens to you, we want you to be prepared.

Specifically, you must be able to show proof of coverage that meets these requirements:

- Be for a minimum of 30,000 Euros (about \$37,000 US dollars at the time of writing).
- Cover possible medical expenses and hospitalization charges while traveling.

- Be valid in Schengen countries like the Czech Republic. Schengen countries are the European Union countries that have signed the Schengen Agreement—for example, Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, etc.
- Include evacuation or repatriation coverage—it must cover the cost of getting you back home if you need to return for medical reasons.

The good news is that our Travel Protection Plan DOES meet these requirements. So what type of documentation you should bring depends on if you purchased Travel Protection with us or not.

If you purchased our Travel Protection Plan: All you'll need to bring is a copy of the coverage from our plan provider. You can download and print a copy of your coverage for this purpose. Go online to www.gct.com/tpp or oattravel.com/tpp, and follow the links to the plan provider's website. This will redirect you to where you can print a copy of your coverage. *TIP: In our experience, the page from Part B with the schedule of benefits is usually enough to satisfy local officials.*

If you did not purchase Travel Protection with us: You will need to bring some other form of proof of coverage. If your own health insurance meets the requirements above, contact your insurer for a letter stating that you are covered. A certificate of coverage or proof of purchase from a private insurer or another Travel Protection Plan will also suffice, as long as the requirements listed above are met. *However, **Medicare cards are not acceptable**, since Medicare does not cover medical expenses abroad.*

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities in Mind

Please review the information below prior to departing on this vacation. *We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home if their limitations are impacting the group's experience.*

GROUP SIZE

- This trip has a group size of 38-45 travelers (with approximately 3-4 groups onboard) each with a local Program Director exclusive to Grand Circle

PACING

- 13 days, with 10 nights aboard our privately owned 162-passenger M/S *River Aria* or M/S *River Adagio*, and a two-night hotel stay
- 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

- Included features on your trip may consist of 3-4 hours of physical activity each day. Travelers should be able to walk 1-3 miles unassisted within a time frame of 1-2 hours, and walk on uneven surfaces, including steep and unpaved paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slick in wet or colder conditions
- Optional activities and walks may be offered in addition to the ones mentioned in our day-to-day itinerary
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them throughout the trip
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Uneven walking surfaces, including steep paths, hills, riverbanks, 25-50 stairs without handrails, and cobblestones, which can be slippery in wet or colder conditions
- Travel by 162-passenger river ship, and 49-seat coach
- Changes in water-level depths may require adjustments to your itinerary
- Docking in Budapest, Hungary may be up to 30 minutes outside of the city center, with transportation to and from the ship by motorcoach

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

Health Check

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential to fully enjoy your trip abroad. If you have ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date.

- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. (You can use the “Keep Your Abilities in Mind” on the previous page as a guideline to discuss with him or her.)
- You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling.
- If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition.

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.

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 (Select “Find International Travel Information” then select “Country Information”; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Your Health Abroad” 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 **1-800-321-2835**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water aboard ship and in the countries you'll visit is perfectly safe for drinking, although it may not taste the same as at home.
- If you prefer bottled water it is usually for sale in hotels, food shops, and restaurants.
- Another alternative is to bring a reusable water bottle from home, which you can fill up on the ship or in your hotel before you set out for the day.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

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 recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip;** you will need euros instead (and Czech crowns if you are taking the Prague extension).

Local Currency

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

Euro Countries: European Euro (€)

Bulgaria: Bulgarian Lev (ЛВ.)

Czech Republic: Czech Koruna (CZK pr Kr.)

Some establishments will accept euros, but the exchange rates are usually not favorable, and any change will be in Czech crowns. If possible, use local currency or credit/debit cards.

Hungary: Hungarian Forint (ft)

Serbia: Serbian Dinar (RSD)

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 2004) are best.

Please note that many banks in Europe will only exchange money for their own customers. One exception is in the Czech Republic, where it is more economical to try a bank first. 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.

Serbia: ATMs can be readily found in large cities and small towns but can be scarce in rural villages.

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

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.

Using Your Credit Card in Europe

Most of us are used to credit cards with the embedded computer chip (the ones you insert instead of swiping). In Europe—where they've had this type of card longer than us—these credit cards usually require a PIN (personal identification number) to make a purchase. And in contrast, most U.S. credit cards either do not require a PIN or don't have one. So what do you do if you want make a purchase with your credit card in Europe?

Don't worry. 90% of the time you won't need to do anything special. You'll insert your card and the purchase will go through as normal. Often you won't even be asked to sign anything.

But bring more than one form of payment with you. For those rare cases when your credit card doesn't work, the best plan is to already have a backup form of payment with you. Debit cards are a good alternative as they have a PIN. And there's always cash.

Consider asking your credit card company. You can try contacting your credit card company before you leave to see if they will issue you a PIN. Many won't—but at least you'll know. You could also try looking at their website to see if they have guidance about getting a PIN.

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.!

Onboard Ship

Two Separate Bills Will be Issued

- **Shipboard account:** This bill is for any on board purchases (drinks, souvenirs, etc.) and is calculated in Euros. The bill is payable at the ship's front desk; we accept cash or credit/debit card only. For cash we accept Euros. For credit/debit cards, we accept MasterCard and Visa. Other forms of payment, such as checks, American Express, and Discover Card are not accepted for this bill.
- **Optional tour account:** This bill is for any optional tours taken during the trip and is calculated in U.S. dollars. The bill is paid at the ship's front desk (they will have you fill out a form) by credit/debit card only; other forms of payments such as cash and checks are not accepted. For more information on optional tours—including which cards we accept for payment—see the “Preparing for Your Trip” chapter.

Please note: Payments made by credit card may take up to three months to process. We ask that you use a credit card that will not expire until three months after your trip ends. Because our headquarters are in Boston, the charges may appear to be from Boston or might be labeled as “OPT Boston” (depending on your credit card company).

Exchange Services: Policy Update

Due to international banking laws, we are not able to exchange money onboard the ship. If you need to obtain local currency, please see the “How to Exchange Money” section for helpful tips and information.

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. For those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. All tips below are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency (this is usually preferred) or in U.S. dollars. Do not use personal or traveler's check for tips.

- **GCCL Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Grand Circle Program Director at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$7–\$10 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Program Director is with them. *Please note that tips for your Program Director can only be in the form of cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Program Director during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Shipboard Crew:** We recommend a flat tip of \$10–\$12 U.S. per traveler, per day. You'll give this tip once—at the end of your cruise—and it will be pooled among the entire cruise staff. **Policy Update:** *Due to international banking laws, we are no longer able to process crew tips on a credit card; crew tips can only be in the form of cash.*
- **Housekeeping Staff at Hotels:** We recommend \$1 per traveler, per day. (This is for hotels only; on the ship Housekeeping are part of crew, so you don't need to tip them separately.)
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Time at Leisure

When you are exploring on your own, it's useful to know when to tip and how much, because local customs often differ from the U.S. Here are a few helpful guidelines for the most common services a traveler might use:

- **Eastern Europe:** Although service charges are generally included, tipping is still expected. A 10% tip at restaurants and bars is sufficient. Make sure your taxi driver does not overcharge by asking for an invoice print out (it's often better to take a taxi ordered by the concierge). If everything is fine, a 5–10% tip is welcome. In these countries, it is acceptable (and welcomed) to tip in U.S. dollars. You might want to bring a supply of U.S. \$1 bills for tipping purposes.
- **Public Restrooms:** It is very common to be charged a small use fee (not a tip) for restroom access. U.S. dollars are not accepted for this fee. Bring small change in the local currency with you or change some upon your arrival just in case as there isn't an attendant on duty (in some cases you will use a turnstile.)

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

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).
- **Customized Air:** You booked international air with us, and have customized it in some way. If you have customized your trip's dates to arrive early, stay longer, or stop on your own in a connecting city, airport transfers will NOT be included. You must also arrange your own accommodations for any additional nights. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner under "My Reservations".

Air Inclusive Travelers

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

- **Overseas Arrival:** Once you arrive overseas, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Important note on porters: Airport porters are NOT allowed in the baggage claim area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your transfer vehicle. Your driver will load your luggage into the transfer vehicle.
- **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.

Arrival Time

If you are booking your own international airfare or have personalized your flights, we recommend that you choose flights that arrive by 2pm on Day 2 of your trip (or pre-trip extension, if you are taking one) if you are interested in joining your Program Director for an orientation walk in the vicinity of your hotel.

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 GCCL travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.

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 **1-800-321-2835**.

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**

Bucharest Air Routing

Because Romania remains a largely undiscovered tourist destination, air service between the U.S. and Bucharest is limited. As a result, your flight to Bucharest (or from Bucharest, depending on the direction of your cruise) may not be direct and may require a layover of between one and five hours, according to airline schedules.

Return Flights: Expect a very early morning on the day of your return flight to the U.S. This is because most international flights from Eastern Europe—including direct flights to the U.S. and ones that connect through other European cities—depart at or before 7 am.

Lost or Delayed Luggage

Unfortunately, it is possible that the airlines may lose or delay your checked luggage, but luckily most luggage is recovered within 24 hours. Should this happen to you, please report the loss immediately to the airlines; they will not accept a claim after you have left the airport. It will be the airline's responsibility to track your luggage and see that it is delivered to you. Your Program Director can assist you with reporting the loss and with staying in touch with the airlines, but please understand that as the legal owner of the suitcase most airlines will want to work with you directly.

