

Jim Gold International Folk Tours

Eastern Bulgaria and Romania

August 16-30, 2027

**Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Turnovo,
Zheravna National Costume Folk Festival!
Varna, Bucharest, Sibiu, Brasov**

**Led by Ventsi Milev, guided by Iskren Ivanov
with Bulgarian folk dance teacher Niki Enchev, and musician
(gaida) Ventsi Andonov**

**Folk Dance, Music, History, Culture,
Adventure, and Friendship**



Welcome to the Zheravna Costume Folk Festival

Featuring

- ★ **Zheravna National Costume Folk Festival:** One of the unforgettable highlights of our journey—a joyous day of costumes, music, dancing, friendship, and Bulgarian tradition come vividly to life.
- ★ **Folk dancing with Bulgarian folkdance teacher, Niki Enchev and gaida player, Ventsi Andonov**
- ★ **Meet and dance with regional folkdance groups**
- ★ **Sofia, Bulgaria's historic capital**
- ★ **Regional foods, local wines, and welcoming restaurants**
- ★ **The Black Sea region and the city of Varna**
- ★ **Traditional Bulgarian villages and towns**
- ★ **Beautiful Romanian countryside and village life**
- ★ **Medieval architecture, churches, monasteries, and town squares**
- ★ **Comfortable hotels and private motorcoach transportation**
- ★ **Wallachia--Bucharest--old and new Romanians**
- ★ **Transylvania--Germans and Hungarians**
- ★ **Maramures--the old customs and unique dances**
- ★ **Price includes hotels, private bus, guide, sightseeing, all breakfasts and dinners**
- ★ **Dance, learn, explore, and make new friends**

Our Itinerary

Day 1: August 16, Monday: Sofia

Arrival in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria and the starting point of our journey through the living traditions of the Balkans. After settling into our hotel, we gather for a welcome dinner and introduction.

Day 2: August 17, Tuesday: Sofia

Our exploration of Bulgaria begins with a guided walking tour of Sofia, a city where ancient history, Orthodox traditions and modern life meet. Built on the foundations of Roman Serdica and located at the foot of Vitosha Mountain, the capital preserves layers of Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and modern Bulgarian heritage. We discover some of Sofia's most important landmarks, including Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, St. Sofia Basilica, the Roman remains of ancient Serdica and the city's famous "Square of Tolerance", where different religious communities have stood side by side for centuries.

In the afternoon there is time for individual exploration or an optional visit to the UNESCO-listed Boyana Church and the National History Museum. Located on the slopes of Vitosha Mountain, Boyana Church is one of Bulgaria's greatest medieval treasures, famous for its exceptionally

preserved 13th-century frescoes, considered among the finest examples of medieval European art. The National History Museum offers a fascinating introduction to Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage through its extensive collections of archaeological treasures, traditional costumes, crafts and historical artefacts.

In the evening, we enjoy a traditional Bulgarian dinner accompanied by folk music and dancing, offering our first introduction to the rhythms, costumes and hospitality that will accompany us throughout the journey.

Day 3: August 18, Wednesday: Sofia – Rila Monastery – Plovdiv

Leaving Sofia, we travel south through the scenic foothills of the Rila Mountains to visit the UNESCO-listed Rila Monastery, Bulgaria's most important spiritual and cultural monument. Founded in the 10th century by St. Ivan of Rila, the monastery has played a vital role in preserving Bulgarian language, literature and national identity. We explore its impressive architecture, colorful frescoes, carved wooden details and peaceful mountain setting.

After our visit, we enjoy a traditional lunch featuring fresh river trout and Bulgarian bean soup before continuing to Plovdiv, one of Europe's oldest continuously inhabited cities and Bulgaria's artistic and cultural capital. A short walking tour introduces us to the charming Old Town, with its cobbled streets, beautifully preserved 19th-century Revival houses, Roman remains and historic churches. We begin discovering the unique blend of ancient heritage and Bulgarian traditions that makes Plovdiv one of the highlights of our journey.



Historic home in Plovdiv

Day 4 / AUG 19 THU: Plovdiv – Thracian Valley & Rose Valley – Shipka – Etara – Veliko Tarnovo

Today we continue through the Valley of the Thracian Kings, also famous as the Rose Valley, a region known for its ancient Thracian heritage, beautiful landscapes and centuries-old tradition of rose cultivation. We visit the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and discover the fascinating legacy of one of Europe's oldest civilizations. Nearby, we stop at the impressive Shipka Memorial Church, built in honor of those who fought for Bulgaria's liberation.

Crossing the Balkan Mountains through the scenic Shipka Pass, we continue to Etara, an open-air ethnographic museum where traditional Bulgarian village life has been preserved. Here we meet craftsmen demonstrating old skills such as weaving, pottery, wood carving and other traditional trades, offering a glimpse into the everyday life and creativity of past generations.

In the afternoon we arrive in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria's medieval capital, dramatically situated among the hills and bends of the Yantra River.



