

Transylvania Trail, Romania



Location

Romania is an exciting and different riding destination with majestic castles, medieval towns, stunning scenery and wildlife.

Covering one third of the country, the Carpathian Mountains (where the trail begins and ends) represent the largest area of pristine nature in Central and Eastern Europe. These impressive mountains are the only place in Europe, west of Russia, where widespread populations of wolves, bear and lynx roam.

The starting point for the ride is Sinca Noua, a small village of some 2,000 inhabitants. Time stands still here, shepherds take their flocks up into the mountains as they have done for centuries past. In the evenings, cows and water buffalo are often brought back from the pastures to the village and there is little noise except the buzzing of insects and the twittering of sparrows and swallows. Yet, the village has read the signs of the times and wants to keep this treasure; it has declared itself the first “ecological village” of Romania.



Equus Silvania was originally established by Barbara and Christoph Promberger who have lived in the area for many years. Christoph and Barbara Promberger now employ managers and riding guides so as to allow them more time for their conservation and ecotourism work. The managers and riding guides will host and guide you and so you are unlikely to meet Christoph and Barbara during your visit.

Equus Silvania participates in a sustainable development strategy for Sinca Noua and tries to contribute to this strategy by developing the business as a sustainable model. This includes the employment of staff from the surrounding area and the use of locally produced, organic food.

From Equus Silvania you set off on a magical 180 km journey through the beautiful hills and historical medieval villages of Transylvania.

Transylvania is a land made for riding, and there must be no better way to explore the endless hills, meadows and medieval villages than on horseback.



On the Transylvania Trail you will see and experience some of the most rural and untouched areas in Europe. Traditional farming methods are still used; shepherds still protect their flock with sheepdogs and fields are ploughed using a horse or buffalo. Tens of thousands of sheep still graze the old way in the hills.

Birdlife in the area is also good, particularly in summer. If you are lucky, you may spot bee-eater, lesser spotted eagle, red-backed shrikes or hoopoes.

Another feature of this ride is having the opportunity to learn about the fascinating history of Romania. En route you will find out how the Saxons protected their families from invasion using fortified churches. In Viscri you will see a particularly famous fortified church and learn about the work of the Mihai Eminescu Trust.



The Riding

Equus Sylvania is a riding centre, which combines local Romanian traditions, cuisine and lifestyle with western standards. Their much-loved horses are Shagya Arabs,

Arabs, Kisber, Gidran, other Hungarian half breeds, plus some other local breeds.

The horses are ridden English style, with GP or endurance saddles. It is not very easy to change saddles once the trail has started and so if you are not happy with your saddle please let your guide know as soon as possible. Although do bear in mind that the saddle allocated to you will be the one that best fits your horse and so there may not be a suitable alternative.

Since the riding can be fast and challenging at times, this trip is not suitable for nervous, novice or intermediate riders. You must be able to fully control a forward going horse at all speeds in a group situation and be comfortable riding over varied terrain. You may also need to negotiate natural obstacles such as ditches, logs and streams.

It is also important to be as riding fit as possible for this holiday. You will be covering an average of 22-38 km and be riding for between about 3 and 7 hours each day.

You will not be allowed to join the Transylvania Trail without wearing a hard hat. You should take your own properly fitted riding hat with you.

You will be expected to groom, tack-up and un-tack your horse. Your guide will be on hand if you require any assistance with this.

You may be allocated a horse for the whole ride, or may change horses half-way through the trail. Riders should be physically fit and able to mount from the ground. On some days the going is quite steep and there will be times where you will be required to dismount and lead your horse on downhill tracks which might be rough underfoot. These walks can last for up to 15-20 minutes.

The usual maximum group size is eight riders plus guides, but occasionally nine riders are accepted.

Itinerary

Please see the detailed ride itineraries for more details.

Transylvania Trail (7 nights/ 6 days riding)

This itinerary starts off in the Carpathian Mountains and you make your way towards the plains of the Olt River Valley. There are some long days in the saddle, at least three of the days you will be in the saddle for 7 hours at a time. On two of the days you can indulge in some of the Romanian culture when you visit Viscri (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Cobor, where the owners of Equus Sylvania run a conservation project which aims to restore some of the village's traditional houses.

The pace of the ride is fast as the terrain allows for long canters over the hills and through forests.

Choose this ride if you want to see some of the most rural and untouched areas of Europe on horseback.

Occasionally it is possible to arrange a Mini Trail, with 4 days of riding and extra sightseeing. This is available on request and for groups of six or more (please ask for details).

