MOLDOVA - ROMANIA TOUR INCLUDING THE PAINTED MONASTERIES OF BUCOVINA (UNESCO)

DAY 1

Day 1: Arrival in Chisinau, Moldova and visit of Asconi winery

Chisinau – Puhoi – Chisinau

On arrival at Chisinau International Airport, you will be transferred to Puhoi village where you will enjoy an excursion, wine tasting and dinner at **Asconi winery**. This is a family-owned winery, whose foundation is a long-standing tradition and experience in the production of Moldovan wine. The winery achieved a lot due to modern wine making technologies. Nowadays at Asconi estate European varieties are grown, but special attention is paid to indigenous varieties such as Rara Neagra, Feteasca, etc. One of the features of Asconi winery is that they pick up the grapes mechanically at night when the grapes are still cold.

After dinner, you will be transferred to Chisinau where you will check in at the hotel.

HIGHLIGHTS: Asconi winery,

DAY 2

Day 2: Discovery of Milestii Mici – the largest wine cellar in the world (200 km)

Chisinau – Hincesti – Milestii Mici – Chisinau

In the morning, you will travel to Hincesti where you will visit the **Manuc Bei Manor** that now houses the Museum of History and Local History. The actual house is a real castle in the French style, with a winter garden, guard towers and a park - built in the second half of 19th century based on the project of Alexander Bernardazzi, and for decades was the estate of family Mirzoyan, descendants of Manuc Bei. In the 70-ies of the 20th century, Manor House Museum was opened, including a collection that now includes more than 20,000 artifacts. The most valuable is the collection of the Moldovan national costumes and textiles.

Next, you will take a ride to **Milestii Mici winery** located at a depth of 40-85 m in Milestii Mici village. Measuring about 200 km, all underground streets make up the largest network of caves ever dug by a human being, which appeared after the extraction of limestone deposits. The winery holds an impressive collection of more than 2 million bottles. The "Golden Collection" of Milestii Mici winery, which has over 1,5 million bottles, is the pride of the whole country, as in August, 2005, it was registered in the Guinness World Records as the biggest wine collection in the world. You will feel like a king/ queen here, admiring the beauty of this place, tasting wines in which you will feel the fire of sun and vigor of earth and enjoying national cuisine dishes.

After visiting Milestii Mici winery, you will be transferred to Chisinau where you will enjoy a **walking tour of Chisinau city** which is the main administrative, scientific and cultural centre of Moldova. During the tour,

you will discover pieces of history and culture of the city such as the Nativity of Christ Cathedral, the Bell Tower, the Arch of Triumph, the Monument of Stephen the Great, etc.

HIGHLIGHTS: Manuc Bei Manor, Milestii Mici winery, Chisinau city,

DAY 3

Day 3: Visit of Orheiul Vechi - a 40-thousand-year-old natural amphitheater and wine and food experience at Butuceni guesthouse

Chisinau – Orheiul Vechi – Butuceni – Curchi – Chisinau

The day will begin with a visit of Orheiul Vechi (Old Orhei) - a natural amphitheater revealing a territory which was first inhabited 40 000 years ago. The **Cultural, Natural and Landscape Reserve Orheiul Vechi** includes a series of historical and cultural monuments as well as natural landscapes in the gorge of the Raut River. Ancient fortifications, cave monasteries, monks and hermits – here you can follow the history of this region. The remnants of the first human settlements were found in the stone caverns from here. On the rocky hill, you will find the ruins of a strong Geto-Dacian fortification, which acted as a sanctuary for celebrating religious holidays and rituals in this prehistoric community. The originality of Orheiul Vechi landscape is due to the gorge of the Raut River, dug under the form of a canyon in the limestone layers of the former Sarmatian Sea, about 14 million years ago.

Next, you will visit **Butuceni guesthouse**, where you will enjoy a **culinary masterclass** during which you will learn how to cook traditional “placinte” (pies) with sour cherries or roll-ups with rose petal jam. At lunch you will taste traditional Moldovan dishes such as “zeama” (chicken soup with homemade egg noodles), “mamaliga” and the dessert made by you that will melt in the mouth.

The day will continue at **Curchi Monastery**. The monastery is surrounded by a high wall of stone, set with towers at each corner, creating the impression of a fortress. The Nativity of Virgin Mary Church built in 1775 by Iordache Curchi is an example of neo-byzantine style, while St. Nicholas Church has monumental forms built in classicism style with baroque elements.

HIGHLIGHTS: Orheiul Vechi - a 40 thousand years-old natural amphitheater, "Placinte" or bisquits with rose petal jam masterclass at Butuceni guesthouse , Curchi Monastery,

DAY 4

Day 4: Discovery of Iasi city in Romania

Chisinau – Capriana – Iasi

In the morning, you will visit **Capriana Monastery**, founded in medieval Moldova, which is one of the oldest monasteries in the country. It is located in Capriana in a picturesque forested area once called Codrii Lapusnei. The first significant reference dates from a document issued in 1429 that gave Capriana the status of royal monastery on behalf of Alexander the Good. During a long period, Capriana Monastery acted as the residence of the Moldovan archbishop. Being closed and devastated in the post-war years, it was one of the first monasteries that reopened in 1989, becoming soon the symbol of national revival.

Then, you will depart to Iasi city, named Open Air Museum or the Cultural Centre of Moldova region in Romania.

Once arrived in Iasi, you will have lunch at the restaurant where you will enjoy Romanian traditional dishes.

The journey will continue with the **city tour of Iasi**, during which you will see the Palace of Culture, one of the most remarkable buildings and a true symbol of the city's past. The Palace was built between 1906 and 1925 on the location of the former prince's palace and is a happy blend of several architectural styles: neo-gothic, romantic and neo-baroque. The Three Holy Hierarchs Monastery is another important attraction of Iasi included in the city tour, distinguished by its unusual quality of being completely dressed in engravings and decoration elements. The walls of this church are the reason why it is among the most valuable architectural monuments of the country.

