

Romania - The Wildlife of Transylvania

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Bucharest & transfer Magura.

Day 2/7 Wildlife excursions from Magura.

Day 8 Fly London.

Departs

May and June

Focus

General wildlife (birds, mammals, butterflies) and local history

Grading

Grade B. Easy to moderate day walks

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ROM01) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Highlights:

- 7 nights based in a small family run hotel high in the Transylvanian Carpathian Mountains.
- Watch Brown Bears from a hide in the forest.
- A general wildlife holiday focusing on birds, mammals butterflies, other insects and flowers.
- Visit Castle Bran, alleged haunt of Vlad the Impaler, better known as Count Dracula!
- Beautiful mountain scenery.
- Look for the tracks and signs of Wolf, Bear, Lynx and other forest mammals.
- Led by expert UK and local naturalists.



From top: Mosorel Guesthouse, Magura., Brown Bear, Castle Bran. Images by Geoff Carr, Rob Murray & Abby Grainger



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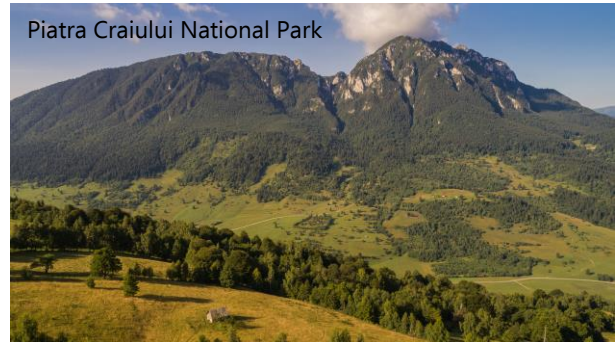
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Introduction

The Carpathian Mountains form a majestic sweeping arc that rise in Slovakia and pass east along the Polish border before turning south into Ukraine and finally Romania. They are a relatively young chain, an eastern extension of the Alps which rose around 60 million years ago and are still growing to this day. The Carpathians are at their widest and most majestic in Transylvania, however, the forest-clad central Romanian province steeped in legend and folklore. Whilst this region is famed for the supernatural, for the naturalist such legends are but an interesting distraction from the wealth of wildlife to be found here. Fortunately, werewolves are difficult to locate these days, but Wolves and Brown Bears still roam the forests in good numbers, birds and butterflies are abundant and the flora contains a wealth of species endemic to the region.



For centuries the people living within the elbow of the Romanian Carpathians have existed in harmony with a rich variety of birds and animals. The continuation of these ancient, low intensity, agricultural techniques has allowed the wildlife to flourish and gives an insight into how our own landscape would have been in days gone by. Add to this abundance of wildlife, the soaring peaks of the Carpathians and one of the most beautiful landscapes in Europe and you have all the ingredients for an unforgettable holiday!

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Magura

We depart from London on our 3 hour direct flight to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Here we will be met of the drive of around 4 hours, out of the flat plains that surround the capital and into the cool forest-clad mountains of the Carpathians. We will base ourselves for 7-nights in the small chalet-style Mosorel Guesthouse in Magura, a small Transylvanian mountain village (around 20 minutes from the town of Zarnesti) set within flower-filled meadows and commanding spectacular views of the jagged peaks of the Piatra Craiului National Park.

Days 2 - 7

Wildlife excursions from Magura

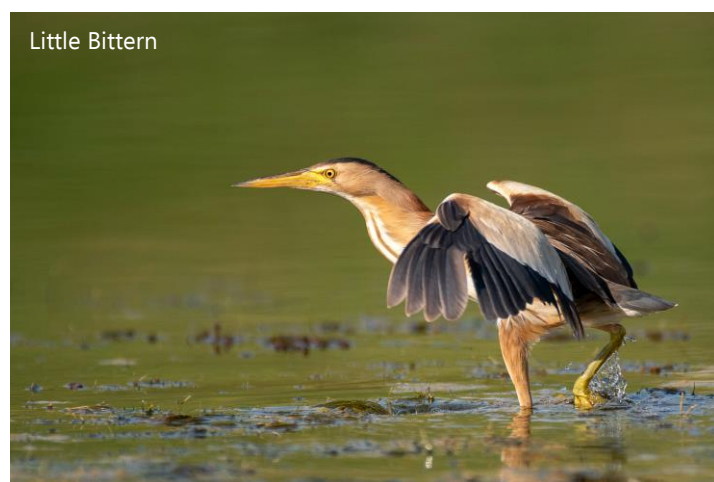
We have the next 6 full days to explore the mountains, gorges and valleys of Transylvania. Our exact itinerary will depend on the weather conditions and advice of our local guide, but we will be focusing our efforts on the spectacular Piatra Craiului National Park (Rock-of-the-King). This dramatic park is

dominated by a 25 kilometre jagged limestone ridge, widely regarded as one of Romania's most beautiful sights, which reaches a height of 2,244 metres. Brown Bears, Wolf and even Lynx still roam the forests whilst, to date, 110 species of bird and 1,100 species of higher plant have been recorded, including 2 endemics. There are many spectacular and wildlife rich areas to explore. The lower slopes are cut by a series of spectacular limestone gorges, such as the Zarnesti Gorge, home to Wallcreepers, Black Redstarts, Crag Martins, Ring Ouzels and wheeling flocks of Alpine Swifts. The surrounding forests are also the haunt of Lesser Spotted Eagle, Goshawk, Golden Oriole, Sombre Tit, Black, Grey-headed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, plus the majestic, but very elusive, Ural Owl. There is also much to keep the botanist and lepidopterist interested including a wealth of orchids, plus Scarce Swallowtail, Camberwell Beauty, Marsh and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, and Small Heath.