Accommodation

The accommodation for the duration of this ride is mostly shared rooms in guesthouses or staying with local people along the way. Since you are in rural Romania the standard and comfort of accommodation is not as high as perhaps in other parts of Europe.

Showers are available on all nights of the ride, although bathroom facilities can be shared between the group.

In Viscri you stay in various guesthouses in the village. Often the group will be split up amongst different houses.

In Cobor you stay in a restored house in the village. There are two rooms with four beds and one with two beds. In the guesthouse there are three bathrooms and a main eating area. If the riding group is at full size or there are others joining you for dinner, you may eat in another larger house across the village.



Some overnight stays are quite basic but do offer an accurate insight into life in this region.

Single rooms are usually possible. There are only a limited number so they are subject to availability and not everyone in the group will be able to have a single room. A single supplement is payable (£15 per night) and it is

not possible to guarantee single accommodation throughout the whole of the ride.

Other Activities

This is quite a full itinerary and so there is not much time for other activities. However there is some time set aside to explore Viscri mid-way through the ride. You may also like to round off the day with a walk around the villages each evening to see more of rural life.



Meals & Drinks

Breakfast is usually yoghurt, muesli, fresh fruit, cold meats, bread and homemade preserves. At breakfast you are provided with the ingredients to make your saddlebag picnic lunch.

Dinner may be two or three courses, perhaps soup, a main course and pudding.

Vegetarian, vegan and gluten free meals can be provided with prior notice.

Soft drinks, local beer & wine are included in the rate.

Children

Children over the age of twelve who are very experienced riders may be accepted on to adult rides.

Weather

Romania has a temperate climate, with four distinct seasons. April and May are usually pleasant with cool mornings and nights and generally warm days. The summer months of June, July and August can be quite hot, with extended sunny days. The hottest months are usually July and August when day time temperatures can be in the mid 30°C. Late September and October are

usually dry and cool, with fields and trees producing colourful foliage.

The weather in Romania can be changeable and you should be prepared for all eventualities. Rain is possible at any time of year. We recommend that you bring clothes that can be layered.

Since weather patterns are increasingly hard to predict, it would be advisable to check local weather conditions before travelling. If you type Sinca Noua in to www.accuweather.com you should be able to call up a forecast for the week.

Phones & Cameras

The mobile phone coverage in and around Sinca Noua is good, but is likely to vary during the trail itself. As always the signal may vary depending on your mobile network.

There is Wi-Fi access at Equus Sylvania, where you spend the first and last nights of the trail and also in Cobor where you spend the third and fourth nights.

Mains electricity is 230 V. You are able to charge camera batteries using a two round pin adaptor for European sockets.



Health Information

Immunisation for Hepatitis A, Polio and Tetanus is recommended. Tick Borne Encephalitis may be present in Romania; however, the geographical extent of this disease is not known. As a precaution we recommend wearing long trousers and applying insect repellent to the legs. A vaccine is available but for specific health advice you should consult your doctor.

You must inform us of any medical conditions and dietary requirements before travelling. Anyone with

severe allergies, heart or respiratory conditions or any other physical limitation must consult their physician before embarking on this ride.

You are riding through forests on many of the trails and some people may be allergic to the flora or spores. If you suffer from allergies please bring anti-histamines or other appropriate medicines.

Please note that any medical condition that is not disclosed but which in the opinion of the guide could affect your ability to ride safely may result in you being refused on the ride.

Money

You will need to pay locally for drinks at bars; shopping (there are local handcrafts for sale in Viscri); tips; the (optional) contribution to the development fund (€40) and the single supplement (if you have requested a single room) of €15 per night. Occasionally it is possible to 'upgrade' to a gourmet seven course meal on your final night if all of your group request it. This costs an additional €60 per person.

Please note that while these prices are quoted in Euro it is not possible to pay in Euro cash. You will need to pay in Romanian Lei or by credit card.

It is usually easiest to get Romanian Lei at the airport on arrival and you will need Romanian Lei for drinks and shopping.

The equivalent of £10 - £20 in total for all the staff is a reasonable tip for the week. Tips should be given to your guide to share out amongst the team. You can leave your tip in cash.

Recommended Reading/Viewing

www.clcp.ro Website for the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project which pioneered eco-tourism in this part of Romania.

The film 'Cold Mountain' with Nicole Kidman and Jude Law. Although this book by Charles Frazier is actually about the American civil war, it was filmed in the Carpathians very close to Sinca Noua. The scenery shots will give you a good idea of what kind of country you can expect to see.



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