

TRAIN : **The Danube Express**

JOURNEY : CASTLES OF TRANSYLVANIA

Journey Duration : Upto 7 Days

DAY 1 ISTANBUL

Arrive into Istanbul where you will be met and transferred to the iconic five-star Four Seasons Sultanahmet hotel for a one-night stay. A century-old neoclassical home located in the tranquil sanctuary of the Old City and steps away from the top historic attractions of the Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, this boutique hotel offers a calming space filled with charm and sophistication.

This evening we will enjoy a welcome reception dinner, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travelers.

Why not extend your stay in Istanbul to explore more of the city at your leisure? Please contact us for hotel options, touring programmes and rates.

DAY 2 ISTANBUL

Istanbul is the fabled city that spans Asia and Europe. Today see how old meets new, east meets west when we visit a selection of Istanbul's must-see historic sites.

One of the most famous monuments in both the Turkish and Islamic worlds, the Sultan Ahmet Mosque (the Blue Mosque) is a superb creation in the classical Ottoman style and features six towering minarets and 260 windows illuminating its vast main chamber, which is decorated with more than 20,000 Iznik tiles.

Now a museum, Hagia Sophia was built in the 6th century by the Emperor Justinian and was one of the largest basilicas in the Christian world. After the Ottoman conquest, it was converted to a mosque and is today one of the most magnificent museums in the world. Take a moment to linger here to admire the fine Byzantine architecture.

The largest and oldest palace in the world and primary residence of the Ottoman Sultans from 1465 to 1853, Topkapi is the crown jewel of the Ottoman Empire. With its treasury and exotic buildings overlooking the Golden Horn, your visit to Topkapi promises to be a truly fascinating experience.

Late afternoon we join our private train, the Golden Eagle Danube Express, to begin our rail journey through Bulgaria and Romania to Budapest.

DAY 3 VELIKO TARNOVO

This morning we enjoy the views from our private train as we climb over the Shipka Pass and arrive at our first stop Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria's ancient capital. Nestled in a magnificent mountain setting, the stone houses seem perched one above the other on the steep banks of the Yantra River. A tour includes the superbly preserved medieval Tsarevets Hill and Castle and there is free time to wander through the narrow alleyways of the ancient city.

This evening relax in the Bar Lounge Car before dinner is served as our train continues through the scenic landscape as we head across the Romanian border.

DAY 4 SINAIA & BRASOV

Overnight the train twists and turns as it climbs over the Carpathian Mountains and threads its way through the dramatic landscape with crystal clear mountain streams.

This morning we arrive in Sinaia for a tour of Peles Castle. The castle is a masterpiece of German new-Renaissance architecture, considered by many one of the most stunning castles in Europe. Commissioned by King Carol I in 1873 and completed in 1883, the castle served as the summer residence of the royal family until 1947. Its 160 rooms are adorned with the finest examples of European art, Murano crystal chandeliers, German stained-glass windows and Cordoba leather-covered walls.

Returning to our private train for lunch we continue onto Brasov in the afternoon for a visit to Bran Castle. Surrounded by an aura of mystery and legend and perched high atop a 200-foot-high rock, the 14th century castle owes its fame to its imposing towers and turrets as well as to the myth created around Bram Stoker's Dracula. Following a tour of the castle and its surroundings we will enjoy a gala dinner tonight inside the castle walls.

DAY 5 SIGHISOARA & SIBIU

This morning we make an early departure from Brasov and arrive after breakfast into Sighisoara for a walking tour of the town's main highlights. A World Heritage site rumoured to be the birthplace of Dracula, it is one of the best-preserved fortified medieval towns in Europe. Burgher houses and ornate churches line its cobbled streets.

We return to the train for lunch as we continue onto Sibiu, known specifically for its Germanic architecture in the Old Town due to the legacy of 12th-century Saxon settlers. Around the city today can be seen the remains of medieval walls and towers, including the 13th-century Council Tower which connects the two main squares.

Tonight, we enjoy a Farewell Dinner on board our private train as we travel across the Great Hungarian Plain.

DAY 6 KECSKEMET & LAJOSMIZSE

This morning we get the opportunity to explore Kecskemét, a fascinating city at the geographical centre of Hungary before the train heads to Lajosmizse for a spectacular 'Pusztá' horse show.

We then arrive late afternoon at the romantic and historic Hungarian capital, Budapest, located on the banks of the magnificent Danube, where we will enjoy a one-night stay in the five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace hotel, a unique art nouveau landmark which combines historical elegance with ultra-modern comforts.

This evening we will enjoy a farewell reception dinner at a local restaurant, giving you the opportunity to reflect on your journey through this fascinating part of Europe.

DAY 7 BUDAPEST

This morning, after an overnight stay at the Four Seasons Gresham Palace, we enjoy our final breakfast on the tour.

Why not extend your stay in Budapest to explore the Hungarian capital at your leisure? Please contact us for hotel options and rates.