To minimize complications due to lost or delayed luggage, we recommend packing a spare change of clothing in your carry-on luggage. Also, when traveling with a companion we recommend "cross-packing", i.e. packing some of your outfits into your companion's checked luggage and vice-versa, in case one bag is delayed.

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your vacation 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 onsite can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard and Visa on all trips, and Discover on all trips except river cruises in France. 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.) We do not take Amex, cash, or checks for optional tours.
- 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".
- We 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.gct.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 is "unlocked", meaning it can accept a local SIM card. If your cell is "unlocked" then you will be able to purchase a local SIM for it and then buy minutes with "Pay as You Go" cards, so that you have a local contact number for your friends and family.

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 & 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 Access and Email

Internet cafés are available in many of the cities you visit on your Cruise Tour; however it prices for use may vary. While sailing Internet access may be unavailable, depending on locks, bridges, and regional remoteness. Internet access will be most consistently available when the ship is docked in larger cities.

Receiving Calls from Home

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one is to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

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

Hungary: +36

Croatia: +385

Serbia: +381

Czech Republic: +420

Romania: +40

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on bag per person.
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current standard is 50 lbs for checked bags and 15 lbs for carry-on bags.
Size Restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (length+width+depth). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches.
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and prevent additional airlines luggage fees (which are your responsibility). Most airlines now charge to check more than one suitcase per person for flights to Europe and other international flights.</p> <p>Luggage rules: 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.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** Consider a 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. Due to space limitations on our motorcoaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.
- **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

- **Travel light:** A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.
- **Consider clothing designed for travel, sports, or camping:** With modern fabrics, lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy.
- **Plan to dress in layers on shore excursions.** Be prepared for a variety of weather conditions: warm days with sun, chilly temperatures with showers, and evenings that could dip into the 40s or 50s, depending on your travel season.
- **Bring rain gear:** Regardless of your month of travel, rainfall is certainly a possibility. We suggest you bring a folding umbrella and waterproof shell. Water-resistant walking shoes are advantageous in case heavy downpours pass through.
- **Good walking shoes are critical.** This program features many included tours that follow steep, unpaved or cobbled routes; and even an average day of light sightseeing or shopping can put great demands on your feet. If you prefer more ankle support, take light hiking boots. In case you get caught in the rain, we suggest you bring an extra pair of walking shoes, and rain boots or galoshes. Aboard ship, you'll want non-slip shoes with rubber soles.

Style Hints

- **Pack casual clothes:** Comfortable, informal apparel is acceptable at each of your destinations. At dinner, you will not need to wear “dressy” clothing; men do not need jackets or ties and women do not need fancy dresses. You may want one or two “smart casual” outfits for the Welcome Reception or Farewell Dinner, but it’s completely up to you.
- **Please keep in mind that in this part of Europe it is considered disrespectful to wear shorts, short skirts, or transparent tops when visiting a religious building.** Some churches may even refuse entry to travelers in shorts, but casual pants or longer skirts are acceptable.

What to Bring

We have included suggestions from former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

Your cabin already has: Shampoo, conditioner, hair dryer, soap, body lotion, shower cap, and towels. **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 to layer
- ☐ Trousers, jeans, or skirts
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes and/or water resistant shoes
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Socks and undergarments
- ☐ A jacket or sweater, depending on the time of year

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, skin care products, etc.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ☐ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger

- ☐ Travel money bag or money belt
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues
- ☐ Moist towelettes and/or anti-bacterial hand lotion
- ☐ Light folding umbrella
- ☐ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- ☐ Camera, spare batteries, and memory cards
- ☐ Plug adapters—see the electricity section of this book

In Summer

- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor

Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Vitamins
- ☐ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ☐ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ☐ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ☐ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ☐ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ☐ Band-Aids, Moleskin foot pads
- ☐ Antibiotics: Neosporin/Bacitracin

Optional Gear

- ☐ Compact binoculars
- ☐ Washcloth
- ☐ Travel-size tissues

- ☐ Hand-wash laundry soap (Woolite), clothespins/travel clothesline/stopper
- ☐ Reading materials
- ☐ Travel journal/note pad
- ☐ Swimsuit, if you want to use the ship's whirlpool
- ☐ Addresses for postcards
- ☐ Photos, small gift for Home-Hosted visit
- ☐ Pocket-size calculator for exchange rates
- ☐ For hotel stays: Many hotels will provide hair dryers, but not all. If a hair dryer is essential to you consider a travel-size version. Hair dryers are provided on your ship.

Electricity

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

Voltage

Aboard the ship, cabins are equipped with 220-volt outlets. In your bathroom you will find a 110-volt outlet; this outlet is only for low-voltage appliances, like electric shavers. (Your bathroom also comes equipped with a hair dryer).

Electricity in the Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Serbia 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. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B; standard European plugs are Type C, E, and F. **Of the three, a Type C adapter is the most useful as it fits into Type E and F sockets.** Type C is usually what is sold in stores as a European adapter.

Aboard ship, the plugs in your cabin bedroom are Type F. The 110V socket in your cabin bathroom takes U.S. plugs, but not polarized ones (where one prong is bigger than the other). *Previous travelers have mentioned this because some small appliances, like Waterpiks, have polarized plugs.*

Note that even though you'll only need the European plug adapter on this trip, 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.

For your reference, here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Bulgaria: C

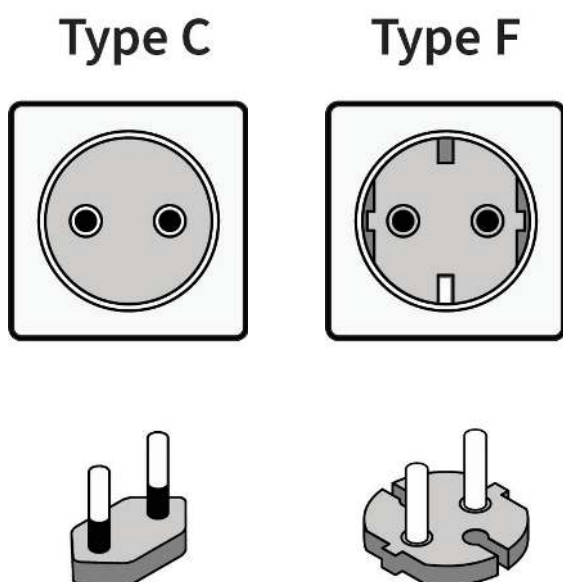
Croatia: C and/or F

Czech Republic: C

Hungary: C

Serbia: F

Romania: C



CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Hungary: Hungary is completely landlocked, and its inland position cuts it off from the moderating influence of the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, seasonal weather is more prone to extremes. Summers can be very hot and winters absolutely frigid. If you're traveling during the peak of summer, be prepared for some high temperatures, though it could also be comfortable and pleasant. As fall approaches, some days may be on the cool side, but stints of warm weather still occur. By late October, the air is usually brisk and evenings are chilly.

Serbia: Serbia has varied weather within three climatic areas. The Adriatic-Mediterranean climate near the coast is the warmest and mildest, with long, hot summers and short, rainy winters. A continental climate prevails on the Pannonian plain and central hills, with warm and dry summers and moderately cold and snowy winters. The third climate zone includes the higher altitudes, which have a mountainous climate, with short summers and very cold, snow-filled winters. Summers in Belgrade can be very hot, with temperatures in the 90s and high humidity.

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.

Czech Republic: In spring, variable weather reigns: some years it's warm, in others it's cool. Summer days are typically very warm, though there may still be some brisk days. Temperatures start to fall in early autumn, and winter weather begins settling in by early November. In general, you can expect average spring temperatures in the low 60s, summer in the 70s, and fall in the 50s. **However, if you're traveling in July or August**, be prepared for heat waves that can spike the temperatures up past the average and into the 90s.

Traveling in Summer? Expect Heat Waves

We'd like to call out that the last few summers in this region have been extremely hot, with average temperatures in the mid-80s and prolonged heat waves in the 90-100 degree range. If you are traveling in the summer, know that we may need to adjust our daily activities to avoid the hottest parts of day and that many shops, restaurants, etc. do not have air conditioning.

Weather Conditions and River Depths

Throughout the river cruise season, weather conditions affect river depths, and water levels may require adjustments to your itinerary. When river depths rise or fall during your River Cruise, we will be required to adjust your itinerary for your safety and to adhere to the current governmental and nautical requirements. Though we strive to adhere to our planned itinerary, we may not always be able to follow it exactly as planned. Therefore the sequence of ports visited and the days on which included features and optional tours occur may vary.

