



Breb

MARAMURES

“A biblical landscape”, “a land that time forgot” and “a step back in time to a medieval rural life”. These are expressions that conjure up a land which no-one who visits will ever forget. When you visit many of the villages in Maramures you are going back at least 200 years!

Maramures is somewhere very special, the very heart of Romania, with ancient traditions and superstitions spanning centuries – and with the church a very powerful influence. The peasant culture still exists here with traditional music, colourful festivals and traffic jams of horse drawn carts.

Wood is the main material here and the area is famous for its exquisite wooden churches which, when viewed at a distance, seemingly made out of matchsticks. Maramures was never conquered by the Romans but was under Hungarian administration as part of Transylvania and the people here have a different spirit. Separated from Transylvania by impenetrable mountains, the communists never imposed their collectivism in this

region as it was hilly, mountainous and composed of many small-holdings. 28% to 30% of Maramures is dense forest. Many houses in Maramures have wonderfully carved immense wooden gates. The more elaborate the carving the higher the status of the inhabitants and there are many beautifully constructed and carved wooden houses to be seen in the villages.

In the middle-ages, the minority Hungarian Catholics, who ruled the area, were only prepared to allow the Romanian Orthodox to build wooden churches so that these



would not last through the centuries and draw attention to the orthodox religion. However, these were so skilfully built that there are many to be seen dating from the 13th century onwards. The churches in the villages of Budești, Desesti, Surdești, Ieud, Barsana, Plopiș, Poienile Izei and Rogoz are all



UNESCO World Heritage sites. The wooden churches are built of oak and spruce on a stone base. They are decorated with both Christian and pre-Christian pagan symbols.

The main town in northern Maramures is Baia Mare. It is an industrial town but is the gateway to an area composed of the Mara and Izei valleys which are truly medieval. As collectivism and the 20th century never touched this area it remained wealthier than other areas of Romania and much of the money earned is still given to the church. At Botiza village the priest insists that every Sunday everyone wears their traditional costume and, in fact, the wearing of the national costume is very much in evidence. Horse and carts abound and the whole area is very keen to preserve its traditional way of life, family values and traditional culture. These villages do not have shops but small provision stores. Many people who live here are self-sufficient. One farm will have sheep and poultry, another will have cows and water-buffalo and the barter system still works.

Folk music is of paramount importance to the life and culture of Maramures and, when mixed with the local gypsy rhythms, this creates a heady blend. Accommodation in Maramures is offered in homes and farms because there are no hotels in the villages but this adds to the overall unique experience.

Maramures lends itself to a walking holiday with accommodation in the villages. This is the only way to truly savour this wonderful, atmospheric and very friendly area.



Local traditional costume

POPICA FARM HOTENI

Airports: 625km Bucharest / 195km Cluj Napoca

■ 3-star guesthouse ■ Half Board

Popica is a famous musician turned farmer. He has travelled the world giving concerts and is quite attuned to the Western mentality. He has many links with the gypsies and, uniquely in Maramures, these gypsies have become integrated into the villages, which is why everything in the area is so neat. Popica farm is on two hectares of land with fruit trees and grazing for sheep. There are two separate buildings for guests.

This is an ideal centre for walking through the surrounding countryside. A 15-minute walk takes you to Taurile de la Hoteni lakes, a local protected nature reserve where you can spot freshwater turtles. It will take 3-4 hours to walk to the surrounding Gutai mountains. Two lakes 'Taurile Chendroaiei', at the foothills of Gutai mountains, can be reached in two hours and the nearest village Harnicesti is only 1km away. It is a half hour walk to the nearest wooden traditional church.

1st Building 'Corbeanca': This modern building has two twin rooms (located on the 1st floor, one has a balcony, and both have en suite shower room) and a family room (two rooms interconnect (one double bedded room and one twin, located on the 1st floor, with en suite shower room). On the ground floor there is a double room with private facilities next door (corner bath and shower). There is also a small kitchenette



(coffee maker and kettle) that opens up on to a large TV lounge with central heating. The house is built in Alpine style and is very comfortable.

2nd Building 'Budesteanca': This is a traditional wooden building on the outside with a modern interior. There are three bedrooms all with en suite facilities (shower), one ground floor double bedroom and two first floor twin bedrooms. The accommodation has recently been renovated. On the ground floor there is also a living room with kitchenette area where guests can make tea and coffee. In the basement there is a traditional oven and dining room. Twelve stone stairs on entrance.



Corbeanca



Amenities/Leisure:

All rooms have central heating ■ Iron and ironing board on request ■ Livestock includes sheep and poultry. The owners also grow their own potatoes and maize ■ Free parking ■ 35-minute walk to Breb village ■ Taurile de la Hoteni lakes are representative of one of the upland

wetlands of Oas-Gutai-Ignis plateau. These peat moss lakes are covered with floating vegetation and are a perfect habitat for small carnivorous plants. The water surface is covered by 150 species of algae, some unique to the region. Below the surface, endemic species of fish and freshwater turtles are hidden beneath the vegetation.!

Maramures

WALKING HOLIDAY IN MARAMURES

Maramures is the perfect location for walkers. Trails enable walkers to access areas difficult to reach by vehicle, rewarding them with magnificent views and spectacular scenery. Our 7-night walking holiday, led by an experienced guide, includes five walks and a visit to a plum brandy distillery. Luggage will be transported by car between properties.



Maramures

Day 1

Arrive Bucharest airport. Meet your tour guide and transfer to a restaurant for dinner. Transfer to train station for overnight train travel (twin sleeper) to Maramures – Sighetul Marmatiei.

