

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



14th-22nd May 2017 (9 days)

THE DANUBE DELTA

Cruise in Europe's largest wilderness

"breathtaking... birdwatching experience of a lifetime"

"a wonderful way of exploring the Delta"

Danube 2011

One of the very few holidays to include a week on a 'floating hotel', exploring the spectacular wildlife of the Romanian Danube Delta.

At the end of a 1700 mile long journey across Europe, the great Danube River empties its water into the Black Sea. Here, the Danube splits into numerous channels and canals, creating the second largest delta on the continent. Vast expanses of swamps and forests, as well as a scattering of pretty lakes surrounded by thick reed beds, provide a perfect sanctuary for over 300 species of birds, many year round residents, plus summer breeders and spring and autumn migrants. On this tour it should be possible to see up to 175 different bird species: our 2009 trip enjoyed sightings of great black-headed gull, red-footed falcon, paddyfield warbler and collared flycatcher as well as huge numbers of herons, pelicans and terns. In the Delta, we stay on a very comfortable 'travelling' houseboat, which as well as being equipped with all the 'mod cons' we might need, also has a lovely open deck for bird-watching and relaxing in the open air.

As well as enjoying the wildlife, we will learn much about the **local conservation** projects and how the lives of many of the people of the Delta, many living in remote fishing villages, are an integral part of the wetland ecosystem. We are delighted to be returning to the delta, a favourite Wildlife Travel destination for over a decade.

The holiday is aimed at providing a unique visit to **one of the last remaining wilderness areas of Europe**. Our local guides are experienced ecologists: their natural history expertise, together with that of our leader, will enable anyone with a general wildlife interest to enjoy this tour as well as those with a more specific interest in birds.



Wildlife and culture holidays

Price
£1875

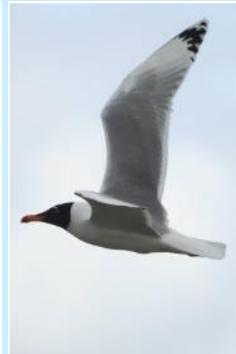
Single Room Supplement
£265

Full board

- Day 1** flight to Bucharest
- Day 2** travel to Delta inc Babadag Forest
- Day 3-8** Danube Delta inc Sfantu Gheorghe Sacalin Island
- Day 9** return to UK

Leaders
Mike Symes
and local guides

birds, natural history, culture
7 nights aboard 'floating hotel'



All our profits are donated to the **Wildlife Trusts**



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 14th May After arrival in Bucharest we **transfer to our hotel** in Amara, approximately 2 hours away. We should arrive at our hotel in plenty of time to settle in and have a brief introduction to the holiday before dinner.

Day 2 15th May An early morning exploration of the nearby lakes will give us our first introduction to the wetland birdlife of Romania, with little bittern and ferruginous duck likely to be seen. After breakfast, we travel eastwards, stopping along the way to visit the **Babadag forest**, home to **wild flowers** including peony, lady orchid and monkey orchid amongst others. Our next port of call will be the salt lakes around Murighiol, where we may catch up with our first ruddy shelduck or pygmy cormorant. Finally we join our houseboat 'Kingfisher', our home for the next seven nights.

Day 3 16th May Today we will have a leisurely cruise to **Sfantu Gheorghe**, one of the most beautiful fishing villages in the Danube Delta. From the deck of the boat we will see many of the typical birds of the delta such as egrets, pelicans, herons, bee-eater, roller and the ever present marsh harriers, the peace only disturbed by the occasional **white-tailed eagle** hunting overhead. We will keep our eyes peeled for the beautiful great black-headed gulls, a speciality of the area. After arriving in Sfantu Gheorghe in the early afternoon we will visit the village to see the local houses in the Ukrainian style.

Day 4 17th May We explore the local area around Sfantu Gheorghe by small boat, including the sandy Sahalin Island, an important bird reserve, at the mouth of the **Black Sea**, home to moustached warbler, **fire-bellied toad** and **golden jackal**. After lunch, we will walk around the Sfantu Gheorghe area, where we will look for a variety of migrating waders, lesser grey shrike, bearded tit and eastern olivaceous warbler. The beach is home to the **steppe runner**, a large lizard that only reaches Europe in this corner of Romania.

Day 5 18th May After an early morning bird walk around Sfantu Gheorghe, we will have a leisurely day on the boat, travelling towards the Dunavat channel, in the company of whiskered terns and egrets along the way, giving us the choice of birding from the upper deck or simply indulging in a siesta!

Day 6 19th May The day will be spent in the remote areas of Zatoane, Perisor and Holbina, along the **Black Sea coast**. Today will give us excellent opportunities for catching up with some of the shyer animals of the Delta: **wild boar** or even **golden jackal** will be looked for, as well as birds such as **paddyfield warbler** and other north-bound migrants.

