



Romania Revealed: Saxon Villages, Transylvanian Cities and Byzantine Monasteries 2026

20 MAY – 2 JUN 2026

Code: 22616

Tour Leaders **Dr Adrian Jones, OAM**

Fitness Level 

Level 1 - Active

For people with active lives and good mobility

Explore Romania's great scenic beauty & diverse culture in rich art collections, walled cities, medieval castles, Saxon fortified churches, frescoed Moldavian monasteries & secluded old villages.

Overview

- **Assoc. Professor Adrian Jones, OAM** and arts educator and consultant **Angelica Iacob** lead this tour of little-known, extraordinarily diverse Romania.
- Moldavia's unique heritage of painted monasteries, where every inch of both inner and outer walls is covered with brilliantly coloured late medieval and early modern Byzantine paintings.
- Centuries-old wooden churches and villages nestled in medieval agricultural landscapes of isolated Maramures; one of the richest heritages of wood architecture in the world.
- Picturesque old Saxon cities originating from the 11th-century German migration to Transylvania.
- Medieval fortified churches built by German migrants; these once existed in Western Europe but are long gone from there.
- Grand country houses and palaces like Princess Marie of Romania's Pelisor, and Mogosoaia Palace, which fuses Italian Renaissance, Ottoman and indigenous elements in a unique harmony.
- Fine collections of Romanian and European art with brilliant Eastern icons and the works of masters such as Van Eyck, Brueghel, El Greco, Rembrandt and Brancusi.
- Priceless collections of gold artefacts, dating from the Paleolithic to the 20th century.
- Beautiful mountain landscapes, with some of Europe's most ancient forests.
- Some of the best collections of old Turkish carpets outside Istanbul's Topkapi Palace and the V & A, in old Saxon churches, especially Brasov's Black Church.
- This tour is limited to 16 participants.

Overnight Bucharest (3 nights) • Sibiu (3 nights) • Baia Mare (1 night) • Borsa (1 night) • Gura Humorului (2 nights) • Brasov (2 nights) • Bucharest (1 night)

Introduction

This cultural tour explores Romania's fascinating complexity, arguably the most diverse culture in Europe. In Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, separated from each other by the densely forested Carpathian Mountains, we encounter an extraordinary and largely unchanged medieval, Renaissance and Baroque visual culture. We discover the meeting of the Latin and Germanic West with the Byzantine, Slav and Gypsy East. Medieval Saxon villages and fortified churches, Hungarian castles and towns, and German trading cities with grand Gothic cathedrals contrast with walled monasteries whose chapel walls are covered, inside and out, with brilliantly coloured Byzantine frescoes. In Romania, city and country stand in stark distinction. Sophisticated Bucharest and Sibiu have fine museums with rich collections of works by Van Eyck, Brueghel, Rembrandt, Manet and Monet, as well as colourful Eastern icons, tapestries and intricately carved wooden doors. Saxon trading cities like Brasov, meanwhile, preserve the greatest collections of old Turkish carpets outside Istanbul. In contrast, we'll explore Romanian peasant culture, which has survived unchanged in the isolated villages of Maramures and Bucovina, with distinctive wooden churches rivalling the masterpieces of Russia and Norway. Romanian folk culture has generated what Yehudi Menuhin considered Europe's richest musical tradition and the folklorist Moses Gaster deemed the world's most distinctive corpus of folk tales. 19th-century nationalists celebrated this living past which in turn encouraged a reaction by Romanian modernist artists of world standing including Brancusi, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu, Dada poets and the absurdist Ionescu. We also explore Romania's post-Soviet national identity in which the past's rich diversity is overlaid by an energetic, often edgy, modernity.

Travel Tuesdays: Explore the World Virtually
Beautiful and Beguiling Romania.
https://youtu.be/Z09LFgKo_OU

Leaders



Dr Adrian Jones, OAM

A retired Associate Professor of History, and a frequent contributor to ABC local radio, Adrian is a Harvard graduate and expert in Greek and Russian, Ottoman and Balkan history: ancient, medieval, modern. He leads ASA tours of the Balkans, especially both Macedonias and Albania, Romania, Istanbul and Slovenia-Croatia. Adrian loves to connect the Ancient to the Modern, and he loves to compare Europe's East to Europe's West.

Recently retired, Dr Adrian Jones, OAM was Associate Professor of European History at La Trobe University. Adrian loves to combine travel, cuisine and history, which he also reprises on segments on ABC local radio and on ABC Radio National. He enjoys the challenges of connecting epochs, cultures, languages and places. He graduated with a BA from the University of Melbourne, an MA from La Trobe University and an MA and PhD from Harvard University, eventually specialising in Russian, Turkish, French and Balkan history. Adrian has published scholarly articles on the philosophy of history, historiography, educational theory, comparative revolutions, and French, Balkan, Russian and Turkish social and intellectual history. Adrian is currently finishing one book about Mustafa Kemal and the ANZACs and starting another on Russian-Romanian-Ottoman relations in the early-eighteenth-century. A foundation Director of the [Australian] *National Centre for History Education* and a former Chair of *The History Council of Victoria*, Adrian was awarded a national Teaching Council award in 2008, and an *Order of Australia Medal* in 2009 for his teaching and professional activities. Adrian first co-led ASA's tour to Romania with the Late Christopher Wood in 2019. He currently leads ASA tours, to Romania, along the Via Egnatia in Macedonia (Greek and Slav) through Albania to Corfu, an in-depth program to Istanbul, and to Slovenia-and-inland Croatia.

Combine this tour with

Bulgaria & the Black Sea: Painted Towns, Byzantine Monasteries & Thracian Treasures 2026

6 MAY – 20 MAY 2026

Türkiye: The Ages of Anatolia 2026

24 APR – 14 MAY 2026



Itinerary

The detailed itinerary provides an outline of the proposed daily program. The daily activities described in this itinerary may be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate changes in museum opening hours, flight schedules etc. The tour includes breakfast daily, lunches and dinners indicated in the detailed itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner.