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	BUDAPEST, HUNGARY			BELGRADE, SERBIA		
	Temp High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	38 to 25	86 to 77	7	40 to 30	89 to 82	1.8
FEB	43 to 27	85 to 68	6	45 to 32	87 to 73	1.6
MAR	53 to 35	81 to 57	6	54 to 39	83 to 59	1.9
APR	63 to 41	75 to 51	7	64 to 47	80 to 56	2.2
MAY	70 to 51	77 to 51	8	74 to 55	79 to 56	2.3
JUN	80 to 56	72 to 51	8	79 to 60	81 to 56	4.0
JUL	85 to 59	76 to 48	7	84 to 64	79 to 50	2.5
AUG	90 to 59	76 to 48	7	84 to 64	81 to 50	2.3
SEP	80 to 52	82 to 52	5	75 to 56	86 to 54	2.2
OCT	65 to 43	86 to 60	5	65 to 48	87 to 63	2.0
NOV	50 to 34	87 to 75	8	52 to 40	90 to 78	2.2
DEC	40 to 28	86 to 79	8	42 to 32	89 to 84	2.3

MONTH	RUSE, BULGARIA			BUCHAREST, ROMANIA		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average #of Days with Rainfall
JAN	36 to 27	88 to 81	12	36 to 23	94 to 81	8
FEB	40 to 29	88 to 76	11	39 to 25	94 to 75	7
MAR	52 to 37	83 to 62	11	50 to 33	93 to 63	11
APR	64 to 46	80 to 52	10	62 to 42	94 to 56	14
MAY	74 to 55	81 to 52	11	72 to 51	94 to 54	14
JUN	80 to 61	83 to 53	10	79 to 58	96 to 55	14
JUL	84 to 64	81 to 49	7	82 to 60	97 to 51	11
AUG	83 to 63	81 to 49	6	82 to 59	96 to 49	10
SEP	77 to 58	82 to 50	6	75 to 52	96 to 49	10
OCT	64 to 47	85 to 62	7	63 to 43	95 to 60	11
NOV	48 to 37	88 to 78	10	47 to 33	96 to 78	11
DEC	40 to 31	89 to 84	11	38 to 27	95 to 85	10

MONTH	PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	37 to 29	91 to 84	15
FEB	41 to 30	92 to 76	12
MAR	50 to 36	89 to 63	16
APR	62 to 44	83 to 51	16
MAY	67 to 50	79 to 53	17
JUN	75 to 57	85 to 55	17
JUL	79 to 60	85 to 54	18
AUG	78 to 59	88 to 53	16
SEP	68 to 51	90 to 60	15
OCT	56 to 43	91 to 68	16
NOV	47 to 38	91 to 83	17
DEC	40 to 38	90 to 85	14

ABOARD YOUR SHIP: CABIN FEATURES, DINING & SERVICES ON BOARD

Our River Ships

Our private fleet of custom-built river ships—with designs incorporating suggestions from Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers—offers a host of amenities to make you feel right at home. Each ship is designed to carry a moderate number of travelers, ensuring an intimate shipboard atmosphere, plus the ease of maneuverability that's so important when entering small river ports. Amenities on each ship include a restaurant with panoramic windows and wraparound promenade, sun deck with lounge chairs, a whirlpool, library, sauna, bar, lounge, dance floor, and small souvenir shop.

By owning our ships, we can assure that you'll be sharing this unique travel experience with only like-minded Grand Circle Cruise Line travelers. You'll find your ship to be an intimate haven that's especially conducive to camaraderie. We'll all be together for the joint celebrations, such as the Welcome Cocktail Party, where you'll experience the gala ambiance of a larger group. At other times, such as when we venture ashore, we'll break into smaller groups with individual Program Directors to allow for more intimate and personal discoveries.

Included features of all Grand Circle Cruise Line European river ship cabins:

- A layout of at least 150 square feet
- All outside cabins
- Individual climate control (heat and air conditioning)
- Twin beds that ship staff convert into a daytime couch
- Storage space under beds of 57 inches x 22.8 inches x 11.8 inches (length + width + height)
- Sufficient closet and dresser space
- Color TV, including CNN programming and a bow camera for ship-front views
- Direct-dial international telephone
- Hair dryer
- Desk
- Private bath with shower

Cabins on the Serenade deck have small balconies with sliding doors; those on the Sonata deck have large picture windows; cabins on the Cantata deck have two picture windows, and Prelude Deck cabins have a square window, placed high in the cabin. For safety reasons, cabin windows do not open.

An important word: While our fleet features larger-than-usual riverboat cabins, please keep in mind that these ships are river vessels, not large ocean cruise ships. Riverboat cabins, in comparison, are relatively small, and ship amenities, in general, are comfortable but not lavish.

Cabin Assignments

You will receive confirmation of your deck and/or cabin category upfront in writing; it will be on your invoice and online in My Planner at **www.gct.com/myplanner**. However, your cabin number may not be assigned until you arrive onboard the ship. (This is normal procedure for ships in many parts of the world, including Europe.) If there's no cabin number on your invoice or online, you can presume it will be assigned later and communicated to you when you board.

Dining

You'll enjoy fine cuisine and excellent views in your ship's dining room, featuring a warm decor of dark woods, rich carpeting, and white-linen and china table settings. Your ship's daily service includes breakfast and lunch buffets, and a more formal dinner. Our professional chefs will create unique menus for you that feature regional specialties. Complimentary house wine, draft beer, and a selection of soft drinks are included with both lunch and dinner. In addition, a selection of other fine wines and beer is available for purchase, starting at approximately \$20–35 per bottle (prices vary according to vintage). Travelers may also bring a bottle of their own favorite wine to dinner to enjoy at their table. Should you care to avail yourself of this service, there will be a corkage fee of approximately \$10 per bottle, charged to your cabin account.

Please note that if you bring your own alcohol aboard, it can only be consumed in the dining room as described above, or in your cabin. Consumption of alcohol purchased outside the ship is not permitted in the lounge or public areas. We also offer complimentary coffee and tea throughout the day, available at meals and from the machine in the reception area.

Open-table, single seating for all meals: Each meal is open seating—reservations of any kind are not accepted. Dinner has only one designated time for its open seating.

Dining times: Dining times for all meals may vary depending on the day's sightseeing and sailing schedule, but in general, meal times are as follows:

- Early bird breakfast: 6:00–7:00 am
- Breakfast: 7:00–9:00 am
- Lunch: 1:00–2:00 pm
- Dinner: 7:00–9:00 pm

Celebrations: Recognition of an anniversary or birthday can be accommodated. Please call Grand Circle Cruise Line to submit your request no later than 45 days prior to departure.

Dress code: The dining-room dress code is casual, though most travelers dress nicely for the Captain's Welcome Reception and Farewell Dinner.

Electricity

Cabin bathrooms are equipped with a 110V outlet for electric shavers. The rest of the cabin has 220V, with Type C/F “Europlug” outlets. See the electricity section of the packing chapter for more details.

Embarkation/Disembarkation

On the day you board ship, your cabin will be available at around noon. The restaurant will open at 12:30 pm and serve a light lunch. On the day of disembarkation, your cabin will no longer be available after 8:00am. You may sit in the ship’s lounge or on the sun deck until disembarkation.

Dock and Landing Etiquette

River waterways are simply not big enough to support large landing docks such as those built on ocean shorelines. It is common for river ships to tie up alongside each other at some piers—particularly in ports where docking area is restricted. While we try to arrange the most convenient mooring available in each port of call, other boats may occasionally obstruct views, and you may have to step across other ships when you want to go ashore. On some rivers influenced by the tide, the ship might get below the level of the shore. It might be more difficult to see the ship from the riverbank, and the view from the cabins might be obstructed by the docking wall.

Docking Accessibility

For certain cities along your trip, your ship may be docked up to 1 hour outside the city center. Transportation to and from the city proper will be done via motorcoach.

Headsets

During your trip, complimentary headsets, or *Whispers* receivers, are provided on our guided tours through the cities we visit. These receivers and headsets allow you to hear your Program Director and our local guides better. If you use a hearing aid or have strong preferences for headphones, we highly encourage you to bring your own headsets/ear buds with you. The plug size is usually the same as that used by iPods, computer jacks, etc.

Wireless Internet Access

Limited Wireless Internet service is available for free in the cabins and common areas on board your Grand Circle Cruise Line ship. If you want to use the WiFi connection you’ll need to bring your own device (laptop/tablet/netbook) — ships do not rent or loan these devices. To use the WiFi, please visit Reception after you board for access information. Shipboard access is subject to the challenges of travel: ship location, signal availability, and usage volume on board will affect connectivity and speed. The ship’s Internet connection demands a strong 3G cell phone signal, which is unavailable in many of the areas we visit. You can expect disruptions of both long and short duration.

Laundry and Linen Service

Laundry service is available for a fee. Please note that neither self-service laundry facilities nor dry cleaning services are available. Bed linens are changed at the start of your cruise and then once a week (i.e. twice during a 14-night cruise); towels are changed daily.

Medical Care

Our entire fleet adheres to stringent European safety standards. In addition to an emergency call button in all cabins, ships also feature fully staffed reception desks, 24 hours a day.

Onboard Activities

During your cruise you'll enjoy exclusive Discovery Series events, organized discussions, group activities that relate to the region (may include a language lesson), and talks on upcoming ports of call.

Recreational Facilities

These include a fitness center, sun deck with lounge, library, and lounge with bar and dance floor. The bar is open from 9:30 am to 1 am, and features both complimentary drinks (soft drinks, house beer, house wine, and non-alcoholic cocktails/beer) and drinks for purchase (spirits, alcoholic cocktails, bottled beers, and a selection of wines). Prices are in Euros. The fitness center has an exercise bike and walking/running treadmill. A massage therapist is available as well (prices listed on board).

Bicycles

We're pleased to offer complimentary bicycle rentals onboard your ship for use during free time, including all of the necessary safety gear, such as a helmet, brightly-colored safety vest, and a lock. Because there is a limited supply of bicycles available, they will be offered on a first-come first-served basis. For more information or if you are interested in using one of the bicycles, please speak to the Front Desk staff or Hotel Manager onboard your ship.

Smoking/Non-Smoking Policy

Smoking is not allowed anywhere inside our Grand Circle Cruise Line European River Ships, including in individual cabins or balconies. The only area on the ship where smoking is permitted is outside on the sun deck.

Elevator/Chairlift

Each ship has an elevator and chairlift service to the sun deck from the deck below (or you can use the staircase to the sun deck, which has one flight of ten to twelve steps). The elevator does not provide service to or from the Prelude Deck. The staircase to/from the Prelude Deck features about six stairs, with a banister to hold on to. The chairlift is a single-seat transport that slides up the staircase banister.

