

## Maramures & Transylvania, Romania

August 18-23

I hesitated between posting this itinerary under weekend trips or longer trips, but as two of us made a 4-day weekend out of it and a third friend joined from London for just 3 days, it seems to qualify as a long weekend. Of course we only covered parts of two regions (Maramures and Transylvania) and even so, more time certainly would have been preferable (I've indicated below a number of additional towns we *meant* to get to but didn't). Nonetheless, with only 3 or 4 days, if you are OK with a fair bit of driving, it's still well worth the trip. August was a perfectly good time to visit: it was hot and sunny but not uncomfortably hot, and we didn't see the crowds you encounter in most corners of Europe in August.

Romania is a beautiful country with medieval towns, green rolling hills and magnificent mountains, and a visit particularly to the northern part of the country (in the region of Maramures, close to the Ukrainian border), is not only a visit to another culture but a visit to another era. About half of the traffic on the roads is horse-drawn buggies. Driving in Romania is not for the faint-hearted. If you're not comfortable passing a truck on the outside of a curve while driving up a mountain in a car with no power steering, it may not be for you. I was quite happy to have some driving experience in Corsica under my belt before attempting Romania. The main tourist attractions are doable by bus but unfortunately without a car you're going to miss out on the more out-of-the-way villages and back roads, and that's where you see Romania's real charm. And lest you think it's just the tourists' obsession, the fascination with Dracula is alive and well in Transylvania....

A note on food: I have not listed any specific restaurants except for a fairly good one in Sibiu, as none of the restaurants we ate at were over-the-top good. Romanian food is not for everyone. Most guide books list Italian or other Western European and American restaurants as the best restaurants in any particular Romanian town. But if you forget about eating healthy and you throw out your pre-existing notions of which foods go together and which don't (i.e. be eager to try deer meat with blueberry sauce and sour cream or really just anything with a tub of sour cream dumped on top), you may even enjoy the culinary experience. And if not, well, the food is relatively inexpensive, so if you don't like the first thing you order, just try again.

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Wed, Aug 18	Fly Copenhagen to Rome-Fiumicino  Lunch in Rome  Fly Rome-Fiumicino to Cluj-Napoca	<i>Abby's flight info:</i> Norwegian DY3624 (CPH Terminal 2 – FCO Terminal 3) 10:30AM-1:00PM Booking K/BFL/100716104752/00337102 on Wegolo, Booking on Norwegian: 22RX3F  Take 17:36 train back to airport  Confirmation Code: X4RHDF W6 786 Rome Fiumicino - Terminal 3 @ 19:55 Cluj-Napoca 23:00 (check-in closes 19:05)  <b>Siago Hotel</b> Address: Str. Republicii Nr.33 Cluj-Napoca, 400015 Romania Phone+40264422422, E-mail: office@pensiuneasiago.ro booking.com booking number 79258818, Pincode 7055  I combined this trip with a trip to southern Sweden the first half of the week (which allowed for lunch in Rome—never a bad thing). But Wizz Airlines flies direct from Paris-Beauvais to Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania, if you prefer to avoid the round-about route I traveled.  I booked the Siago Hotel through booking.com, a site I use quite often. It's a very comfortable hotel with a breakfast buffet (included) and not far from the center of town.	€52 total (not yet paid)	Left luggage on the ground floor (street level) of Terminal 3 - International Arrivals area  Direct non-stop train service from Fiumicino to Termini, every half hour on the 0:22 and 0:52 and back to airport on the 0:06 and 0:36 (31 minutes). Fare: EUR€1.