Bucharest - 3 nights

Day 1: Wednesday 20 May, Arrive Bucharest

- Tour commences at 4.30pm in the foyer of the Mercure Bucharest City Center
- Orientation Meeting
- Welcome Dinner

Meeting Point: The tour commences at 4.30pm in the foyer of the [Mercure Bucharest City Center](#) located in the heart of Romania's capital, Bucharest. We commence the tour with a short orientation meeting before we enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant. (Overnight Bucharest) D

Day 2: Thursday 21 May, Bucharest

- Morning coach tour of central Bucharest
- National Museum of Romanian History
- National Museum of Art of Romania: European masterpieces
- Visit and drinks at Vasile Grigori Museum

Bucharest, first mentioned in documents in 1459, evolved from a 14th-century settlement that was part of a chain of fortresses built across the Danube plain to protect Wallachia from the Turks. In the 18th and early 19th centuries it was subject to Phanariot Greeks, who ruled as clients of the Divine Porte. In 1862, when Moldavia and Wallachia were united, it became Romania's first national capital. Bucharest has a unique

urban form. Unlike many Western European capitals it was never surrounded, and therefore constricted, by a city wall; the Turks would not allow the fortification of Wallachian cities. Although Bucharest does possess a tightly packed historic core, the Lipscani district, most of the city developed over a wide area, its beautiful 15th and 16th century monasteries, inns and palaces separated by swathes of countryside; Bucharest's early plan seems to have been based loosely upon the Italian schema for an 'ideal city', originating in European notions of Jerusalem. In the 17th century, more churches were built, and in the 18th century many villas were added. The Phanariot Greeks built houses based upon the homesteads and inns of the Christian quarter of Istanbul, with deeply overhanging eaves and courtyards. The Phanariots also introduced public squares – *maidan* – of the type that is seen throughout Asia (eg Isfahan). The creation of the first Romanian state in 1862, and the subsequent incorporation of Transylvania after WWI, led to two periods of great creative energy, seen in literature, music, art and architecture, and reflected in the physical development of the capital. In both phases of development buildings began to fill the green spaces between the older monuments. In the earlier phase, Bucharest gained the title 'Little Paris' in part due to its magnificent monuments in the French style like the Bucharest Athenaeum (1888). At this time also, a fascinating Romanian National Style emerged. This 'Brancovan' style, characterised by picturesque arcades with intricate arches, was based upon architecture from the time of Constantine. The interwar period saw a flowering of early modernism in Bucharest, exemplified by the houses of Marcel Iancu. During the Communist period massive monuments like Ceausescu's House of the Republic (now Palace of Parliament) were imposed upon the city.

We shall visit the world's largest building after the Pentagon, but shall also see lovely old churches, old palaces, and fine Beaux-Arts, Art Nouveau and Brancovan, and modernist architecture. Central Bucharest also retains lovely parks and lots and lots of small, leafy, out-of-the-way cafés.

After touring central Bucharest we shall visit the National Museum of Romanian History. Its great treasure is an extraordinary collection of gold artefacts dating from as early as the Palaeolithic period (600,000-6000 BC) and covering ancient Dacia, the Migration Period, the emergence of the medieval Moldavian and Wallachian principalities, Gothic and Renaissance Transylvania, the Phanariot period, the emergence of the National monarchy, and the 20th century. The other exhibit that we shall view in this museum is the great collection of plaster casts taken from Trajan's Column, in Rome, picturing Trajan's invasion of Dacia (101-102 and 105-106 AD). This priceless gift was given to Romania by the Italian government. The many plaster casts allow you to explore close up the vast, intricate relief cycle depicting the Roman army's operations in this region.

We shall eat lunch amid rich wood sculpture and panelling, gilt and painted walls, fine ironwork and stained glass in the wonderful Neo Gothic Caru' cu Bere restaurant that was founded in 1879, and has remained unchanged since it was moved to its present location in 1899. The Caru' cu Bere will give you a taste of Romanian café life during the late 19th and early 20th century when Bucharest was the most vibrant cultural centre of Eastern Europe.

We shall spend some of the afternoon in the rich European collection of the National Museum of Art of Romania. This museum, housed in the former Royal Palace, is composed of a wing dedicated to Romanian art and a European wing whose fine collection, including works by Brueghel, Bronzino, Tintoretto, Cranach, Zurbarán, El Greco, Rembrandt, Monet, Pissarro, Signac and Sisley, derives from the 19th-century Royal Collection.

We shall end this afternoon nearby in the fascinating Vasile Grigori Museum, where you will explore the collection of this important Romanian modern artist. Drinks and snacks will be served at the museum. (Overnight Bucharest) BL

Day 3: Friday 22 May, Bucharest

- Mogosoia Palace
- National Museum of Art of Romania: Romanian Collection
- Theodor Aman House Museum
- Romanian Athenaeum (exterior)

This morning we travel just outside the city to visit Mogosoia Palace. Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu built Mogosoia (1698-1702), one of the most beautiful and distinctive palaces in Eastern Europe. It is in the Brancovan or *Brâncovenesc* style, the revival of which we have noted in 19th-century Bucharest architecture. The palace has a symmetrical plan inspired by the Italian Renaissance, but is adorned with wonderful galleries with intricate arches, ascribed variously to the influence of Venetian and Ottoman architecture. Although inspired by foreign models, these elements are combined in an utterly unique way, reflecting the fascinating syncretism of Romanian culture.