Passport Procedures

For your convenience, your passport will be held by the hotel manager after embarkation and returned to you on disembarkation day. This is standard ship's procedure, and is designed to speed up border crossings and to ensure the crew has all the necessary documents on hand during potential controls in our ports of call.

Lost & Found

Any lost or forgotten items found on board the ship will be held for 90 days from disembarkation. After 90 days, all unclaimed items will be discarded or donated.

Ship Specifications

M/S River Adagio

- **History:** Built in 2003
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 38 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Aria

- **History:** Built in 2001
- **Size:** 410x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 163 passengers, 40 crew members
- **Layout:** 82 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

M/S River Harmony

- **History:** Built in 1999
- **Size:** 361x38 ft
- **Capacity:** 140 passengers, 32 crew members
- **Layout:** 70 cabins, 4 decks; Elevator-yes (no elevator access to Prelude Deck)

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

Your Program Director

Grand Circle Cruise Line is committed to showing you a destination through the perspective of those who live, work, and play there. How better to do that than to have a resident with you every step of the way? We are proud to be the only cruise line to provide you the dedicated services of an expert Program Director, a resident or native of the country who is delighted to share their in-depth knowledge of local history, culture, and hidden gems.

Fluent in English and skilled in fostering camaraderie among travelers, our Program Directors are constantly cited by our travelers as the main reason they continue to travel with us. During your cruise, you'll enjoy multiple Program Directors aboard your ship, who will each be with you and your group of 25-47 travelers throughout your journey—both on ship and on land. And with personal headsets on every included and optional tour, you'll be able to enjoy their perspective and enthusiasm as you explore at a level deeper than most Americans go.

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.”

While Hungary may not geographically fit into this umbrella term, Hungarians as well have struggled for centuries to find their own identity while under the control of more powerful states, from Austria to Turkey to Germany and the Soviet Union. Especially among the older generation, there is a sense of somber nostalgia called the “Trianon Syndrome” that harkens to a post-World War I Treaty that whittled Hungary down to about 60% of its previous size. The country has yet to fully recover from this loss, and some still look back on the pre-Trianon years as Hungary's golden age. On the other hand, most Hungarians have a strong sense of pride about their fierce Magyar forebears, their legendary cuisine, and their close family ties. Regarding the latter, they are not insular and will extend true hospitality to all guests.

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 Croatia, 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.

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.

History and Politics

Traveling inside the Iron Curtain would have seemed an impossible dream just a couple of decades ago; today it is a reality. In the years since the collapse of the communist system the former Eastern Block countries have struggled to regain their independence. Almost 50 years of totalitarian rule left difficult political, economic, and cultural legacies, but enormous amounts of energy have been invested in rebuilding for the future. Today the Eastern European nations are proud of what they have achieved and are eager to engage visitors on the subjects of politics and history. We encourage you to ask questions, but don’t be surprised if not everyone agrees!

In particular, the countries of the former Federative Republic of Yugoslavia have their own story to tell about the not-too-distant civil war. Again, please feel free to ask questions, but also understand that for some the war was very traumatic and they may not wish to discuss it in detail.

Religion and Religious Observances

It is virtually impossible to separate the role of religion from the historic, political, and cultural development of all the countries visited on this adventure. This goes back to the 4th century AD, when the Roman Empire was split along religious lines between the Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) churches. That line fell directly down the middle of southeastern Europe, roughly along today’s Bosnia-Serbia border. Then, in the 14th century, the Ottoman Turks invaded and settled in for five centuries, during which time Islam was widely embraced.

During the Communist era, these countries were secularized, and all religions were suppressed. That completely changed with the fall of the former Yugoslav nation, and today, the vast majority of people in Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania declare themselves to be religiously observant. In Hungary, the fall of the communist era led to an increase in religious groups being officially registered, however, today, a significant portion of the population identifies as non-religious.

Religion in Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania is not just a matter of faith, it’s the single most important differentiator among the various ethnic groups. Croats are mainly Roman Catholic. Orthodox Christian Serbs live in Serbia, but also have significant minorities throughout southeastern Europe. 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.

Historically, there were Jewish communities throughout Southeastern Europe, mainly descended from Sephardic Jews who’d been expelled from Iberia in 1492 and resettled here. Under Ottoman rule, the Jews were granted some protections. But in the 19th century, when independent Slavic states arose, things became more restrictive. With World War II, most of the Jews residing in what was then Yugoslavia were deported to concentration camps and murdered. Today, the Jewish

community here is very small. Hungary has the region's largest Jewish population at a little over 100,000. But most Hungarian Jews are not religiously affiliated and consider themselves Jews by ethnicity.

In Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania, Christmas and Easter are the most important religious holidays. All Saint's Day (November 1) is when families gather at cemeteries with flowers and candles to honor departed ancestors, then return home to visit other relatives and enjoy a family feast. Members of the Serbian Orthodox church practice a very solemn and sacred tradition called *Slava*. It is the celebration of a family's patron saint on his or her saint's day, and it represents the family's affirmation of Christianity, the Orthodox Church, and by extension, the Serbian national identity. It includes several rituals and folk practices, and always ends with a lavish banquet.

In Hungary, religion is not a major force. Most people identify as non-believers, and though some religious traditions are bound up in the observance of local holidays and customs, church attendance is low.

Visiting a Home

A handshake is an appropriate greeting for a first-time meeting. Longtime friends or family may kiss on the cheek. Men introduced to a woman for the first time should wait to see if she offers her hand. If not, a friendly "hello" and a smile will do.

It is considered polite to give a small gift to the host or the hostess, but it is not required. A small album with photos of your hometown would be a useful icebreaker and would be an appropriate gift. Exchanging e-mail addresses is a common practice, especially if you wish to send a photo taken with the host or hostess from your visit. You may be repeatedly offered food or drink, even if you decline.

A common welcome drink is the famous (and potent) plum brandy, widely known as "slivovitz". Many people still make this at home themselves. After a meal, it is considered polite to offer to clear the dishes and/or complement the chef. Offers of tea or coffee are common, sometimes even in shops or businesses.

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 with pork or beef, tomatoes, okra, mushrooms, peas, green beans, potatoes, eggplant, and onions.

Croatian Cuisine

Are Croatia's **Ston oysters** the best in the world? You can decide when you are exploring the Dalmatian coast, which is also famous for mussels, prawns, and all manner of fish and shellfish. The Zinfandel grape originated here, so you may want to try a local wine made from it. Croatia also has a stronger alcoholic beverage, **rakija**, in several differently flavored or spiced varieties, such as **travarica**, which has added herbs is one regional specialty. Pair it with some well known dishes like:

- **Crni rizot:** A black risotto made with squid.
- **Brudet:** A flavorful fish and tomato stew.
- **Pasticada:** A dish loved by carnivores, is this stuffed beef cooked in wine.
- **Rozata:** This sweet caramel cream is a Dubrovnik specialty.
- **Gregada:** A fish stew often made with fresh scorpion fish or grouper chopped into large chunks with sliced potatoes and lashings of olive oil.
- **Štrukli:** Delicious pillows of dough filled with cottage cheese and slathered in cream that are enjoyed as a dessert or a mid-morning snack.
- **Burek:** Flaky pastries layered with cheese, spinach, apple or meat that are enjoyed any time of day.

Czech and Slovak Cuisine

Like their neighbors, the Czech Republic and Slovakia share a culinary heritage that emphasizes meat, potatoes, dumplings, and fermented vegetables (usually, sauerkraut). These are often served with heavy gravies or sauces, but the high-caloric impact is somewhat mitigated by the fact that most Czechs and Slovaks eat their heaviest meal at lunch, and have a lighter supper of just cold cuts and condiments. You'll also find that in the major cities, young chefs are experimenting with lighter and healthier versions of the classic dishes they grew up with.

- **Vepro–knedlo–zelo:** Shorthand for *veprové s knedliky a kyselé zeli*, this dish consists of a succulent roast pork and dumplings concoction that is often seasoned with caraway, and served with sauerkraut. You will see it on just about every restaurant menu.
- **Houskové knedlíky:** Bread dumplings made with flour, yeast, egg yolks and milk, sometimes with bread cubes added to the mix. After the dough rises it gets boiled or steamed, then sliced.
- **Ovocné knedlíky:** Fruit-filled dumplings served with cottage cheese as a main course.
- **Bryndzové halušky:** Potato dumplings (similar to Italian *gnocchi*) topped with a creamy, soft, Slovakian sheep's milk cheese that has its own EU protected designation of origin status. It is then topped with crumbled bacon bits and a garnish like chopped chives, onions or dill. It is the national dish of Slovakia, but it's also popular in the Czech Republic, especially in Moravia.
- **Svicková na smetane:** A dish where beef is marinated in vinegar and herbs; then roasted with vegetables; then simmered till tender. The broth and vegetables are pureed with sour cream to make a sauce, and it all gets garnished with cranberries.
- **Párek v rohlíku:** The quick meal where a small *parek* sausage is completely enclosed within the bun, like pigs in a blanket.
- **Laskonky:** A dessert of two crispy meringues filled with caramel or chocolate buttercream.
- **Trdelník:** A dessert made by wrapping dough around a metal or wooden stick, then roasting it over an open flame. The tubular treat is then dusted with sugar, and topped with nuts and cinnamon.
- **Veterník:** A profiterole made of puff pastry filled with vanilla and caramel cream. The whole pastry is then dipped in a shiny caramel icing for a belt-busting grand finale.