Day 2

Arrive in Sighetul Marmatiei town where you will be transferred from the train station to Hoteni village (20-minutes drive), in the Mara valley, for overnight accommodation at Popica Farm (half hour transfer). You will be driving along Mara valley where the villages, the carved gateways and the wooden churches are a splendid introduction to the wooden architecture, typical of Maramures.

Although Hoteni is a small village it is renowned in the area for its remarkable annual country festival – held in May – that celebrates spring. Popica is a famous musician so, in the evening, you may sample some traditional Maramures music!

Today, the walk is easy, exploring Hoteni village located in the foothills of Gutai Mountain and also Breb village that lies at only 4km from Hoteni (the walk to Breb village takes about 40 minutes one way). While in Breb, visit the 17th century wooden church and a woodcarver that makes beautiful seals for bread, wooden carved spoons and spindles.

On your way to Breb village you will notice that, along the riverside, there are several structures – all made of wood: valtori for washing clothes and blankets, water mills which operate all day long and traditional distilleries for producing the strong plum brandy called horinca. These are locations where local people can meet and chat.

Breb is also famous for having been visited by The Prince of Wales in the spring of 2004. Here are three traditional wooden houses bought by the Mihai Eminescu Trust* (whose royal patron is the Prince of Wales). After restoration they will house the local ethnographic museum for the village. This is another initiative of the Trust that seeks to conserve the architectural heritage of the area.

Overnight accommodation in Hoteni village.

** The Mihai Eminescu Trust is concerned with the conservation of built and natural heritage and the promotion of education, culture, religion and academic research in Romania. The Trust is also heavily involved in the restoration of the Saxon village of Viscri in Transylvania*

Day 3

In the early morning drive by car to Gutai Pass (987m) – the starting point to Creasta Cocosului (the 'Cocks crest'). From Pintea Viteazu (Pintea the Brave) Inn it is a 2 hour 30 minute

walk (7.5km) from the summit of the Pass to the craggy andesite cliff of Creasta Cocosului (1,428m). The path, marked with red stripes (easy walking) heads east through the forest, then across several clearings to reach a rocky path that leads to the summit. After this steep climb (about 15 minutes) to the summit one is rewarded with a stunning panorama of the villages along the Mara and Cosau Valleys, surrounded by highlands and remote mountains. Here is a 50 hectare reserve, protecting various types of flowers like edelweiss, gentians and snowflakes.

For the way back there are two options:

1. Return via the same route to Gutai

Pass for a minibus transfer to Hoteni village or

2. Walk through pastures and clearings to Hoteni village (an easy walk downhill along unmarked paths, following cart tracks). Approximately 3 hours 30 minutes.

Overnight accommodation in Hoteni village.

Day 4

Walk 10km (1 hour and 30 minutes) from Hoteni village through meadows to Sirbi village along the Cosau river. Here, almost every household in the village has its own carved wooden gate. Once again, along the riverside, there are several structures, all made of wood: valtori for washing clothes and blankets, water mills operating all



Rug weaving, Botiza

day long. In the villages along Cosau Valley, men of all ages wear the traditional little straw pillbox hats. You can visit two craft artisans that make these hats.

Continue walking for 4km (40 minutes) to the neighbouring village of Budesti to visit its two wooden churches built in the 17th and 18th century. The lower church (Josani) preserves several icons on glass and wood. The church is also the guardian of the coat of mail of the famous Maramures outlaw Pirtea the Brave. A room in the upper church (Susani) has some very well preserved murals, especially a depiction of "Paradise". Overnight accommodation in Budesti with a village family.

Day 5

Early morning walk across pastures and hills to Glod village (approximately 15km) then continue to the neighbouring village of Poienile Izei. After visiting the wooden church choose between a horse and cart ride to Botiza village or walking there (approximately 30 minutes). Overnight accommodation in Botiza with village family.

Day 6

Botiza village is well-known for the women's artistry in weaving rugs. Visit a selection of local artisans and then hike 7km (2 hours and 30 minutes) over the hills to Ieud village for a brief stop to visit one of the oldest churches in Maramures (the Church on the Hill built with fir tree wood in 1364) and also the small ethnographic museum, before returning to Botiza for overnight accommodation with a village family.



Merry Cemetery, Sapanta



Budesti Church

Day 7

Transfer along Iza valley north to Sighetu Marmatiei town, near the border with the Ukraine.

Visit the Museum of the Arrested Thought – housed in what was one of the cruelest prisons of Romania. Here, during the communist regime, the most prominent political leaders, high ranking officers, priests and some of the country's most brilliant intellectuals were murdered.

Visit the open air Museum of Maramures village on Dobaies Hill.

Visit the Ethnographic Museum of Maramures.

Leaving Sighetu, transfer along the Tisa river to the mixed Romanian,

Hungarian and Ukrainian villages of Sarasau and Campulung la Tisa. Stop at the most famous village in Romania – Sapanta – well known for its unique Merry Cemetery. It owes its name to the vivid colours of the wooden headboards on which naively painted scenes illustrate the life of the deceased. Sapanta is also famous for its fluffy woollen blankets – the traditional "cergi" – with alternating grey and black stripes.

Return via Tisa village to visit the

fascinating private museum of the Pipas family. Here is a unique collection of Romanian paintings, icons painted on glass, wooden icons, lace, old books, porcelain and much more. Drive to Sighetu Marmatiei for the overnight train (twin sleeper) to Bucharest.

Day 8

Transfer from the train station to a restaurant for breakfast and then transfer to the airport for your return flight.

No. of nights	Accommodation	Location
1	Overnight train (twin sleeper)	Bucharest to Sighetul Marmatiei
2	Popica Farm	Hoteni
1	Village family home	Budesti
2	Village family home	Botiza
1	Overnight train (twin sleeper)	Sighetul Marmatiei to Bucharest