Following lunch at a local restaurant we visit the National Museum of Art of Romania, where we explore the extensive Romanian art collection. This includes icons and iconostases, rich textiles and intricately carved wooden thrones and doors from Orthodox churches and monasteries, courtly garb and decorative objects from the Moldavian and Wallachian principalities, Gothic treasures from Catholic Transylvania, as well as a very significant 19th-century and early modernist painting and sculpture collection. The medieval collections reflect Romania's fertile mix of Eastern and Western cultural elements. The 19th-century collection begins with portraits in which men are clothed in the fashions of the Ottoman court, whereas women follow French fashion. There is also a large corpus of Romanian Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and Modernist works, whose fine quality shows the country's close links to Paris. Modernist artists include the famous Romanian artists Constantin Brancusi and the Dadaist Marcel Iancu (Marcel Janko). This rich collection, of the works of artists like Nicolae Grigorescu, Theodor Aman, and Matisse's old friend Theodor Pallady, like Bucharest's architecture and Enescu's music, show the cultural vitality unleashed by Romania's attainment of national unity.

A short walk takes us to the lovely small house museum of one of Romania's finest 19th-century artists, Theodor Aman. After travelling to Crimea during the Crimean War, where he painted *The Battle of Alma*, Theodor gained a scholarship to study in Paris, where he was much influenced by the Barbizon School. Some of the most fascinating works in the house museum's collection are small sketches painted on the lids of cigar boxes, which are very like those of Australia's Heidelberg School.

After exploring this museum we view the exterior of Bucharest's Athenaeum. Its magnificent opera hall, designed by the French architect Albert Galleron, is arguably the finest 19th-century opera hall in Eastern Europe. The building is home to the George Enescu Philharmonic, named after Romania's greatest composer; Yehudi Menuhin was his most famous pupil.

Tonight we dine together at a local restaurant. (Overnight Bucharest) BLD

Sibiu - 3 nights

Day 4: Saturday 23 May, Bucharest – Curtea de Arges – Cozia – Sibiu

- Biserica Domneasca St Nicolae, Curtea de Arges
- Episcopal Church, Curtea de Arges
- Cozia Monastery

This morning we depart Bucharest early by private coach for the Wallachian Royal shrine of Curtea de Arges (Court on the River Arges), where we shall visit two extremely important and beautiful churches. Curtea de Arges is located in the upland region of Wallachia called Muntenia, on the southern verge of the Transylvanian Alps. The Biserica Domneasca St Nicolae is a stunning small Byzantine construction variously dated between the 12th and 14th centuries. It was modelled upon the churches of Constantinople that take their name from the Comnenus dynasty (1081-1185). It is liberally decorated with a large cycle of frescoes, whose style and iconography, like that of the church of St Saviour in Chora in Istanbul, is based upon the *Erminii*, a Byzantine manual that laid down strict rules for the creation of images.

After lunch in Curtea de Arges we shall visit the early 16th-century Episcopal Church founded by Prince Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521). This church, with whom the tragic poem of the builder Master Manole is associated, perhaps best of all represents the fascinating syncretism of Romanian culture. To a Byzantine triple-apsed east end is linked a grand narthex – a royal mausoleum – giving the church a basilical plan usually associated with the West. Its extraordinarily intricate façade architecture, however, is even more fascinating. It has many Byzantine elements and Islamic motifs that seem to derive from Persian art, as well as distinctive Romanian ‘barley-sugar’ cupolas.

On our drive north into Transylvania this afternoon you will gain your first taste of the awesome scenery of Romania. We follow a narrow valley through the Carpathians into Saxon Transylvania and along the way we visit Cozia Monastery. This little-visited but lovely complex has two churches; a monastery church and infirmary church (1542). The monastery church was completed in 1390 by Serbian architects and is modelled on the churches of the Morava Valley. Trefoil in plan, with a long rectangular narthex, it is tall and narrow. The exterior walls are decorated with filigree latticework, decorative tiles, blind arcades and classical columns. Influences for these motifs are as diverse as Classical Greek and Islamic forms.

After visiting Cozia, we drive through the steadily narrowing Olt River Pass into Transylvania. Transylvania has a totally different cultural landscape to Wallachia. This is the territory of German villages and fortified churches. The latter are medieval complexes with a church surrounded by up to four rings of walls watched over by martial towers. These religious citadels protected the people and their livestock from Turkish and other incursions in a land which was constantly contested by outside powers. Much of the region’s wealth derived in the Middle Ages from the migration of Germans who brought with them technology such as looms, giving birth to a thriving textiles industry. Textiles were also traded, and one fascinating local custom was that the inner walls of churches are often hung with old, extremely rare Turkish carpets.

We shall encounter a number of these fortified churches, called ‘Real Citadels of Faith’. The Germans built their towns along the main trade routes that have long, continuous streetscapes of coloured façades. Wide, arched entrances to courtyards puncture these façades. Goods were stored and agricultural implements, animals and produce kept in the courtyards. With its fortified churches and distinctive towns this region makes you feel as though you have been transported back to late medieval Germany, into a Brueghel painting. (Overnight Sibiu) BLD

Day 5: Sunday 24 May, Sibiu

- Orientation tour of Sibiu
- Council Tower and other medieval towers
- Brukenthal Museum
- Afternoon at leisure

We spend the day in Sibiu, a Transylvanian town founded by medieval German migrants. Its oldest street dates from the 12th-century migration of Flemings, Frankonians and Saxons to Transylvania. Sibiu’s houses

are prettily coloured with steep roofs punctured by quaint openings that look like half-closed eyes; these vents were used to air goods stored in their attics. Sibiu is also the home of ASTRA (Asociatia Transilvenene de Arta si Literatura), a society founded in 1861 to encourage Romanians in Transylvania to appreciate and explore their own culture. ASTRA founded important museums and many of the region's greatest writers were members.

We visit the fine city square, beautifully restored when Sibiu became 'Capital of European Culture' for 2007; Forbes lists Sibiu as the 8th-most idyllic place in the world to live. At one end is the medieval council tower, which was both a centre for urban life and a symbol of the city's pride and independence.