Veliko Tarnovo

Day 5 / AUG 20 FRI: Veliko Tarnovo – Balkan Mountains – Zheravna

We begin the day exploring Veliko Tarnovo with a visit to Tsarevets Hill, where the remains of the royal palace, fortress walls and churches recall the glory of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. We continue along Samovodska Street, a traditional crafts street where local artisans demonstrate skills such as pottery, wood carving and other old Bulgarian crafts.

We then cross the Balkan Mountains through beautiful landscapes of forests, meadows and mountain villages, following historic routes that once connected communities on both sides of the range. En route, we visit the village of Arbanassi, famous for its well-preserved 18th-century architecture and richly decorated churches, including the remarkable Church of the Nativity with its exceptional frescoes.

In the afternoon we continue to Zheravna, one of Bulgaria's finest examples of a traditional Balkan village. With its wooden Revival-era houses, stone-paved streets and authentic atmosphere, Zheravna provides the perfect setting for our immersion into Bulgarian folk traditions ahead of the Festival of National Costume.



Gaida player and dancers at the Zheravna Festival

Day 6 / AUG 21 SAT: Zheravna Folk Festival

Today is dedicated to one of Bulgaria's most authentic cultural events – the Zheravna Festival of National Costume. Set among the beautiful surroundings of the Eastern Balkan Mountains, the festival brings together thousands of participants dressed in traditional Bulgarian costumes, musicians, dancers and folk groups from across the country.

Throughout the day, we immerse ourselves in Bulgaria's living heritage through traditional music, horo dances, regional costumes, crafts and customs. The narrow, cobbled streets and wooden Revival-era houses of Zheravna provide a unique setting where old traditions come to life, offering countless opportunities to meet performers, enjoy local food and experience the atmosphere of a true Bulgarian folk celebration.

Day 7 / AUG 22 SUN: Zheravna – Nessebar – Varna

Leaving Zheravna, we continue towards the Black Sea coast, with a stop in Nessebar, one of Bulgaria's most remarkable historic towns. Situated on a small peninsula, the UNESCO-listed Old Town preserves a unique atmosphere with its cobbled streets, medieval churches, traditional wooden houses and centuries of maritime history.

Continuing north, we visit the village of Priseltsi, where we meet a local craftsman preserving the tradition of making the Bulgarian gaida (bagpipe), one of the most distinctive instruments of Bulgarian folk music. Through this encounter, we learn about the craftsmanship, materials and cultural importance of an instrument that has accompanied Bulgarian songs and dances for generations.

In the late afternoon we arrive in Varna, Bulgaria's maritime capital, where we have time to enjoy the atmosphere of the city and the Black Sea coast.

Day 8 / AUG 23 MON: Varna – Balchik – Dobruja – Bucharest

Before leaving Bulgaria, we explore Varna, the country's maritime capital. Our visit includes the Archaeological Museum, home to the famous Varna Gold Treasure, the oldest processed gold in the world, dating back more than 6,000 years and offering a fascinating glimpse into the advanced culture of Europe's earliest civilizations.

We then continue north along the Black Sea coast to Balchik, a charming coastal town whose history reflects the diverse cultural influences of the region. We visit the former summer residence of Queen Marie of Romania and its beautiful botanical gardens, a reminder of the historical connections between Bulgaria and Romania.

Crossing into Romania through Dobruja, a region shaped by centuries of interaction between different peoples and traditions, we continue to Bucharest. In the evening, we enjoy a traditional Romanian welcome dinner, introducing us to the country's cuisine and hospitality.



Romanian dancer welcome you!

Day 9 / AUG 24 TUE: Bucharest

Today we explore Bucharest, Romania's vibrant capital, a city of elegant boulevards, historic buildings and fascinating contrasts between old and new. Our walking tour introduces us to some of the city's landmarks, including the Romanian Athenaeum, the Patriarchal Church, the Old Princely Court, Revolution Square and the atmospheric streets of the Old Town.

In the afternoon there is time for individual exploration or an optional visit to the Romanian Peasant Museum, one of the country's most important cultural institutions, with outstanding collections of traditional costumes, handwoven carpets, painted eggs, ceramics and wooden crafts. The museum provides a fascinating introduction to the regional diversity of Romanian folk culture and the skills that have shaped village life for generations.

In the evening, we enjoy a traditional Romanian dinner accompanied by folk music and dance, beginning our journey into the living traditions of Romania.

Day 10 / AUG 25 WED: Bucharest – Sinaia – Bran – Brasov

Leaving Bucharest, we travel north through the beautiful landscapes of the Carpathian Mountains towards Transylvania. Our first stop is Sinaia, known as the “Pearl of the Carpathians”, where we visit Peles Castle, the former summer residence of Romania’s royal family and one of the country’s most beautiful architectural landmarks. Surrounded by forests and mountains, the castle combines Neo-Renaissance architecture with impressive collections of art, furniture, textiles and decorative objects.

Continuing through the Prahova Valley, we reach Bran Castle, famously associated with the legend of Dracula and the historical figure of Vlad the Impaler. Beyond the legends, the castle reflects the history of the border region between Transylvania and Wallachia and its traditional trade routes.