Pubs are an integral part of Czech and Slovak life, and the region brews some of the best beer in the world. In the Czech town of Plzen, brewing dates as far back as the founding of the town, in 1295. Plzen is internationally known for its award-winning *Pilsener Urquell*, and there are numerous other local beers that perfectly accompany the region's hearty food.

Hungarian Cuisine

It won't take long for you to figure out that paprika (*paprikás*) and sour cream (*tejföl*) figure prominently in many classic Hungarian dishes. But don't be fooled, Hungarian food is delicious and diverse, and even dishes accented with paprika have distinctive tastes, thanks to the eight different grades of "red gold" that are used here.

- **Gulyas:** Or goulash is a saucy beef dish that in Hungary is more like a soup than the stew you may be familiar with.

- **Pörkölt:** A hearty stew of beef, pork, lamb, chicken, or liver simmered with onion, paprika and other spices, and served with a side of chewy *nokedli* (egg noodle dumpling). It's comfort food at its finest, and Hungarians like to say, "It's not a real Sunday without *pörkölt*." If you thicken the stew with sour cream, you get *paprikás*.
- **Töltött káposzta:** Rolls of pickled cabbage stuffed with seasoned rice and ground pork or beef, in a sauce accented by sour cream. It is a favorite around Easter and Christmas.
- **Halászlé:** Or fisherman's soup, is cooked in a kettle over an open fire. It is based on Danube river fish like carp, catfish, perch, or pike and seasoned with hot paprika, giving it a bright red color. If you order it **a la Baja**, it will have thick pasta and mainly carp. *Szeged*-style will have four types of fish.
- **Lángos:** A popular street food of crispy, chewy, deep-fried flatbread smothered with sour cream and garlic sauce, and topped with grated cheese and sometimes, sausage and bacon.
- **Lecsó:** Similar to the French ratatouille, this dish is a stew of peppers, tomatoes and onions. Some cooks do put meat in it but typically it is served just with bread and a dollop of sour cream.
- **Uborkasaláta:** A salad of thinly sliced cucumbers dressed with white vinegar, dill, and onions.
- **Palacsinta:** Hungary's answer to crepes, they can have sweet or savory fillings, and they are always served rolled. The famous Budapest restaurant Gundel serves their own version filled with a rum-walnut cream which is then flambéed, and drizzled with chocolate sauce.
- **Dobos torte:** This dessert was named after the master confectioner who invented it in 1885. It includes six layers of sponge cake covered in chocolate buttercream with a glistening topping of caramel. It is a staple at the many famous coffeehouses of Budapest (and Vienna), and not to be missed.
- **Somlói galuska:** A cake is topped with chocolate cream, walnuts, rum and whipped cream, and it is another specialty of the renowned Gundel restaurant.

Serbian Cuisine

Serbians love their meat—especially when it's cooked **pod sac** style, in a covered pan until it's fall-off-the-bone tender. But Serbian food isn't all meat all the time! Vegetables and dairy get attention too, like the **shopska salad**. Some key dishes to look for include:

- **Pljeskavica:** A "Serbian hamburger" that consists of a spiced meat mixture of pork, beef, and lamb that is used as the "burger" patty.
- **Karadjordjeva šnicla:** Or schnitzel, a breaded veal cutlet smothered with tartar sauce.
- **Knedle:** Potato-dough dumplings stuffed with a plum and rolled in sugar and cinnamon.
- **Cvarci:** A great snack made from crispy, salty pork rinds.
- **Ajvar:** This garlicky, red pepper relish is served with most of the dishes above.

- **Prebranac:** A baked bean soup.
- **Kajmak or mladi sir:** These are soft or unripened cheeses similar to cottage cheese.

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 castraveți:** 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.
- **Papanasi:** 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!”

Budapest in Brief

Budapest is divided by the Duna (Danube River) into a right and left bank. Of the city’s three main districts, two—Buda and Obuda—are found on the west bank; Pest is on the east bank. Most of the major shopping venues, the House Parliament, the National Museum, Museum of Applied Arts, and Museum of Fine Arts are located in Pest. Buda, on the west bank, is the site of Castle Hill, Fishermen’s Bastion, Matthias Church, and the National Gallery. In essence, Pest is the hub for dining, shopping, banking, and nightlife; and Buda contains the historical and cultural part of the city. The main shopping street in Pest is Vaci Utca, now a pedestrian zone, which runs parallel to the Danube and is every bit as elegant as the Merceria in Venice or the Faubourg-St.-Honoré in Paris.

Local Transportation

The public transportation system in Budapest—a metro (subway), buses, streetcars, and trolleybuses—is economical, efficient, and simple to use, but closes down around 11:00 pm. Certain trams and buses run on a limited schedule all night. A day ticket (*napijegy*) allows unlimited travel on all services within the city limits. You can also buy tickets for single rides from metro stations or tobacco shops. You can travel on all trams, buses, and on the subway with this ticket, but you can’t change lines. Bus, streetcar, and trolleybus tickets must be canceled on board. Don’t get caught without a ticket: spot checks are frequent, and you can be fined if you don’t possess one.

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.

Prague in Brief

Prague, an ancient and historic city, is the capital of the Czech Republic (made up of Bohemia, Moravia, and part of Silesia). The city, located at the crossroads of Europe, is both ancient and modern and possesses a palpable energy. Getting around Prague can be a bit tricky—many of the streets are small, narrow cobblestone paths that seem to wind about endlessly. But the “city of 1,000 spires” is one of the most beautiful you will ever see.

Prague is really a series of five historic towns welded together to form one great city. The river Vltava slices through Prague, giving the city its distinctive bridges. Hradcany, the castle district, is on the river's west bank with Prague Castle and St. Vitus cathedral nearby. Below this section lies Mala Strana (the Lesser Quarter) with buildings dating back to the 13th century. Petrin Hill to the south offers wonderful views out over the city. On the east bank of the river is Stare Mesto

(Old Town) with its large central square. Nearby is Josefov, the former Jewish ghetto. Nove Mesto (New Town, though parts of it go back to the 14th century) stretches around parts of Stare Mesto and historic Wenceslas Square. The Charles Bridge, a city landmark, stretches over the Vltava and links much of the city.

Ruzyne airport is in the western suburbs of the city. The Prague Information Service offers good information about Prague and is located in Old Town Square. The Tourist Office (Cedok) at Na Prikope is also a good place for information and maps.

Prague is a lovely city for walking so be sure to stroll the Royal Way, which takes you by some of the city's architectural treasures, including Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. In Hradcany stop to see the Strahov Monastery and the Summer Palace. If you are a fan of classical music you'll want to stop in at the Smetana Hall in Obecni Dum. The Museum of the City of Prague in northern Nove Mesto is an impressive and interesting stop. Wenceslas Square in Old Town and Josefov in Stare Mesto both offer excellent walking and sightseeing opportunities.

Local Transportation

Subway: Prague's modern subway system—the Metro—is easy to use and spotlessly clean. It provides the simplest and fastest means of transportation, and most new maps of Prague mark the routes. Subways run daily from 5 am to midnight with trains every two minutes during peak hours, slowing down to every ten to fifteen minutes by late in the evening. There are several lines, each a different color, which intersect at various points in the city center and the route plans are easy to follow. Once inside the Metro, acquaint yourself with these words: vystup means exit, and prestup means connection.

Tram/Bus: You'll probably stick to the Metro, but a bus ride can be a good way to see some of the city, especially if you want to venture farther out. You need to buy a new ticket every time you change vehicles.

Taxi: These are not recommended, as some drivers try to take advantage of tourists and inflate the price, possibly by driving miles out of the way. If you must take a taxi, it is best to use the hotel's taxi service—it is a little more expensive than taxis found at taxi stands but it is more reliable. Another choice is to ask the hotel to contact AAA Taxi for you (or call them at 233 113 311)—AAA Taxi is also dependable and they speak English. If you choose instead to use a taxi at a taxi stand or one you hail on the street, definitely agree on a price beforehand!

Punch your ticket on the Metro, trams, and buses: For the Metro, punch the ticket in the station before getting on the escalators; for buses and trams, punch the ticket inside the vehicle.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your vacation. 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. Grand Circle 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.

Croatia

Typical Croatian souvenirs include gingerbread hearts (*licitar*), lavender oil, olive oil, and red coral jewelry (note that red coral is illegal import into the U.S. but allowed if in jewelry). Dry skin? Locals swear by the lanolin-based *Zagrebacki melem* ointment. Remember that the cravat was invented here, so be on the lookout for unusual and beautifully made neckties.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic many stores sell a wide range of crafts and tourist goods, such as Bohemian glass, porcelain, crystal, peasant pottery, wooden toys, jewelry, and folk carvings. Modern artwork and crafts are sold at private art galleries.

Hungary

Look for exquisite Herend porcelain, cut glass, fine peasant embroidery and needlework, homespun cloth, carpets, charming carved wood objects and, of course, dolls in national dress. Other excellent buys are recordings of classical and folk music.

Serbia

Slovenia claims to have the finest wines of the region, but up-and-comer Serbia offers some wonderful options too—especially from the Oplenac region, considered the “Serbian Tuscany.” Other souvenirs you will want to bring home with you include: Yugoslavia memorabilia, traditional Serbian pottery, local honey, ajvar (red pepper dip), Licider heart (a traditional heart shaped cookie), handmade jewellery, ratluk (the Serbian answer to Turkish delight), and pirot kilim (handmade flat tapestry rug made in Pirot).

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.

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 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

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**.