We shall also visit Romania's second finest art collection, after the National Museum of Art of Romania (Bucharest). After a decade living in Vienna as Governor of the Great Principality of Transylvania (1777-1787), Baron Samuel von Brukenthal returned to Sibiu with his collections, and the Hochmeister's Calendar for the year 1790 mentions among the attractions of the city a painting collection including 800 paintings displayed in the halls of the Brukenthal Palace. Over time this collection was enriched. The collection of European paintings originally belonging to Brukenthal now includes around 1200 works from major schools from the 15th to the 19th century. The Flemish and Dutch schools are represented by masters from centres such as Anvers, Brussels, Ghent, Bruges, Amsterdam, Leiden and Utrecht. The pride of this collection is a group of paintings by Hans Memling, Jan van Eyck, Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Pieter Bruegel the Younger. Masters such as Lucas Cranach the Elder represent the Germans and Austrians. The Italian school, although made up of a relatively small number of works, nevertheless includes renowned artists: Botticelli, Tullio Lombardo, Titian, Paris Bordone, Sebastiano Ricci and Alessandro Magnasco. The remainder of the day will be at leisure. (Overnight Sibiu) B

Day 6: Monday 25 May, Sibiu – Biertan – Sighisoara – Apold – Sibiu

- Fortified church of Biertan
- Apafi Manor and/or church (subject to confirmation in 2026)
- Medieval Citadel of Sighisoara
- Fortified church of Apold

Today we explore the development of the Transylvanian fortified church and city. Biertan is one of the finest, most complete, extant examples of a fortified church. It stands on a hill above its village, approached by a long covered wooden staircase and defended by high walls and fortress towers. Within the fine Gothic church hang old guild banners (the guilds of the town were responsible for defending the enceinte as well as furnishing the church) and there is also a beautiful altarpiece. The treasury of the church is protected by a powerful old wood and iron door that has an extraordinarily intricate locking system so unique that it was exhibited at a 19th-century Paris exhibition.

After visiting Biertan we shall, if time permits, visit the lovely Apafi Manor, which has been restored by the Mihai Emenescu Trust. It was built by the Hungarian princely family, the Apafi, probably in the 15th century. It is most unusual to have a Hungarian manor house in a Saxon village. Hungarians seldom governed Saxon communities. Archaeology reveals that the Manor House was built in several phases. There was a house on the site in the 15th century. The present house was built, in its original form, by (or possibly before) the 17th century. It appears to have been altered in the 18th-19th centuries. This manor lay in ruins until the Mihai Emenescu Foundation, which numbers among its past and present board members Patrick Leigh Fermor, John Julius Norwich, Yehudi Menuin and Sir Stephen Runciman, took it over and restored it as a small guesthouse; the patron of the Foundation, who has been deeply involved in restoring a number of Saxon monuments, is Prince Charles.

We shall spend the middle of the day exploring Sighisoara, one of the most visually exciting fortified towns in Romania. It is made doubly romantic by its association with the Pied Piper of Hamelin, who is believed to have brought the children of the ungrateful citizens to the myriad passages and catacombs beneath the citadel. Set on a rock surrounded by the 'silver coils of the Tarnava Mare [River]' as well as by deeply forested hills, Sighisoara is the most complete fortress city in Transylvania. Strong towers, each built in a distinctive style by a different guild of the town, protect its walls. Of particular interest is the Clock Tower that has an intricate clock with seven oak figures symbolising days of the week that used to appear on the hour. These figures contain a marvellous mix of references to Greek mythology, local legend and astrology. The oldest private building in the citadel is the 15th-century house of Vlad Dracul, father of Vlad the Impaler, Prince of Wallachia, who may have been born here. There is an old German school with Baroque frescoes and a church with magnificent paintings and fine altarpieces, one of them by Johannes Stoss, the son of the famous Nuremburg sculptor, Viet Stoss, a leading figure of the Northern Renaissance.

We return to Sibiu via the lovely fortified church of Apold which is located on high ground at the centre of the village. It has a double defensive wall, towers and a fortified belfry. PLEASE NOTE: The keys to many fortified churches (other than Biertan, which is a public monument) are held by people in the towns in which the churches are sited. Our access to these churches therefore depends upon their availability on the day of our visit. (Overnight Sibiu) BLD

Baia Mare - 1 night

Day 7: Tuesday 26 May, Sibiu – Cluj-Napoca – Baia Mare

- St Michael's Church, Cluj-Napoca
- Bontida Bánffy Castle

Today we drive through the heart of Transylvania to Baia Mare in the far north of Romania. Along the way we visit Cluj-Napoca, a city whose form, like that of Sibiu, took shape when German migrants, brought here by Hungarian kings to protect the south-eastern flank of their Danubian kingdom, imported the urban and rural cultures of the Rhineland and Flanders. Their industriousness as cultivators, craftsmen and merchants made Cluj-Napoca a thriving centre. In the 15th century Hungarians arrived, inflecting the old German town with Magyar forms. In the 18th century it was the turn of the Habsburgs, whose Austrian subjects transformed the city with grand Baroque monuments.

We have lunch in Cluj and visit St Michael's, the largest Gothic church in Romania. After lunch, we visit Bontida Bánffy Castle, a grand estate of the powerful Hungarian Bánffy family with different sections in the Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical and Gothic Revival styles. The palace was heavily damaged during World War II and is gradually being restored with the patronage of Prince Charles and Princess Margareta of Romania. (Overnight Baia Mare) BLD

Borsa - 1 night

Day 8: Wednesday 27 May, Maramures Region: Baia Mare – Sapanta – Bârsana – Rozalvea – Ieud Deal – Bogdan Voda – Borsa

- Merry Cemetery, Sapanta
- Wooden churches & villages of Maramures region

Today we drive from Baia Mare to Borsa. These towns stand at either end of one of the most extraordinary cultural landscapes in Europe. The Maramures region constitutes a group of isolated valleys, skirted by mountains and deep forests, which harbour a culture distinguished by its astonishing continuity with the

past. Part of its population is even believed by some scholars to be the final pure remnant of the ancient Dacians.