Day 7 20th May After breakfast, we transfer to the small boats for a trip to the lakes around the main channel. The reeds will be alive with the song of birds, including **great reed, sedge** and **Savi's warblers**. After lunch back onboard, we travel on to Uzlina.



Day 8 21st May Today our explorations may take us to the shallow lagoons hidden amongst the reeds where hundreds of pairs of **whiskered tern** nest amongst the lily pads and red-necked grebes and red-crested pochard make their homes. After another bird-packed day, we will relax with a glass (or two) of wine and a farewell dinner on board.

Day 9 22nd May After a leisurely breakfast, we bid farewell to the boat and start to travel slowly back towards Bucharest, stopping along the way for one last spot of birdwatching before we finally return to Bucharest for our onward journeys home.

Life in the Delta

In the heart of the Delta there are a **myriad of marshes, reedbeds, lakes and water channels** holding an amazing number of breeding birds as well as frogs, snakes, otters, dragonflies, butterflies, small mammals and a rich plant community. It has a high number of fish species and, traditionally, the majority of people who live in the Delta have earned their living from fishing. The Delta contains **the world's largest area of reed bed** and almost 400 freshwater lakes. It is Europe's richest location for birds but remains relatively undeveloped as far as tourism is concerned. In addition to wetland, there are areas of sandy, dry ground that are covered with woodland of oak and ash. Mature willow trees are an exceptional feature, covering much of the wetter land. Also in the area covered by the **Biosphere Reserve** are dry steppes and open dunes.

The Danube splits into three main channels before it enters the Black Sea -the Sulina, Chilia and Sfantu Gheorghe Channels. The Sulina Channel is the shortest route to the Sea and carries most of the traffic. Our journey takes us along the southernmost channel, the Sfantu Gheorghe, which is the **most attractive** of the three and probably the oldest. After the village of Murighiol, it meanders gently to the village that shares its name. This is a fishing village and small port, very isolated and surrounded by dunes, woodlands and marshes, adjacent to the Black Sea. Many of the villages in the Delta were settled by **Ukrainians and other, previously 'Russian', peoples** and the houses and other buildings reflect the continued presence of these cultures.

Fitness

During this holiday, you will need to be able to climb in and out of small boats, sometimes directly onto the bank. We will spend lengthy periods sat in the small boats, which do not have back supports. Please note that facilities for disabled travellers in Romania are not to the same standard as those provided in the UK. As this tour involves considerable moving around in boats, it may not be suitable for people with limited mobility.

Weather

The weather should be pleasant, mostly warm, even hot, although rain is possible, as is cooler weather. We will not be walking long in the sun. There is no major problem from mosquitoes at this time of year in the delta.



Leader and Guides

Mike Symes is an excellent all-round naturalist and professional ecologist who has worked for Devon Wildlife Trust for almost ten years. Mike has led for Wildlife Travel in the Danube Delta in 2015, as well as Estonia, the Dolomites and Norfolk. His enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history and his keenness to share this knowledge with others will help to ensure that you enjoy a wonderful holiday.

Our local guides, **EuroDelta Travel**, know the Delta intimately: their company specialises in tours of the Delta and they have direct links with local landowners and conservationists, having been involved in conservation projects themselves. They have organised and led our seven previous trips to the area and we are very pleased to be travelling with them again.

Accommodation and meals

Our first night will be spent in the **Hotel Diamant** in Amara, half way between Bucharest and the Delta. On the delta, our home is a very comfortable boat, each cabin having an en suite 'bathroom' (shower/w.c). The 9 cabins are all on the same deck, 'outside' (i.e. with a window) and have twin or double beds (not bunks). There is an outside viewing deck where we can sit and watch the birds and other wildlife as we drift along the river. Our meals will be a mixture of **Romanian and International dishes**, with an emphasis on local cuisine. Most of the fresh food is organic and produced locally, including meat and fish.

Flights

The group flight is with British Airways from London Heathrow
14th May Depart Heathrow 10.55, arrive Bucharest 16.10
22nd May Depart Bucharest 17.10, arrive Heathrow 18.45

Romania is 2 hours behind UK time



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

DEPOSIT £650 PER PERSON, BALANCE DUE BY 12/02/2017

INCLUDED: Return flights from London Heathrow to Bucharest, including all airport taxes. Local transport on excursions as specified in the itinerary. 8 nights accommodation, full board basis. Services of leaders and guides.

NOT INCLUDED: Refreshments. Entrance fees for optional sightseeing (eg museums). Gratuities. Travel insurance.

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