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

Croatia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 21,851 square miles

- **Capital:** Zagreb
- **Government:** Presidential/parliamentary democracy
- **Language:** Croatian (Hrvatski), with Italian, German, and English also spoken by some.
- **Location:** Croatia is situated between the Pannonian Plain and the Adriatic Sea in southeastern Europe. Irregularities of its Adriatic coastline have created over 1,000 islands. The region in the north of Croatia is a highland area with a mountainous climate.
- **Geography:** Croatia is located in Southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea, between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia. The terrain of Croatia is geographically diverse; flat plains along Hungarian border, low mountains and highlands near Adriatic coast, coastline, and islands.
- **Population:** 3,878,981 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 79%, Orthodox 3.3%, other Christian 4.5%, Muslim 1.3%, other 1.8%, unspecified 3.8%, none 6.3%
- **Time Zone:** Croatia is on Central European Time, which is six hours ahead of U.S. EST. Daylight Saving Time is in effect from the last Sunday of March until the last Sunday of October.

National Holidays: Croatia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Croatia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter and Corpus Christi. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/06 Epiphany

03/20 Bajram

04/05 Easter

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

05/30 Statehood Day

08/05 Homeland Thanksgiving Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

10/08 Independence Day

11/01 All Saints' Day

11/18 Remembrance Day

12/25 Christmas

12/26 St Stephen's Day

Croatia: A Brief History

Though Croatia defines itself along ethno-nationalist lines, the first Croat tribes did not arrive here until the 6th century. Little is known about them, but they were likely Slavic people from the marshlands of Ukraine who migrated to the Pannonian plains and Dalmatian coast.

The Croats came after the Illyrians, Greeks, Celts and Romans, who arrived in 11 BC and ruled for 500 years, expanding their colony from the Adriatic to the Danube. In the decades after the Western Roman Empire fell in 476 AD, the Croats began to move in, banding with other groups in a series of shifting allegiances, and organizing around powerful clans. When Charlemagne came in 800 AD, he Christianized the Dalmatian Croats. Though the Byzantine Empire held political power, the Christian Croats still looked to Rome for cultural and spiritual leadership—a connection that endures today, with most Croats identifying as devout Roman Catholics.

In 925 AD, Tomislav united the Dalmatian and Pannonian Croats, establishing a unified kingdom that included modern-day Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro. Venice invaded Dalmatia, but the Croat kingdom lasted until 1102, when it merged with the kingdom of Hungary. By the mid-1400s, under widespread Ottoman occupation, the Croatian Assembly invited the Hapsburgs to assume control. The Hapsburgs ousted the Turks by the 18th century. But the dream of an independent Croatia reawakened during the mid 1800s, as Europe was swept by a wave of romantic nationalism. This brought a flowering of Croatian language and art.

Following World War I and the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in 1918 the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes united as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Axis takeover of Yugoslavia during World War II gave power to Croatia's far-right Ustase party, which built eight concentration camps to exterminate hundreds of thousands of Jews, Roma, and Serbs. Antifascist resistors rose up, but many, the Serbian Chetniks among them, enacted massacres against the Croats, exacerbating political and ethnic tensions.

The most effective partisans were led by the communist Josip Broz (aka "Tito"), who forced the Nazi retreat and became the architect of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, established in 1944. Though initially aligned with Moscow, Tito openly critiqued Stalin and continually asserted Yugoslavia's independence. In 1961, he founded the Non-Aligned Movement, positioning its members as serious bargaining partners between the Soviet and western blocs.

Tito was determined to create a state in which no ethnic group dominated, and where church and state were separated. It was a fragile balance he maintained through a one-party system that suppressed all opposition. When he died in 1980, old tensions among the six Yugoslav republics resumed. In 1989, with the fall of communism, Yugoslavia fell apart. In 1990, Croatian nationalist Franjo Tudjman was elected President, and a year later, Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia. Conflicts between Serbs and Croats escalated, and within a month, war broke out.

The United Nations mediated a cease-fire in 1992, but hostilities resumed the next year when Croatia tried to regain lost territories. Multiple offensives and cease-fires ensued until 1995, when Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian governments signed the Dayton Peace Agreement, committing to a permanent cease-fire, regional cooperation and further democratization. When President Tudjman died in 1999, the subsequent coalition government brought major changes. Since then, Serbs and Croats have maintained a stable, albeit wary peace. Croatia joined NATO in 2009, and since joining the EU in 2014, its economy, powered by tourism, has grown.

Czech Republic

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 30,451 square miles
- **Capital:** Prague
- **Languages:** Czech is the official language.
- **Ethnicities:** Czech 64.3%, Moravian 5%, Slovak 1.4%, other 29.3%
- **Location:** The Czech Republic is bordered by Austria, Slovakia, Poland, and Germany.
- **Geography:** Landlocked in Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic comprises the ancient provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, with a mountainous rim on the German border to the west.
- **Population:** 10,644,842 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Roman Catholic 10.4%, Protestant 1.1%, other or unspecified 54%, none 34.5%
- **Time Zone:** The Czech Republic on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Prague.

National Holidays: Czech Republic

In addition to the holidays listed below, the Czech Republic 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.

01/01 New Year's Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

05/08 Victory in Europe Day

07/05 Saints Cyril and Methodius

07/06 Jan Hus Day

09/28 St. Wenceslas Day

10/28 Independent Czechoslovak State Day

11/17 Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

The Czech Republic: A Brief History

Though the Czech Republic is less than 50 years old, its culture dates to the 5th century BC, when groups of Celts calling themselves "Boii" settled in Bohemia, which means "home of the Boii." By the 6th century, the Celts were replaced by Germanic and Slavic tribes. Around 631 AD, Samo, a Frankish merchant living in the area, formed a coalition of Slavic tribes, became their king, and won victories against the Avars and the Franks. His short-lived kingdom was the first Slavic state.

A unified Slavic state continued with the formation of Great Moravia, an empire that included the Duchy of Bohemia. The region soon fell under the influence of German dukes, and in 950 became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Fast-forward to the 14th century, the Czech golden age. Under the enlightened reign of Charles IV, who was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1355, Bohemia was a center of power, culture and prestige.

By the 14th century, Jan Hus, a rector at Charles University in Prague, advocated for church reform and against corruption. He gained a huge Czech following two centuries before the Protestant Reformation. Hus was burned at the stake in 1415, and in 1419 his followers stormed Prague's Town Hall and tossed Catholic councilors out the window in what is called the "Defenestration of Prague." Bohemia and Moravia remained Protestant strongholds, but as the Hapsburgs consolidated power, they confiscated Protestant lands. The Hapsburgs dominated for 300 years, leaving an ambiguous legacy. Though they suppressed dissent and imposed Austrian culture, they also provided stability. Under Empress Maria Theresa and her son Joseph, serfdom was abolished, public education was provided, and the region's Jews gained rights. An industrial middle class emerged. And there was a renewal of Czech language and culture.

World War I brought the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the establishment of the first independent Czechoslovakia—a joint state between ethnic Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks. Czechoslovakia thrived until Hitler annexed the country in 1939. Bohemia and Moravia became a protectorate of the Reich, and Slovakia became a puppet state. Prague was spared significant physical damage, but the resistance was destroyed and two-thirds of the nation's Jews were murdered. In 1945, the Nazis withdrew; Czechoslovakia was reconstituted; and in 1947 2.5 million resident ethnic Germans were expelled to Germany and Austria.

The Soviets took power in 1948, sending thousands of Czechs to prison. Resistance emerged in the 1960s with the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Alexander Dubcek, who espoused "socialism with a human face." It smiled upon the world during the Prague Spring of 1968, when there was an outpouring of democratic sentiment. Dubcek loosened restrictions on the press, speech and travel. But in August, 1968, the Soviets invaded with Warsaw Pact troops, replaced Dubcek with a hardliner, and began reprisals against protest leaders (including activist-playwright, Václav Havel).

As Communism fell across Europe in 1989, the most striking revolt was in Czechoslovakia. When Prague police brutally attacked a peaceful student demonstration, dissidents led by Václav Havel negotiated the government's resignation on December 3, and Havel was elected president. Forty years of Soviet domination were swept aside in what has been called "the Velvet Revolution." Soon after independence, differences between the Czechs and Slovaks became irreconcilable. So on January 1, 1993, they agreed to a "Velvet Divorce" and split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, and the EU in 2004. Today, the Czech Republic is a pluralist multi-party parliamentary democracy. The country has held numerous free elections without incident, and the economy has remained relatively robust.

Hungary

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 35,911 square miles
- **Capital:** Budapest
- **Languages:** Hungarian (Magyar) is the official language.
- **Ethnicities:** Hungarian 85.6%, Roma 3.2%, German 1.9%, other 2.6%, unspecified 14.1%
- **Location:** Hungary is located in central Europe
- **Geography:** Hungary is a landlocked country that has borders with seven countries: Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia to the east; Serbia and Romania to the south; Ukraine to the northeast; and Slovakia directly to the north. Most of Hungary is a fertile, rolling plain lying east of the Danube River, and drained by the Danube and Tisza Rivers.
- **Population:** 9,897,541 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 37.2%, Calvinist 11.6%, Lutheran 2.2%, Greek Catholic 1.8%, other 1.9%, none 18.2%, unspecified 27.2%
- **Time Zone:** Hungary is six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Budapest.

National Holidays: Hungary

In addition to the holidays listed below, Hungary 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**.