Scattered through the valleys are towns and villages with wooden churches that constitute the densest and richest collection of traditional wooden architecture in the world, many of it preserving medieval forms. Oak and pine houses, built from the wood of nearby forests, reflect styles that once predominated throughout Eurasia, from northern Europe to Anatolia. Even more distinctive are the region's churches. These also evolved from a general idiom (seen from Scandinavia to Croatia) but took on specific forms in Maramures such as incredibly tall, elegant steeples, double-skirted roofs, and shingle cladding. These churches, moreover, contain a priceless heritage of interior wall paintings that mix Byzantine, Latin and folk elements.

In the meadows themselves, low soil ridges that are often mistaken for ancient terracing serve to separate small land holdings, as they once did in the medieval West. Set against a backdrop of mountain and forest, inflected by exquisite wooden buildings, they constitute an unsurpassable landscape of beauty. The people of Maramures have also preserved traditional clothing styles and distinctive festivals of which there are few equals. We shall drive through a number of valleys today, visiting communities and exploring villages and churches.

A particularly idiosyncratic element of local folk culture is Sapanta's so-called 'Merry Cemetery' in which wooden carved and painted grave markers depict local inhabitants with inscribed details of their lives; some of the inscriptions are hilarious, recounting the occupants' foibles! (Overnight Borsa) BLD

Gura Humorului – 2 nights

Day 9: Thursday 28 May, Borsa – Câmpulung Moldovenesc – Vama – Voronet – Humor – Gura Humorului

- Wood Art Museum, Câmpulung Moldovenesc
- Vama Egg Museum: Art of painting eggs
- Monastery of Voronet
- Monastery of Humor

This morning we depart Borsa for Gura Humorului in the Moldavian region of Bucovina via the famous monasteries of Voronet and Humor. Once into Moravia we follow a small, fast flowing river through historic villages like Ciocanesti. Village houses here are decorated with brightly coloured painted patterns reminiscent of the stitched designs on local textiles.

In the mid-morning we visit the Wood Art Museum at Câmpulung Moldovenesc. This town, whose name means 'Moldavian Long Field', has for centuries been a centre for lumber and possesses a museum that is unique in Europe. Twenty rooms displaying every imaginable artefact, including shoes, beehives, butter churns, farm implements, furniture, animal traps, large sleds and even 300-year-old wagons, all made of wood, provide a vivid visual narrative of peasant life. The myriad objects in this wonderful little museum form a telling companion to Romania's fascinating local architecture and extraordinary corpus of folktales and rich musical tradition.

We shall have lunch in the town of Vama, where we will be introduced to the Romanian art of painting eggs.

In the afternoon we visit the monastery of Voronet, built in 1488, and dedicated to St George the Martyr. A pious hermit, Daniil, and Prince Stephen the Great were responsible for its foundation, a princely token of gratitude for divine intervention in a battle against the Turks. Daniil became the first abbot, and is buried in the narthex. In 1547, Bishop Grigore Rosca, whose tomb is also here, added the porch and the exterior

paintings. Monastic life at Voronet was interrupted in 1785 when Bucovina was annexed to the Habsburg Empire. It became a working monastery again in 1991 with the arrival of a community of nuns who combine their life of prayer and worship with housekeeping and farm work, running a painting workshop and providing guided tours of the monastery for visitors. The paintings in Voronet's porch represent the Christian Orthodox Calendar. Above the entrance, in the narthex, lies a superb icon – *Dulcea Imbratisare* (the Sweet Embrace). The monastery's votive painting is found in the nave. Stephen the Great, the Lady Maria-Voichita and Bogdan, his heir, are depicted in the act of donating the monastery to Christ, through the mediation of St. George the Martyr. The imperial doors of the gilded yew-wood iconostasis are a masterpiece of wooden sculpture, as is the throne of the Metropolitan Bishop Grigore Rosca.

The artistic climax of the building is, however, the *Last Judgement* on the exterior west wall. Voronet's colour is a unique blue, seen especially in the background of the Tree of Jesse. Graeco-Latin philosophers are depicted in the borders to the left and right of the Last Judgement. On the left of the entrance door lies the haloed image of St Daniil the Hermit. Above the door is the beautiful Deisis Icon. It depicts Christ as Judge flanked by Mary and St John the Baptist who both mediate on behalf of the visitor. The paintings in the nave and at the altar were blackened from the smoke of hundreds of years of burning candles, and are at present undergoing restoration.

The interior and exterior walls of Humor Monastery church are covered with frescoes in the Byzantine style. In the narthex is a series of images representing the *Synaxary* (Calendar), the icon of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, the icon of the *Akathist Hymn of the Virgin*, and portraits of the great Christian hermits and angels. On the vault of the room of tombs are scenes from the *Life of the Virgin*. Portraits of saints and the monastery's donors and a cycle of *Christ's Passion and Entombment* decorate the nave walls and on the vault is *Christ Pantocrator*. The altar with its sacred images completes this precious ensemble of fresco-paintings. The apse vault bears images of the *Virgin with Christ*, the *Last Supper*, saints and Church leaders, following Orthodox iconographic tradition. The delicate, untouched exterior frescoes, the masterpiece of the monastery, are by Toma Zugravul (1535). They depict the *Annunciation*, the *Tree of Jesse* and the *Last Judgement*. Particularly interesting are depictions of the siege of Constantinople. After exploring Humor we drive a few kilometres to our hotel in Gura Humorului. (Overnight Gura Humorului) BLD

Day 10: Friday 29 May, Gura Humorului – Putna – Sucevita – Moldovita – Gura Humorului

- Monastery of Putna
- Monastery of Sucevita
- Monastery of Moldovita

Today we visit four more of the magnificent painted churches and monasteries for which Bucovina is justly famous. These constitute one of the most significant corpuses of religious buildings in Eastern Europe. The monasteries were built in the lands of the Moldavian realm, which prospered for a short time due, in large part, to its inaccessibility. It is a place of high, densely forested mountains and deep valleys, a fragmented topography that was difficult for foreign hegemonies like the Habsburgs and the Turks to control. This unique landscape, which favoured local rulers, provides an unforgettable setting for the richly painted churches we visit.