Dracula’s Castle

In the late afternoon we arrive in Brasov, a beautifully preserved medieval city surrounded by the Carpathians. We enjoy a walking tour through the historic center, including Council Square, the Black Church and the charming cobbled streets that reveal the city’s Saxon heritage.

Day 11 / AUG 26 THU: Brasov – Sighisoara – Sibiu

Today we continue deeper into Transylvania, a region where Romanian, Saxon and Hungarian influences have shaped a unique cultural landscape. Our first stop is Sighisoara, one of the best-preserved medieval citadels in Europe and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Walking through its narrow, cobbled streets, colorful houses and fortified towers, we discover a town where medieval traditions and architecture have survived almost unchanged.

We continue to Sibiu, one of Transylvania’s most beautiful historic cities and an important cultural center. During our walking tour, we explore the atmospheric Old Town, including the Great and Little Squares, the Council Tower, the historic guild houses and the impressive Evangelical Church, reflecting the city’s Saxon heritage.

In the evening, we enjoy the charm of Sibiu’s historic center, with its cafés, restaurants and beautifully preserved architecture.

Day 12 / AUG 27 FRI: Sibiu – ASTRA Open-Air Museum – Sibiel – Sibiu

Today we discover the traditional culture of Transylvania through some of Romania’s finest ethnographic experiences. We visit the ASTRA National Museum Complex, one of the largest open-air museums in Europe, where traditional houses, wooden churches, workshops, windmills and farmsteads from different regions of Romania recreate the atmosphere of village life as it existed for generations.



Peasant homes

The museum offers a fascinating insight into Romania’s rural traditions, architecture and craftsmanship, with demonstrations of old skills such as woodworking, weaving and other traditional crafts.

In the afternoon we continue to the nearby village of Sibiel, known for its strong traditions and

welcoming local community. We visit the Museum of Glass Icons, home to one of the largest collections of Transylvanian painted glass icons, and experience the atmosphere of a traditional village that has preserved its customs, crafts and way of life.

Return to Sibiu for overnight.

Day 13 / AUG 28 SAT: Sibiu – Maramure – Sighetu Marmatiei

Today we leave Transylvania and travel north towards Maramureş, one of Romania's most traditional regions and a place where old customs, craftsmanship and village life remain deeply rooted. The scenic route takes us through the Carpathian landscapes and rural communities of northern Romania.

Upon arrival in Maramureş, we discover a region famous for its wooden churches, carved gates, traditional costumes and strong sense of community. The villages here have preserved many elements of traditional life, from woodworking and weaving to seasonal customs and celebrations passed down through generations.

We continue to Sighetu Marmatiei, the cultural centre of the region, where we overnight before exploring the villages and living traditions of Maramureş in greater depth.



Dancers from Sibiu

Day 14 / AUG 29 SUN: Maramure: Villages, Wooden Churches & Living Traditions

Today we immerse ourselves in the unique cultural landscape of Maramureş, one of Romania's most traditional regions. We visit the Maramureş Village Museum near Sighetu Marmatiei, an open-air ethnographic museum presenting authentic wooden houses, gates, workshops and traditional farmsteads from the surrounding villages. The museum offers a fascinating introduction to the architecture, crafts and daily life of a region where old traditions have been preserved for centuries.

We continue through the countryside to explore the famous villages of Maramureş, known for their beautifully carved wooden gates, traditional costumes and strong community customs. We visit Sapanta, home to the colorful Merry Cemetery, where hand-painted wooden crosses tell the stories of local people through vivid images and folk-style verses. We also visit one of the region's remarkable wooden churches, including the UNESCO-listed wooden churches that represent the exceptional craftsmanship of Maramureş.

Throughout the day, we experience the living traditions of the region, with opportunities to meet local people, discover traditional crafts and learn about the customs, music and way of life that make Maramureş one of Europe's most fascinating cultural landscapes.

Day 15 / AUG 30 MON: Sighetu Marmatiei – Cluj

Today we leave Maramureş and continue south towards Cluj-Napoca, travelling



Romanian dancers bid you farewell

through the scenic landscapes of northern Transylvania. Along the way, we make stops in the countryside to enjoy further glimpses of the region's traditional villages, where wooden houses, carved gates and small rural communities still preserve the character of old Romania.

The journey offers a final opportunity to appreciate the landscapes and cultural heritage of Maramureş before returning to the more urban atmosphere of Cluj, the historic capital of Transylvania and one of Romania's most vibrant cultural centres.

Upon arrival in Cluj-Napoca, we explore the city centre, with its elegant squares, historic buildings and multicultural heritage shaped by Romanian, Hungarian and Saxon influences.

Overnight in Cluj.

Day 16 / AUG 31 TUE: Cluj-Napoca – Departure

After breakfast, transfer to Cluj-Napoca International Airport for your departure flight.

As our journey through Bulgaria and Romania comes to an end, we leave behind memories of centuries-old villages, traditional crafts, folk music and dances, historic towns, and the living cultural heritage of the Balkans and the Carpathian region.

Land Only: \$5995

(Private tour price: \$7995)

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