01/01 New Year's Day

03/15 1848 Revolution Memorial Day

05/01 Labor Day/May Day

08/20 Hungary National Day

10/23 1956 Revolution Memorial Day

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 Boxing Day

Hungary: A Brief History

Hungary has been populated for half a million years. It was settled by Illyrians, Thracians and Scythians, and the Celts arrived around 400 BC. Romans established a province in western Hungary called Pannonia, but left in the 2nd century AD, when Attila the Hun briefly took over.

The progenitors of modern Hungarians were the Magyars. In 895, seven Magyar tribes under the leadership of Árpád formed an alliance. (These chiefs are depicted in the iconic statues of Budapest's Heroes' Square.) They were fierce and superior horsemen who conquered lands as far west as Spain. But the Magyars realized that their survival depended on forming ties with more powerful entities—namely, Byzantium or the Holy Roman Empire. They chose Rome.

Magyar rule was solidified in 973, when Géza, the great-grandson of Árpád, had himself and his grandson Vajk baptized—gaining the favor of Rome. Vajk took the Christian name Stephen (István) and in 1000 he became the first King of Hungary. His kingdom lasted 500 years and its endurance gave Hungary a strong taste for sovereignty. But by 1526, nearly all of Hungary was occupied by Ottoman Turkey. The remaining western and northern parts gained the protection of Austria. But when the Hapsburgs drove the Turks out in 1686, they also made the rest of “liberated” Hungary an Austrian province. Over time there were setbacks (and revolts) under the Hapsburgs, but also an economic and cultural flowering that continued into the 20th century.

In 1848, Hungary revolted against Hapsburg rule and failed. But in 1867, Austria and Hungary formed a federated dual monarchy with two parliaments, two capitals (Vienna and Budapest) and a hyphenated name: Austria-Hungary. Hungary was industrialized, and its economy soared. When Austrian Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914, Hungary entered World War I as a German ally. Losses were enormous, the empire dissolved, and unrest broke out. Large minorities within Hungary’s borders clamored for independence, and got it, thanks to the Treaty of Trianon. It gave lands to the new nations of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, reducing Hungary to 40% of its traditional size—a loss many Hungarians still mourn.

To recoup its former lands, the increasingly right-leaning Hungarian government of Miklós Horthy turned to fascist Italy and Germany. Hungary did recover some lands, but it was also drawn into World War II as an Axis ally. After the Hungarian army was virtually decimated, Horthy tried to negotiate a separate peace with the Allies. But Hitler invaded, installed the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross party, and resumed the murder of thousands of Jews, partisans, Romani, and intellectuals. In December 1944, the Red Army had encircled Budapest and a two-month siege began. By the time the Nazis surrendered in April 1945, much of Budapest had been destroyed.

The Soviets occupied Hungary after the war and made it a satellite state. In October 1953, 50,000 Budapest students began an anti-Soviet demonstration calling for Hungary’s liberal-minded Imre Nagy to be Prime Minister. The secret police fired on them and overnight, Hungary was in revolt. Nagy formed a government and offered amnesty to those involved in the violence. But when he announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and pursue neutrality, the Soviets stormed in with tanks. The world watched in horror as nearly 20,000 Hungarians died.

Communism fell in 1989 and on October 23—33 years after the 1956 Uprising—Hungary became the Republic of Hungary. The new Hungary joined NATO in 1999; and the EU in 2004. The current Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, a onetime anti-Communist, now serves his fourth term. He has moved far right and been criticized for increasing authoritarianism.

Serbia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 29,913 square miles
- **Capital:** Belgrade
- **Language:** Serbian is the official language. Albanian is also spoken.

- **Location:** Serbia is a landlocked country in central and southeastern Europe, covering the central part of the Balkan Peninsula and the southern part of the Pannonian Plain. Serbia borders Hungary to the north; Romania and Bulgaria to the east; the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania to the south; and Montenegro, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the west.
- **Geography:** Serbia's is slightly smaller than South Carolina, and its northern region is rich with fertile plains, where as its eastern region has limestone ranges and basins. The southeast features a mountainous landscape.
- **Population:** 6,926,705 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Serbian Orthodox 84.6%, Catholic 5%, Muslim 3.1%, Protestant 1%, atheist 1.1%, unknown 4.5%.
- **Time Zone:** Serbia is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of North American Eastern Time. Daylight Saving Time goes from the last Sunday of March to the last Sunday of October.

National Holidays: Serbia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Serbia 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**.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/07 Orthodox Christmas Day

02/15 Statehood of the Republic of Serbia

02/16 Statehood of the Republic of Serbia (Day 2)

05/01 Labour Day

05/02 Labour Day (Day 2)

11/11 Armistice Day

Serbia: A Brief History

Like its neighbors, Serbia was settled by Illyrians and Celts; subsumed into the Roman Empire; and inhabited by waves of Slavic people. The Slavs merged with native Illyrians, Thracians and Dacians to form the ethnic base of the Serbian people. The next nation-shaping event occurred in AD 395, when the Roman Empire split into eastern and western spheres, and Serbia became part of the eastern realm. Subsequent proselytizing by saints Cyril and Methodius led the Serbs to embrace the Orthodox religion, which is still the heart of the Serb national identity.

That identity began forming in 1166 when Stefan Nemanja, a Raskan chief, formed the first Serbian kingdom. His successors in the Nemanjic dynasty expanded it from the Danube to the Peloponessus. Through shrewd diplomacy, King Stefan was recognized by the Pope Honorius III, and his brother Sava was granted an archbishopric by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This established the first independent Serbian Orthodox church, with Saint Sava as its head.

In 1389, the Serbs fought the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo. Though the battle ended in a draw, for Serbs it took on mythic proportions: Kosovo came to symbolize their national suffering, in which Serbs sacrificed their lives for their religious ideals. In truth, the Serbs were granted several decades to recover, as the Turks had suffered too many casualties to push on. It was only in 1459 that the Ottomans resumed their takeover; by 1521, Serbia was fully occupied.

The Ottomans dismantled most of Serbian society—except for the Serbian Orthodox church. The Ottoman administrative system revolved around the extraction of revenues and was not concerned with converting subjects to Islam. Instead, they required the Christian ecclesiastical authorities to serve as their functionaries. Still, frequent Serbian peasant uprisings broke out and a revolt in 1815 gained the Serbs a degree of autonomy; by 1878, Serbia achieved full statehood. When the first World War ended and with it, the Hapsburg dynasty, a new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes emerged. It became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

When the Nazis invaded in World War II, the Yugoslav state was divided among the Axis nations. The Croatian Ustase government, who were Nazi puppets, waged a genocidal campaign against Jews, Serbs, and Roma people. Two major resistance groups emerged: the communist partisans under Tito, and the Chetnik royalists. They were so bitterly opposed that they turned on each other. By 1944, the communist partisans (with Allied support) overwhelmed the Nazis. Serbia joined the new Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia under Marshal Tito.

In the postwar years, the crimes committed by the various Yugoslav groups during World War II were never addressed. After Tito's death, Serbian nationalists began to push for a "Greater Serbia" that included ethnic Serbian communities in neighboring republics. As one after another of the six Yugoslav republics declared independence, the Serbian controlled Yugoslav army reacted with violence, and the peninsula was ravaged by ethnic cleansing. It mainly affected Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the Serbs repeated the same tactics in 1998 when they attempted to suppress cries for autonomy in Kosovo. It was only after weeks of NATO air strikes against Serb military targets that Serbia agreed to a peace proposal.

This century saw the complete dissolution of Yugoslavia with the independence of Montenegro and Kosovo. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was tried for war crimes, but died before he could be convicted. Serbia has normalized relations with Kosovo, and both nations are candidates for accession to the EU, with hopes for full membership by 2025.

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.

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 19th 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 10th century, a fragmented feudal society had emerged, with the nobles from outside ethnic groups, and serfs who were Romanian peasants. In the 14th 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.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

General

The Improbable Voyage by Tristan Jones (Travel Account) In 1985, former Royal Navy skipper Tristan Jones embarked on a 2,307-mile voyage across Europe, traveling from the North Sea to the Black Sea via the Rhine and Danube rivers. Battling ice and cold, life-threatening rapids and narrow gorges, German bureaucrats and Romanian frontier police, Jones made his way through eight countries and emerged triumphant, albeit penniless, at the Black Sea. His spirited account of his adventures gives readers a vivid glimpse of the quality of life along Europe's oldest water routes—and of life on the Danube toward the end of the Cold War era.

Danube by Claudio Magris (Travel Account) This widely regarded descriptive travel book follows the river as it flows from its source in Germany to its mouth in the Black Sea, with wonderful descriptions of the scenery en route.

Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends by Lonnie R. Johnson (History) A panoramic history of Central Europe that provides a comparative analysis of the key events that have shaped Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia. The author abandons the Cold War convention of defining Central Europe in the bipolar terms of East and West, and emphasizes the underlying continuities in the region's history.

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.

Croatia

Girl at War by Sara Novic (2016, Fiction) Ana, a New York college student, flashes back to her childhood in the former Yugoslavia in 1991. As civil war descends, ten-year old Ana's carefree existence dissolves in tragedy and she must become a child soldier. Later, even as she builds a seemingly normal new life in America, her war never ends. A moving meditation on family, identity, memory and redemption.

Chasing a Croatian Girl by Cody McClain Brown (2015, Memoir) An incisive and often hilarious journey into everyday Croatian culture. The author, an ex-pat American and professor of political science, marries a Croatian woman and struggles to understand his indomitable mother-in-law, endless coffees with friends and neighbors, and a vast catalog of quirky customs.

The Walnut Mansion by Miljenko Jergovic (2015, Fiction) A 97-year-old matriarch recalls five generations of her Yugoslav family—vividly drawn characters whose lives play out against the fall of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, two world wars, the rise of communism, and the dangers of war-torn Dubrovnik as one nation dissolves, and another emerges.