Our first visit is to Putna, one of the most important cultural, religious and artistic centres in 15th and 16th-century Bucovina, which has the tomb of Stephen the Great. This monastery does not have painted exterior walls, however is noteworthy for its architecture. It has one of the most sophisticated towers in Romania. These towers, which grace the crossings of many Moldavian churches, are unique, being constructed of a number of superimposed arches that show an interesting fusion of Gothic and Byzantine structural approaches. Putna also has an important museum, with objects like Stephen the Great's regalia and fine

church cloth.

We continue to Sucevita. Ieremia Gheorghe and Simion Movila built this monastery in 1585. It is composed of a large fortified yard, with high walls and towers, boyard (aristocratic) and monastic houses. The church at the centre of this ensemble is a masterpiece of Moldavian medieval architecture. Sucevita's paintings (1601), covering its interior and exterior walls, are one of the most valuable corpuses of Romanian painting. With them the great epoch of Moldavian exterior wall painting ended. One of Sucevita's most unforgettable scenes depicts a long ladder running diagonally across the wall to heaven, climbed by monks assisted by angels. This is a metaphor for their struggle against sin. A number of the aspirants fall between the ladder's rungs and are dragged down to hell by demons. Above the ladder is a vast choir of angels, their wings forming startling colour rhythms across the church wall.

This afternoon we drive to the last of our monasteries for this day, Moldovita. In the 14th century, hermits began to inhabit the forests covering the hills along the Moldovita Valley and the Cimirna Rivulet. Here a small wooden church was built, and the hermitage surrounding it coalesced into an early monastic community. This constituted the first foundation on the site of the later institution of Petru Rares Voivode (1532). A fortress with powerful walls, corner and entrance towers now protects a magnificent complex. In the centre of this complex stands a tripartite plan church, its walls covered by frescoes like the pages of an open book.

The dominant colour at Moldovita is a sunny yellow gold. Moldovita has a distinctive architectural character. The nave is unusually large and incorporates two rooms. The tomb room (*tainita*) is hidden because it was there that the treasure of the monastery, its plate, vestments and other goods, were secreted in times of danger. The church's murals were finished in 1537, five years after its construction. The starlit vault of the pronaos and two icons of Holy Virgin show the Moldovita painter's masterly fusion of Western and Eastern art. The Moldovita complex includes the *Clisiarnita*, the house of Voivode and his family (or possibly a house for important guests). It is a monumental construction on the north-west side of the complex, where some of the church's treasures were kept. Sacred vessels, votive lamps, fine embroidery, manuscripts and icons were kept here for centuries. In the north-west corner of the enceinte rises a tower named *Clisiarnita* with a circular turret and winding stair. Its high roof increases the impression of verticality. Overnight Gura Humorului) BLD

Brasov - 2 nights

Day 11: Saturday 30 May, Gura Humorului – Targu Neamt – Bicz Canyon – Brasov

- Bicz Canyon

Today we drive south through the Carpathian Mountains via the awesome Bicz Canyon (*Cheilele Bicz* – the Keys of Bicz) to Eastern Transylvania, one of the most beautiful areas of Romania. Here open grasslands meet and contrast with great sub-alpine forests. We pass through a number of small towns peopled by a Hungarian-speaking group, the Székelys. The history and ethnicity of the Székelys is uncertain. Perhaps the most cogent argument is that they were a border people moved south to create a southern buffer by the Magyar (Hungarian) Árpád dynasty. But it is also sometimes argued that they arrived in Romania before the Magyars settled the Hungarian plain and were once part of either the Hun or Avar migratory groups. Diverse explanations of their origins reinforce our understanding of the extraordinary complexity and diversity of Romanian history and culture. (Overnight Brasov) BL

Day 12: Sunday 31 May, Brasov – Prejmer – Sinaia – Brasov

- Fortified Church, Prejmer
- Pelisor Palace, Sinaia
- Peles Palace Castle, Sinaia
- Black Church and its collection of Turkish carpets, Brasov

Today we drive through a fascinating region of beautiful villages founded in the 14th century for the Székely families who had probably arrived in this particular area in the late 12th and 13th centuries. The Székely people have remained here to this day. They speak a dialect of Hungarian and use strange runes that you can see on the elaborate gateposts of their houses. The Roman Catholic churches of the region were originally in the Romanesque style but were modified with Gothic features. One distinctive quality is their massive fortified towers, used as strongholds against Tartar and Turkish attacks.

Along the way we visit the Fortified Church in Prejmer, which is considered the equal of Biertan. The thick, high walls of this 15th-century complex surround three courtyards, in the largest of which is an austere Gothic church. Prejmer is more elaborate than Biertan and its position on a plain required that it have higher walls. On their inside face are a large number of cells reached by interesting wooden walkways. These cells acted both as residences and storerooms for the surrounding community that retreated to this fortress in times of danger. Some stores were, in fact, kept here permanently in case the locals were surprised by an attack and did not have time to stock their citadel.

Next we drive into the Carpathian Mountains again toward Wallachia, to the beautiful mountain town of Sinaia, where we visit the small palace of Pelisor, built for Carol's nephew and heir, Prince Ferdinand, and his consort, Marie of Romania, granddaughter of Queen Victoria. Marie of Romania was an extraordinary woman. She was an artist and writer of children's books, and a keen patron of the Romanian National Revival. Although less grand than Peles, Pelesor is far prettier. It is light and airy, with lovely interiors not unlike those of Edwardian England.

Nearby we visit the great 19th-century palace complex of the Romanian royal family. Peles Palace Castle is a massive, late 19th-century German Neo-Renaissance fantasy, built as a summer retreat for King Carol I and Queen Elisabeta but also partly as a National Museum. Its extraordinary historicist interiors range from Gothic halls to an Islamic Revival section inspired by the Alhambra, Granada.