On one day we will take a horse-drawn cart ride, enjoying a more relaxing way of getting around, and finding out more about some of the local people who make their home in these mountains.

Throughout the week we will aim to look for tracks of some of the region's big mammals and learn how to find and identify the prints, spoor and other easily missed signs of the large carnivores that still patrol these hills. We hope to find wolf and bear tracks and learn how to tell the former from the more common dog prints. Then, as the sun lowers, we will make our way to a specially constructed hide deep in the forests to watch the animals themselves (approximately 1 hour from Zarnesti). Wolves and Lynx are rarely seen, but the Brown Bears frequently descend from the hills in the evening and, whilst nothing is certain in the world of wildlife watching, we have a good chance of finding one or more of these



magnificent creatures. Indeed, Romania still holds the largest population of Brown Bears on the continent and whilst they are not faring so well in other regions of Europe, in the Carpathians they are flourishing!

As spectacular as the mountains are, we will take a short break from the hills on one day to visit the Dumbravita Fishing complex, a 420 hectare Ramsar wetland teeming with waterbirds and a wealth of other lowland species. Great White Egrets, White Stork,

Purple Herons and Marsh Harrier are common whilst other species to look out for include Red-necked Grebe, Little Bittern, Red-footed Falcon, Black Tern, White-winged Black Tern, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Penduline Tit and Red-backed Shrike. If time permits, we will visit to the nearby medieval town

of Brasov and spend an hour or so here to learn a little about the history of region and enjoy Brasov's medieval architecture.

Finally, it is impossible to visit Transylvania and completely ignore the folklore and stories that abound here. We hope to, therefore, to end trip with a visit to nearby Castle Bran, the 'alleged' haunt of Vlad the Impaler, on whom the Dracula stories are based.

Day 8

London

Today we must sadly return to Bucharest, but will try and break the journey wherever possible. Our return flight to London usually departs in the late afternoon or early evening.

Images Courtesy of Shutterstock

Tour grading

Grade B - Easy to moderately strenuous. We will be on foot, on mountain trails, for the best part of each day and some of the trails can be steep (up and down hill) and rocky in places. Several miles will be covered on foot each day, although the longest walk is in the region of 5 miles (8km). The walks are a mixture of circular, one way and return walks. As such, this tour is suitable for people with an average to good level of fitness and a love of walking in the hills.

A typical day will start with breakfast at 0730 hours and departing the guesthouse at 0830 hours. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, generally in blocks of three to four hours, with a lunch break in the middle of the day. Return in the evenings will be around 1730 hours, to give time to freshen up ahead of dinner at 1830 hours, apart from on the evening when the bear hide is visited. On a number of days there are no toilet facilities available and people should be prepared for this. Your leader or guide can advise on best practices for using 'bush toilets'.

NB - Please note that the Mosorel Guesthouse in Magura is located up in the hills, approximately 25 minutes from the town of Zarnesti, up a winding road. Although travelling up and down this road each day adds a little to the travelling, we feel this extra driving is more than compensated for by the idyllic setting of the guesthouse and the wonderful views it commands across the valley. If you would like to discuss this in more detail please give the Naturetrek office a call on 01962 733051.

Focus

This is a general wildlife tour (with a little local history) focusing on all aspects of natural history, in particular birds, butterflies, mammals and scenery. While the flora of the region will also be enjoyed, your tour leader will not normally be an expert botanist.

Weather

Mountain weather is always variable, with cloud and rain - and even snow - always a possibility, especially in the afternoons. However, at this time of year, the weather should be becoming settled, with daytime temperatures ranging from 15°C to 30°C (depending on altitude), and plenty of clear sunny weather. However, at high altitudes, overcast conditions can rapidly reduce temperatures, and here waterproofs and a warm jacket should be carried at all times.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Hotels in Romania are fairly simple in nature so you should not expect 5-star accommodation on this tour! This holiday is based in a simple, but comfortable, guesthouse (all rooms with private facilities) in the small mountain village of Magura. The guesthouse overlooks a rocky hillside where chamois and bears can often be seen. The water source is from the local springs, so water pressure in the guesthouse is affected by the water level in the springs and we would ask that our groups please be considerate with their water usage.

Meals will be a mix of traditional Romanian meals and more 'westernised' food. Lunches will be mostly picnics, but this will depend on the weather, and we may opt for an indoor meal on occasion. Evening meals will be generally taken at our guesthouse. Vegetarians can be catered for but please be aware that vegetarianism is a concept that is not always well understood in Romania and your choice of food may be somewhat limited and repetitive.

Flight Options

There are a limited number of regional flight options for this tour, and these are rarely direct. If you would like information regarding a regional departure, or upgrade options, please contact the Naturetrek office.

Your Safety & Security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/romania> regularly prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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