

TRAIN : The Danube Express

JOURNEY : The Transylvanian West

Journey Duration : Upto 10 days

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1: Istanbul

Arrive into Istanbul where you will be met and transferred to the iconic five-star Pera Palace Hotel Jumeirah, for a two-night stay. The hotel was built in 1892 to cater for guests taking the Orient Express and it was here that Agatha Christie wrote her famous book 'Murder on the Orient Express'. A fitting Grand Hotel to start our tour.

Today is at leisure for all guests to explore this wonderful city, or relax at this luxurious hotel and spa. This evening we will enjoy a welcome reception dinner, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travelers.

Day 2: Istanbul

This fabled city that spans Asia and Europe deserves an extended stay so over the next two days we will see how old meets new, east meets west when we visit Istanbul's must-see historic sites.

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

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

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

Day 3: Istanbul

Following a leisurely breakfast we visit the Grand Bazaar, which is one of the worlds largest covered markets, with 58 streets and over 4,000 shops. In operation since the 14th century the bazaar is especially known for its jewellery, leather, pottery, spices and carpets. The Egyptian Market or Spice Bazaar will also be visited on the Golden Horn.

Later this afternoon we join our private train, the Golden Eagle Danube Express, to begin our long-awaited rail adventure to Budapest.

Note: Continuing engineering works associated with the new Bosphorus tunnel could mean that the train starts on the outskirts of Istanbul.

Day 4: Kazanlak & Veliko Turnovo

We arrive before breakfast in Kazanlak, situated in the Valley of the Roses, which produces rose oil prized by perfumers worldwide. Here we visit the Shipka Memorial Church and a Thracian tomb with vaulted brickwork dating back to the 4th century BC.

We take lunch onboard during the climb over the scenic Shipka Pass, site of a famous battle in 1878 when the combined forces of Russia and Bulgaria crushed the army of the Ottoman Empire, and travel onwards to Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria's ancient capital. Nestled in a magnificent mountain setting, the stone houses seem perched, one above the other, on the steep banks of the Yantra River. A tour includes the superbly preserved medieval Tsarevets Hill and Castle and there is free time to wander through the ancient city.

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

Day 5:

Overnight the train twists and turns as it climbs over the Carpathian Mountains and threads its way through the dramatic landscape with crystal clear mountain streams. This morning we arrive into Brasov for a tour of Bran Castle. Popularly known as Dracula's Castle, this beautiful 14th century building is situated amongst stunning mountain scenery.

We return to the train for lunch as we continue onto Sighisoara for a walking tour of the town's main highlights. A World Heritage site rumored to be the birthplace of Dracula, it is one of the best-preserved fortified medieval towns in Europe. Burgher houses and ornate churches line its cobbled streets.

Dinner is served as our train continues onto Hungary and across the Great Hungarian Plain.

Day 6: Kecskemét & Budapest

Our final day onboard is expected to provide a spectacular conclusion to our rail journey as first we get the opportunity to explore Kecskemét, a fascinating city at the geographical centre of Hungary before the train heads, steam-hauled, to Lajosmizse for a spectacular 'Pusztá' horse show.

We then arrive late afternoon at our final destination, Budapest, the romantic and historic Hungarian capital located on the banks of the magnificent Danube. There is a welcome reception in the Royal Waiting Room at Budapest Nyugati station before transferring for a two-night stay in the five-star Four Seasons Hotel Gresham Palace, located centrally, opposite the renowned Chain Bridge.

Day 7: Budapest

Budapest is actually two cities separated by the Danube. The old city of Buda and the imposing Royal Palace, dominates the city with stunning views across the Danube to the commercial heart of Pest. Our city tour includes the Royal Palace, St. Mathias Church and a panoramic view of the city from Gellert Hill. We will also see the Citadel, the Opera House, St Stephen's Cathedral, Heroes Square and the City Park.

The rest of the day is at leisure where you can stroll along the banks of the Danube, visit the historic Great Market Hall with its endless variety of delicious foods and wines or head to one of the city's famous thermal baths for a rejuvenating dip. Alternatively you can relax at the hotel and indulge in the hotel's luxurious spa with infinity-edge pool or make use of the state-of-the-art fitness centre.

Day 8: Budapest

Following breakfast you will be transferred to the airport for onward departures. There is also an option to extend your stay in Budapest for additional nights to explore more of this fascinating city.