In the late afternoon we return to the proud Saxon city of Brasov to visit the Black Church. We have now left the lands of the Székely and entered a Saxon realm. This area was heavily influenced by the Teutonic Knights, some of whom came south to Romania (whilst others pursued their 'crusade' to take Catholicism to the north-east – and founded Prussia). The Teutonic Knights, a military order that had developed during the Third Crusade, built great fortresses in this region. They were finally ousted by the Hungarian monarchy when they became too independent and powerful. Brasov prospered through its location on the main trade route between Moldavia and Wallachia. Its greatest treasure is the Black Church, named for the discolouration of its walls by fire during the Austrian invasion (1689). It is a typical Germanic hall church and its rich interior has fascinating paintings of guild insignia and one of the world's greatest collections of Turkish carpets, donated to the church by Armenian merchants returning from the East.

The Brasov display, the best of many collections of oriental textiles in Romania, reflects the fact that this region was one of the major conduits of oriental riches to the markets of Northern Europe; carpets depicted in the paintings of artists like Jan Van Eyck and Hans Holbein reflect this extensive trade. The Black Church collection, which hangs from its galleries, within its choir stalls and along its walls, is said to equal those of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. (Overnight Brasov) BLD

Bucharest - 1 night

Day 13: Monday 1 June, Brasov – Bucharest

- Village Museum
- Afternoon at leisure
- Farewell Dinner at Restaurant Savart

We drive this morning to Bucharest. When Romania attained nationhood its frenetic urban life contrasted markedly with the culture of the vast majority of its people, who lived in villages, husbanding their flocks and tilling the land. This enduring peasant culture, unchanged for centuries, kept alive local traditions that had disappeared or were fast disappearing from more industrialised countries. This meant that 19th and 20th-century Romanian folklorists, writers, composers and artists were able to document traditional life with a richness and profundity that is unequalled elsewhere. It is partly for this reason that Bucharest's Village Museum, with an extraordinary heritage of traditional village buildings, is believed by many to be the best of its kind in the world. We shall visit this outdoor museum. Most foreigners have no idea of the extent, quality and variety of Romania's art collections.

The afternoon will be at leisure. This evening we enjoy a farewell meal at the contemporary gourmet Restaurant Savart, where chef Manuela Paraschivescu has created an eclectic menu with influences from all around the world. (Overnight Bucharest BD)

Day 14: Tuesday 2 June, Bucharest (tour ends)

- Tour concludes in the morning
- At leisure/Check out

Our tour ends in Bucharest after breakfast. In the morning you will be required to check out of the hotel. Please contact ASA if you require assistance with a transfer to Bucharest Airport. **B**

Accommodation

Accommodation is in 3-4 star hotels, in twin-share rooms with en suite bathroom.

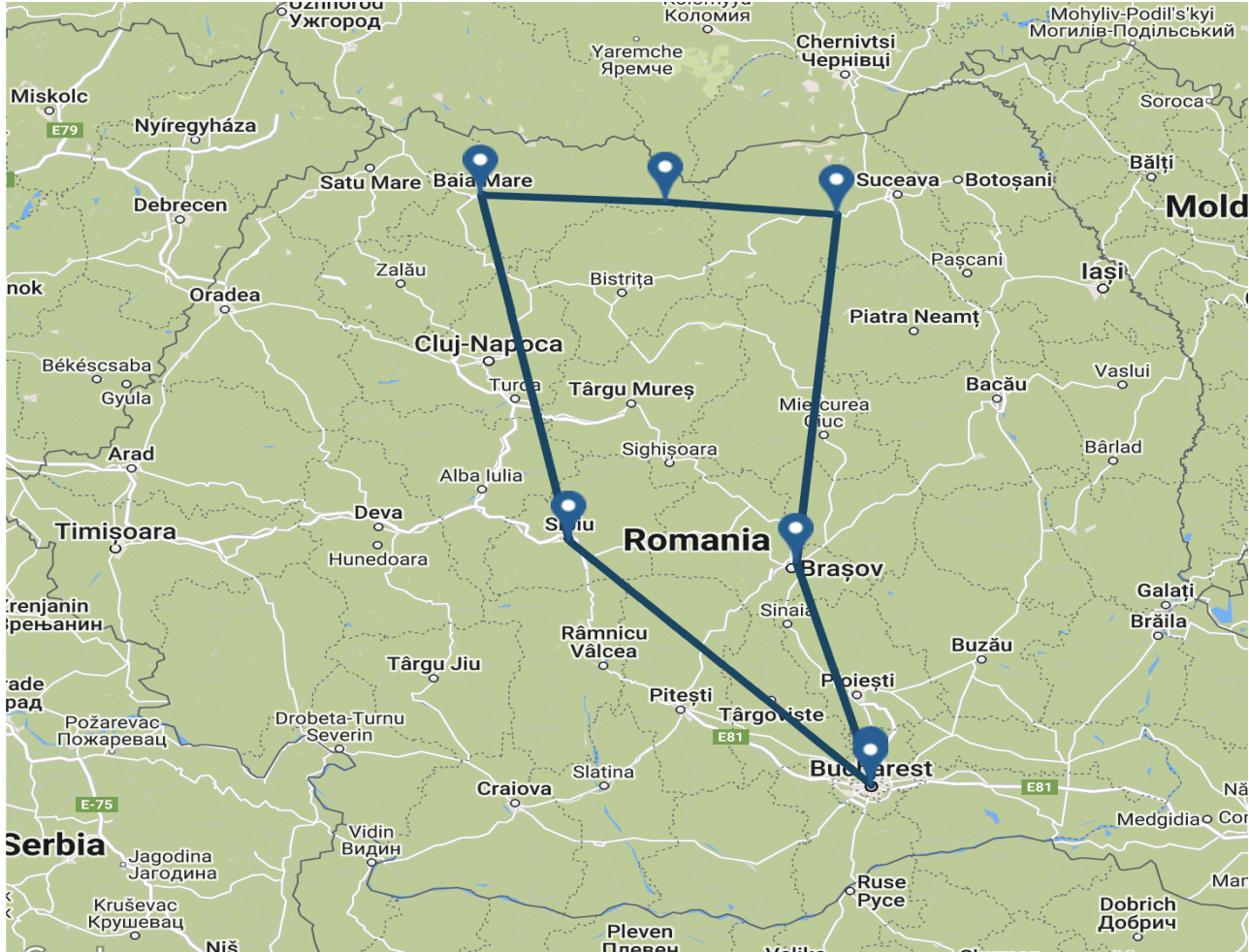
- Bucharest (3 nights): 4-star [Mercure Bucharest City Center](#) – located 350m from the National Museum of Art of Romania; various luxury stores, shops, restaurants and cafes can be reached within a 10-minute walk.
- Sibiu (3 nights): 4-star [Continental Forum](#) – set in a historical building, 50m from the town centre.
- Baia Mare (1 night): 4-star [Hotel Carpati](#) – a modern hotel located in the city centre.
- Borsa (1 night): 3-star [Hotel Victoria](#) – an alpine-style hotel, located in Borsa Maramures, 400m outside the town centre on the edge of a pine forest.
- Gura Humorului (2 nights): 4-star [Dukat Hotel](#) – a modern hotel located 6.1km from Voronet Monastery.
- Brasov (2 nights): 4-star [Aro Palace Hotel](#) – a modern hotel overlooking the Tampa Mountain and the medieval historic quarter of Brasov.
- Bucharest (1 night): 4-star [Mercure Bucharest City Center](#) – located 350m from the National Museum of Art of Romania; various luxury stores, shops, restaurants and cafes can be reached within a 10-minute walk.