The Hired Man by Aminatta Forna (2014, Fiction) Well reviewed novel about a family of newcomers from England who renovate a farmhouse in the Croatian village of Gost, befriend a local handyman, and unwittingly dredge up secrets of the village's dark past.

Dubrovnik, A History by Robin Harris (2003, History) A scholarly but readable history of Dubrovnik from its origins in the 7th century, until the collapse of the Republic in 1808. Recommended for the history buff.

Czech Republic

Prague Winter: A Personal Story of Remembrance and War, 1937–1948 by Madeleine Albright (2012, Biography) Former Secretary of State Albright describes her early life in Czechoslovakia during the Nazi occupation and World War II. Albright spent much of her childhood in exile in London, and was too young to understand the forces at work in her birth country. For that, she relies here on historical research but also the letters, journals, and articles of her remarkable family and their friends. A stellar example of how the personal becomes the political.

Me, Myself & Prague: An Unreliable Guide to Bohemia by Rachael Weiss (2008, Travel Narrative) When the author uproots herself and moves from Australia to Prague she hopes to reinvent herself in a specific way—as a worldly and chic novelist—but ends up discovering more about who she was all along.

The Garden Party and Other Plays by Václav Havel (1994, Plays) Written by the famed playwright who went on to become the first president of post-communist Czechoslovakia. These absurdist plays blend politics with typical wry Czech humor to capture the mood of a country on the brink of great change.

Love and Garbage by Ivan Klíma (1986, Fiction) When Klíma wrote this book in 1986, it was banned by the Communist regime. Three years later, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, it became a sensation. It follows the ups and downs of a dissident artist forced to be a garbage man in Communist Prague. He collects far more than trash.

The Unbearable Lightness of Being by Milan Kundera (1984, Fiction) Passion, politics, and philosophy; loyalty and lies; these are just some of the themes explored in this novel, which follows a young woman in love with a philandering surgeon in Prague of the 1960s.

Hungary

Budapest: A Critical Guide by András Török (2016, Guidebook) Frequently updated and widely loved, this is more than your average travel guide, but a witty insider's look at the quirks and pleasures of Hungary's most dazzling city. Even if you never went here, this book would be fun to read.

Budapest Noir by Vilmos Kondor (2012, Mystery) The death of a call girl in a seedy neighborhood a few days after the death of Hungary's Prime Minister doesn't seem to be of interest to anyone, except a dogged reporter. A classic noir-style mystery that unravels in 1930s Budapest.

Fatelessness by Imre Kertész (1975, Literature) This semi-autobiographical novel follows the experiences of a young Hungarian Jewish boy imprisoned at Auschwitz. Kertész drew on his own experiences there, and went on to be the only Hungarian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002.

The Bridge at Andau by James Michener (1957, Nonfiction) For a brief time in 1956, the bridge at Andau became an escape route for Hungarians fleeing the Soviet suppression of the famous popular revolt that wracked Budapest and riveted the world. Historian Michener was living at the Austrian-Hungarian border at the time, and captures here the dramatic nature of the true-life events surrounding the revolt and the plight of the refugees.

Serbia

Serbia: The History of an Idea by Stevan K. Pavlowitch (2002, History) A readable history focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of Serbia.

With Their Backs To The World: Portraits from Serbia by Åsne Seierstad (2000, Nonfiction) Norwegian journalist Seierstad conducted extensive interviews with ordinary Serbs from across the political and ethnic spectrum—a farmer, a rock star, a priest and more—to create this detailed tapestry of modern Serbian life.

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.

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 Spasov 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.

Croatia

The Diary of Diana B. (2019, Drama) This film follows the unique and heartbreaking story of humanitarian Diana Budisavljevic, who rescues thousands of children from the Utasha camps in Nazi-occupied Croatia during World War II. This historical piece combines dramatized reenactments with archival material and interviews with survivors to create a harrowing retelling of Diana’s perilous efforts.

The Eighth Commissioner (2018, Comedy) Filmed on the Dalmatian coast islands of Brač, Hvar and Zlarin, this endearing film follows an arrogant politician whose career is derailed by scandal. Banished to a remote island with no telephone or internet, he is given the impossible task of organizing a local government. The islanders are as quirky as their incomprehensible dialect, and other residents include Italian smugglers, a Ukrainian porn star, and the previous Commissioner.

What is a Man Without a Mustache? (2005, Romantic Comedy) A Croatian guest worker suffers a fatal fall in Germany, and his widow Tatjana uses her settlement to purchase a hillside in an idyllic Dalmatian Coast village. Magical things happen, including Tatjana falling madly but inexplicably in love with the hapless village priest. A sunny romance with an even sunnier setting.

Harrison’s Flowers (2000, Drama) This French film is about a *Newsweek* photojournalist who travels on his last assignment to Yugoslavia in 1991, during the Croatian War of Independence. He is presumed to be killed, but his wife (played by Andie MacDowell) searches for him through the war-torn landscapes and witnesses some of the horrors of the period. French with English subtitles.

Middle Europe

The Grand Budapest Hotel (2014, Comedy/Mystery) This film was shot primarily in Saxony (Germany) and it takes place in the fictional Republic of Zubrowka, but it beautifully conjures a rich Mitteleuropa nostalgia and has an uproarious story-within-a-story format—plus a killer cast. Ralph Fiennes is the debonair concierge of a grand hotel who deftly contends with his quirky staff, wealthy guests, fascist agents, and the theft of a priceless artwork. Directed by Wes Anderson at his light-hearted (but always precise) best.

Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Czechoslovakia

Anthropoid (2017, Drama) Based on the true story of Operation Anthropoid, an attempt by World War II Czech and Slovak partisans to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, architect of the Final Solution and the so-called “Butcher of Prague.”

Ice Mother (2017, Comedy/Drama) Hana, a recent widow, has her spirit nearly crushed by her dysfunctional family, with whom she gathers every Saturday for the traditional dinner. Things get disrupted when she meets Brona, who welcomes her into his quirky club of cold-water swimmers, but warms things up in other ways.

Kolya (1996, Comedy/Drama) An Oscar winner for Best foreign Language Film. Kolya is an aging ladies man and professional cellist, after being flippant with Russian officials, he loses his orchestra position. To make money, he marries a Russian woman for pay so she can get her papers. But when the cellist is left with 5-year old son, he changes his tune.

Kafka (1991, Drama) Directed by Steven Soderbergh and starring Jeremy Irons as the legendary Czech writer Franz Kafka, this unconventional biopic blends events of the author’s life with fantasy scenes from his fiction. Segments of striking black-and-white cinematography add to the moody allure of 1920s Prague.

The Shop on Main Street (1965, Drama). The Oscar for Best Foreign Film of 1965 went to this story about a disillusioned carpenter, Tono, who is appointed the “Aryan controller” of a button shop owned by an old Jewish woman. By Nazi decree, Tono is the shop’s new owner, but the kind Mrs. Lautmann is so senile, she thinks he is just a nice helper. The two end up forging a delicate bond, but when a roundup of Jews begins, Tono must make a terrible moral choice.

Fireman’s Ball (1967, Comedy) Made just before the Prague Spring, this is the last film that the renowned Miloš Forman directed before going into exile in the US. A masterpiece of the Czech New Wave, this veiled critique of Soviet bureaucracy is wrapped in a comic tale about a retirement fete being hosted by some small town firemen. None of the actors were professionals— they were the actual firemen of Vrchlabí, a Czech village.

Hungary

Son of Saul (2015, Documentary). Winner of the Cannes Grand Prix, Oscar, and Golden Globe awards, this film by László Nemes follows a day and a half in the life of Saul, a Hungarian inmate at Auschwitz forced to work as a *Sonderkommando*—a prisoner ordered to remove corpses from the gas chamber.

Mephisto (1981, Drama) This retelling of the Faust legend takes place in 1930s Germany, where amoral actor Hendrik Höfgen rapidly rises to become Germany’s most famous actor, and head of the State Theater, by currying favor with the Reich. Sharply observant, yet untroubled by scruples, Höfgen realizes that his best performance is the one that takes place off stage as he acts the role of a loyal Nazi. Buoyed by the electrifying performance of Klaus Maria Brandauer, this gem by István Szabó was the first Hungarian film to win an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film.

Serbia

Circles (2013, Drama) Inspired by the true story of a Bosnian-Serb soldier who was murdered protecting a Muslim civilian from three fellow soldiers during the Bosnian War, this film delves into the deep repercussions of this tragic act through three parallel perspectives. Nebojša, who witnessed the death of his best friend, overcomes his guilty conscience; Haris risks everything in order to return the favor to the person who saved his life; and the murderer's son meets the fallen hero's father.

Fuse (2003, Comedy) Two years after the Bosnian civil war, a small town that is plagued by corruption, prostitution, and organized crime must quickly organize a democracy when it's announced that U.S. President Bill Clinton will be paying a visit.

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.

Useful Websites

Grand Circle Forum (tips from previous travelers)

www.gct.com/forum

Grand Circle Frequently Asked Questions

www.gct.com/faq

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

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
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

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, 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

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

TripWhistle

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

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

ALIX for One

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

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



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traveler from Clinton, TN



Submitted by Elinor Graham, first-time
traveler from Ocala, FL



Created by Sarah Brown, first-time traveler
from Providence, RI



Created by Joseph Jiang, 3-time traveler
from San Francisco, CA



Created by Sheila Knox, 20-time traveler
from Modesto, CA



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