<p>Thurs, Aug 19</p>	<p>Drive to Maramures</p> <p>Stay in Botiza</p>	<p>Rental car brought to Siago Hotel at 9:00am (agent's phone #: 0040 749 151 028). Contact: Romona Gradinar (<a href="mailto:office@eurocars.ro">office@eurocars.ro</a>)</p> <p><b>Eurocars, a Romanian rental car agency, brings the car to your hotel for no extra charge. The car was not the best I've had (that's an understatement) but I got used to the lack of power steering after a while and perhaps it was better to fit in with the locals.... For an extra €5 per day, I bought the all-inclusive insurance. And I mean all-inclusive: the agent didn't even check for scratches on the car before handing over the keys as he said "it doesn't matter, you can dent up the car all you want." I was almost disappointed that I <i>didn't</i> get a single dent. But still, that €20 was well worth it for peace of mind alone. A warning for GPS users: my GPS only knew the main streets and larger cities. It still helped us to get going in the right direction but be sure to bring a detailed map with you as well. Also keep in mind that distances may not seem far, but when you get stuck behind a horse and buggy for 10 kilometers, it sure is far. Roads are potholed and windy—however long you think it will take, double it.</b></p> <p><b>Hotel in Botiza: Guest House Petreus Irina</b>  Comuna BOTIZA nr. 771  Jud. MARAMURES, cod 437065  Phone: 00 40 (0)262 334 129  Cell phone: 00 40 (0)727 724 895  Email: <a href="mailto:irina_petreus@yahoo.com">irina_petreus@yahoo.com</a>  <a href="http://www.ruraltourism.ro/maram/pensmar/botiza/petreus%20irina/html/petreusen.html">http://www.ruraltourism.ro/maram/pensmar/botiza/petreus%20irina/html/petreusen.html</a></p> <p><b>Botiza is a tiny town with no real hotels, just guest houses. I cannot recommend Guest House Petreus Irina highly enough. Everyone in town seems to take particular care of their yards, planting some of the most beautiful and flowerful gardens I have ever seen. The Petreus family exemplifies this. For a small extra fee, they served us a delicious and copious homemade dinner (in fact, you don't have much choice as there aren't any restaurants in town so far as I could see), which of course included the famous homemade sour cherry liqueur. Dinner and breakfast the next day (included) are served in a gazebo in the garden. I would have happily spent a whole week in Botiza, exploring more nearby villages, hiking and soaking up the small-town hospitality.</b></p>	<p>€132 total for car (€28 x 4 + €20 airport drop-off) (not yet paid)</p>	<p>-Biserica Unitariana, Bulevardul 21 Decembrie 1989 &amp; HQ building next door  -The Gaudeamus bookstore  -Agape cafeteria</p> <p><b>I intended to visit the first Unitarian Church, in Cluj-Napoca, but unfortunately my timing did not allow.</b></p> <p>-Rodnei Mountains National Park  -<b>Sapinta</b> (cemetery)  -Villages: Surdesti, Plopis, Rogoz, Ieud, Poenile Izei, Barsana, <b>Budesti</b>, Desesti, Breb  -Sighet</p> <p><b>Our plan to visit all the villages listed above was a bit ambitious, but we did make it to Surdesti for its famous wooden church, the "merry" cemetery in Sapinta with its brightly colored wooden tombstones that tell about the lives of those no longer living, author Elie Wiesel's birthplace in Sighet, and Budesti before arriving in Botiza.</b></p>
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<p>Fri, Aug 20</p>	<p>Drive to Cluj-Napoca to pick up Dave then to Sibiu</p>	<p>Pick up D. at Cluj-Napoca airport 12:55PM  <i>D's flight info:</i> W6 772 London Luton 08:05 Cluj-Napoca 12:55</p> <p><i>Hotel in Sibiu: Hotel Villa Astoria</i>  Str. Piața Mică nr.31  Str. Avram Iancu nr.1-3  RO 550182 - Sibiu - România  tel +4 0369 44 69 17  office@villaastoria.com  <a href="http://www.villaastoria.com">www.villaastoria.com</a></p> <p>Hotel Villa Astoria is a beautiful hotel with spacious rooms and a nice breakfast room right in the center of town. Highly recommended.</p> <p>Dinner was at Crama Sibiul Vechi, a nice location in an atmospheric brick wine cellar by the main pedestrian area:  A.Papiu Ilarian nr.3., Sibiu 2400, Roumanie +40-269-210461  <a href="http://www.sibiulvechi.ro">www.sibiulvechi.ro</a>  (I just noticed that this restaurant is also rated #1 in Sibiu on TripAdvisor.com)</p>	<p>€135 total (not yet paid)</p>	<p>Visit Sibiu &amp; Sibiu villages</p> <p>Marginimea Sibiului (18 villages): Boita, Sadu, Raul Sadului, Talmaciu, Talmacel, Rasinari, Poplaca, Gura Raului, Orlat, Fantanele, Sibiul Vale, Saliste, Gales, Tilisca, Rod, Poiana Sibiului and Jina</p> <p>Again, we were a bit overambitious—we planned to visit at least some of the famous 18 medieval villages near Sibiu but after a long day of driving, opted for beers on a terrace in Sibiu instead.</p>
<p>Sat, Aug 21</p>	<p>Hiking in Farages Mountains</p> <p>Stay at Cabana Balea</p>	<p><i>Hotel: Cabana Balea</i> (0745-072 602) at Lake Balea (contact: Julietta)</p> <p><b>**call 2 days ahead to reconfirm cabana</b></p> <p>We were nervous that Cabana Balea wouldn't have our reservation when we arrived, as you must call to make reservations (no e-mail) and if you don't speak Romanian, you won't have an easy time communicating your request. But our room was ready for us when we arrived. The Cabana is actually a mountain lodge, with a bit of a (low-end) ski resort feel: the rooms are simple but clean and comfortable and if it's warm enough to eat dinner on the deck, you could not imagine a more beautiful setting high up in the mountains.</p> <p>We started hiking from Lake Balea towards Cabana Podragu, made it over the first false summit (less than 30 minutes but straight up, and then you lose 95% of the other hikers) then a bit beyond. We turned around after a couple of hours because the fog prevented us from seeing much, but we dropped our elevation a bit, took another route, and we were back in the sun. This was for sure one of the best day hikes I have done.</p>	<p>130 lei per person (~€30) (not yet paid)</p>	<p>Transfagarasan Road then hike from Lake Balea to Cabana Podragu</p> <p>The drive up the Transfagares Road, the highest and most treacherous Road in Romania, is challenging without power steering. Luckily, the road is only open in daylight hours. Be sure to stop once in a while for photos as the views are magnificent.</p>

Sun, Aug 22	Drive to Cluj	<p><b>Siago Hotel</b>  Address: Str. Republicii Nr.33  Cluj-Napoca, 400015 Romania  Phone+40264422422, E-mail: office@pensiuneasiago.ro  booking.com booking number 156772223, Pincode2875</p>	€57 total (not yet paid)	<p>Transfagarasan Road, (Bran Castle), Brasov, Sighisoara, Biertan</p> <p>On the way back to Cluj-Napoca we had lunch in Brasov and also visited Sighisoara and the village of Biertan. It was a long day of driving but I wouldn't have wanted to skip any of our stops.</p>
Mon, Aug 23	Fly Cluj to Paris	<p>Car drop-off at airport 4:30am</p> <p><i>A&amp;K's flight info:</i> Wizz Airlines Conf. Code: C4JKLI  W 6787 Cluj-Napoca 6:00  Paris Beauvais, arr. 7:40</p> <p><i>D's flight info:</i> W6 771Cluj-Napoca 06:00  London Luton 07:05</p>		<p>The flight was excruciatingly early but the rental car drop-off was easy and it allowed us to be back for a full day of work on Monday.</p>