Note: hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a single-occupancy room throughout the tour. In most hotels, this will be a double/twin room for single occupancy. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only – Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 June 2025

AUD \$TBA Land Content Only

AUD \$TBA Single Supplement

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with en suite bathroom in 3-4 star hotels
- Breakfast daily, lunches and dinners indicated in the tour itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch & D=dinner
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals include bottled water only.
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (not at airports)
- Lecture and site-visit program
- Tour handbook
- Local guides
- Entrance fees
- Use of audio headsets during site visits
- Tips for the coach driver, local guides and restaurants for included meals

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Bucharest, Bucharest-Australia
- Personal spending money
- Airport-hotel transfers
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance



Fitness Criteria & Practical Information

Fitness Level 

Level 1 - Active

For people with active lives and good mobility

You must be able to:

- manage at least five hours of physical activity per day with ease.
- walk at a regular pace on flat or undulating terrain; some stretches include uneven cobbled streets and steeper slopes (eg. Biertan & Sighisoara).
- negotiate some challenging historic sites which may include several flights of stairs and/or rocky terrain.
- stand for one to two hours during visits to galleries and museums without the need to sit.
- contend with extensive coach travel that includes winding mountain roads; road conditions are variable.
- cope with a tour schedule which involves a few longer days, some early morning starts and several one night stays.
- contend with a shower over a bath; walk-in showers may not be available at all hotels.
- manage your own luggage at some hotels.

Fitness Levels

Please also view the fitness criteria required for our tours, graded from Level 1 to Level 3, at www.asatours.com.au/fitness-level/

All ASA tours are active programs suitable for people with a good level of mental and physical fitness and good mobility. They are not suitable for people who lack stamina, have difficulty walking at the group's pace or who have mobility issues. An unavoidable aspect of every tour is the need to manage walking, stair-climbing and standing for long periods of time.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Before enrolling on an ASA tour please read the fitness requirements carefully.

Booking Conditions

Making a Tentative Reservation before the tour price has been published

ASA INTENTION TO TRAVEL APPLICATION FORM

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD \$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD \$800.00 per person. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your deposit of AUD \$1000.00 is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

Or

- CANCEL your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD \$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).



Intention to Travel Application

TOUR NAME _____

TOUR DATES _____

Booking before the tour price is available

Some ASA tours fill almost immediately. Don't miss out! You can register your 'Intention to Travel' by completing this application and returning this to ASA with a AUD\$200.00 per person deposit. Once the tour price has been published, the itinerary and ASA Reservation Application Form will be sent to you. From the time you receive the itinerary you will have two weeks to either:

- Send us a completed ASA Reservation Application Form together with an additional deposit of AUD\$800.00 per person applicable for International tours OR AUD\$300.00 per person applicable for Australian tours. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation. At this time your full deposit is subject to the tour's Booking Conditions.

OR

- Cancel your Intention to Travel in writing. ASA will refund your AUD\$200.00 per person deposit, less a \$66.00 service fee (including GST).

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Dr ☐ Other _____

FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____

MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____

POSTAL ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____

TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____

EMAIL address _____

Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____ GENDER Male ☐ Female ☐

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: ☐ a twin-bedded room ☐ a double-bedded room ☐ a room for sole occupancy

I am travelling: ☐ on my own ☐ with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

☐ I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

☐ fish ☐ poultry ☐ red meat ☐ dairy products

☐ eggs ☐ pork ☐ nuts

☐ Other _____

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence ☐ Postal Mail ☐ Email Address _____

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour.

ASA's ability to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs, your health and safety and the health and safety of other tour members, is of paramount importance to us. For this reason the ASA Reservation Application includes a Medical Information section. As a general guideline, you must be able to accomplish each of these activities *without assistance or support*:-

- walk & stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions
- walk confidently on and over uneven surfaces
- climb at least 3 flights of stairs
- embark and disembark from ferries, buses and trains
- walk up and down steep slopes
- walk at a steady pace and no less than 1 km every 15 - 20 minutes
- organise, manage and carry your own luggage
- follow and remember tour instructions
- meet punctually at designated times and places
- administer your own medication.

Applicant's Signature _____

Dated _____

Tour / Course Name

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

Payment by (please indicate): ☐ Cheque ☐ Direct Debit (see below) ☐ Credit Card (see below)

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended _____

Date Money Transferred _____

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard, Visa & American Express 2%

Please debit my: ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____

Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ) _____

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____

Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____

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