HIGHLIGHTS: Capriana Monastery, Iasi city,

DAY 5

Day 5: Visit of Probota Monastery (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Seat Fortress of Suceava

Iasi – Probota – Dolhesti – Suceava

After breakfast at the hotel, you will travel to Probota village where you will visit **Probota Monastery** built in 1530 by the prince Petru Rares. Only the church and the prince's residence remain today from the original ensemble founded by Petru Rares. The church of the monastery is dedicated to St. Nicholas and is a masterpiece of the Romanian medieval architecture distinguished by the elegant silhouette, the richness of architectural forms and elements and the brilliant execution of the paintings. It is one of the eight churches of northern Moldova, in Romania, built from the late 15th century to the late 16th century that were included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List. Probota was the first monastery to have external frescoes painted in Moldavia. In 1532, the church featured both outside and inside frescoes. In the 19th century, a large part of the mural paintings was replaced. High walls (6 m) surround Probota with corner towers for defense and a gate tower built in 1550.

Next, you will be transferred from Probota to Dolhesti where you will attend a **culinary masterclass**, enjoy a **traditional lunch with folkloric program** and visit the artisans.

After lunch, you will visit the **Seat Fortress of Suceava**. The city of Suceava was the capital of the former Principality of Moldova between 1388 and 1565 and the fortress is the most significant medieval site closely linked with the history of this region. The fortress was initially built during the reign of Petru Mu?at (1375–1391), who built the fortress to serve as his fortified residence and to protect the new Moldovan capital of Suceava from the threat posed by the Ottoman Empire. It was further expanded and strengthened during the reign of Alexander the Good (1400–1432) and Stephen the Great (1457–1504). The medieval citadel was part of the fortification system built in Moldova in the late 14th century, to stop the Ottoman danger and became strong enough to hold off an attack by Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (the conqueror of Constantinople), in 1476. The Seat Fortress of Suceava consists of two concentric citadels: the inner citadel, built by Petru Musat in the late 14th century that has a rectangular shape and a patio and a circular-shaped citadel built by Stephen the Great in the second half of the 15th century that surrounds the old one.

HIGHLIGHTS: Probota Monastery, Seat Fortress of Suceava,

DAY 6

Day 6: Voronet, Moldovita and Sucevita Monasteries (UNESCO World Heritage Sites)

Suceava – Voronet – Vama – Vatra Moldovitei – Sucevita – Putna – Iasi

In the morning, you will be transferred from Suceava to Voronet where you will discover **Voronet Monastery**. It is one of the famous painted monasteries and was founded in 1488 by Stephen the Great to celebrate a victory over the Turks at Battle of Vaslui. Often known as the "Sistine Chapel of the East", due to its interior and exterior wall paintings, this monastery offers an abundance of frescoes featuring an intense shade of blue commonly known as "Voronet blue". The church dedicated to St. George is possibly the most famous church in Romania and is one of the painted churches listed in the list of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.

The journey will continue in Vama. Here, you will visit the **Egg Museum** where there are over 7,000 eggs from all over the world displayed in 22 glass-cases. You will be able to admire eggs collected from international exhibitions and eggs from Bucovina with unique, old motifs and patterns inherited from ancestors.

Next, you will discover **Moldovita Monastery** that was built in 1532 by Petru Rare?, as a protective barrier against the Muslim Ottoman conquerors. The predominantly gold and deep blue paintings on the exterior walls were completed in 1537. Its church dedicated to the Annunciation, was included in the list of UNESCO's Word Heritage Sites. On the church's southern exterior wall, a depiction of the Siege of Constantinople is highlighted. Inside the sanctuary, a portrait of Prince Petru Rares, offering the church to Christ, is painted. The museum of the monastery preserves manuscripts from the 15th century, old prints, objects of worship, embroideries and Petru Rares's seat (16th century) - the most valuable piece of its kind in Moldova.

In Sucevita village you will visit **Sucevita Monastery** built in 1585 by Ieremia Movila, Gheorghe Movila and Simion Movila. The architecture of the church contains both Byzantine and Gothic elements, and some elements typical to other painted churches of northern Moldova. Both interior and exterior walls are covered by mural paintings that date from around 1601, which makes Sucevita the last painted monastery to be decorated in this style. In 2010, the monastery was included by UNESCO on its list of World Heritage Sites, as one of the painted churches of Moldova. The interior court of the monastic ensemble is almost square (100 by 104 meters) and is surrounded by high (6 m), wide (3 m) walls, including four towers (one in each corner). Sucevita was a princely residence as well as a fortified monastery and its thick walls today shelter a museum that presents an outstanding collection of historical and art objects.

The last attraction of the day will be **Putna Monastery**, a Romanian Orthodox monastery and one of the most important cultural, religious and artistic centers established in medieval Moldavia. It was built by Stephen the Great, famous for building and influencing the building of many churches and monasteries all over Moldavia. The Putna Monastery houses the tombs of Stephen - nowadays, a place of pilgrimage. The monastery has been damaged many times by fires and earthquakes during its five centuries but has always been restored and remains the centre of spiritual life in Bucovina.

HIGHLIGHTS: Voronet Monastery, Egg Museum , Moldovita Monastery, Sucevita Monastery , Putna Monastery ,

DAY 7

Day 7: Departure from Iasi, Romania

Iasi

On departure day, you will be transferred from the hotel to Iasi International Airport. If your flight is in the afternoon, you will have the option to explore Iasi for a while on your own in the morning and buy some souvenirs.