



ORKNEY ISLAND HOLIDAYS LTD

Paul & Louise Hollinrake
Furrowend, Shapinsay,
Orkney, KW17 2DY.
Tel : 01856 711373

Email : info@orkneyislandholidays.com

Web : www.orkneyislandholidays.com

Romania Special Holiday

A multi-interest Holiday in Romania.

Check the Dates & Prices tab on our website or See our Holiday Schedule for current dates and prices.

Exploring the Carpathian Mountains, Lowland Steppes of Dobrogea, Black Sea Coast and Danube Delta.

Looking at Birds, Wild Flowers, Insects, Reptiles, Brown Bears, Archaeology, History, Local Culture & Music.

Leaders Daniel Petrescu and Ibis Tours Staff and Paul and Louise Hollinrake of Orkney Island Holidays Ltd.



Black-necked Grebes in the Danube Delta by Daniel Petrescu

[An introduction to your Holiday in Romania.](#)

Welcome to your brochure about our multi-interest tour of Romania.

This Holiday is ideal for all levels of bird watchers and wildlife enthusiasts plus those people who enjoy learning about and visiting some of the local history and archaeology of a fascinating new area. There are many easily seen birds and flowers, some fascinating historical and archaeological sites, a chance of seeing some mammals and wonderful scenery. The pace is relaxed and the varied itinerary makes the Holiday enjoyable for everyone.

Our tour is organised with Daniel Petrescu and Ibis Tours, a local family-run Wildlife Tour Company in Romania. Daniel, a great character, was born and brought up in the Danube Delta and has extensive knowledge of the country's wildlife. We have worked with him for several years and know that his experience of boats and life in the Delta is second to none. He is a professional photographer and helps all guests get good photo opportunities.



Daniel helping to identify something good!



..... And demonstrating the ecology of the Delta.

[We will explore three main areas of Romania.](#)

[1. The Carpathian Mountains.](#)

The Carpathian Mountains form the backbone of Central and Eastern Europe. They are famed for their wildlife, which lies hidden in vast ancient forests where brown bears still roam. We will attempt to see wild brown bears one evening, on a special excursion to their woodland habitat. Mountain and forest birds include ring ouzels, alpine accentors, raptors, woodpeckers, wagtails, buntings and pipits.



In the Carpathian Mountains.

There is a wealth of alpine flowers and butterflies to test our identification skills too, plus glorious mountain scenery, woodlands and limestone gorges. We will explore the area using the Ibis tours Minibus and short walking excursions, glimpsing Bran Castle built in 1212, the inspiration for Stoker's Dracula.

2. The Danube Delta in Romania.

The Danube Delta is Europe's second largest riverine delta covering some 4,200 square km and growing! Only the Volga Delta is larger. Around 82% of this area lies in Romania and 18% in the Ukraine.

It is one of Europe's greatest wetlands for birds and birding.

The River Danube rises in Germany's Black Forest and travels 2,840 km to end, after passing through the enormous filter of the Delta, by flowing into the Black Sea.

The Danube passes through ten countries and four capital cities, Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest & Belgrade.

In 1990 the Danube Delta was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.



Peace & Tranquility in the Delta.



Floating Hotel moored for the night in the Delta.

The Danube Delta is not just the world's largest reed bed, but has dense woodlands of ash, willow, oak and poplar, plus grazing marshes, man-made fish ponds, orchards and small fishing and reed gathering villages. Bird specialities include both Dalmatian and white pelicans, ibises, egrets, pygmy cormorant, ferruginous duck, red-necked & black-necked grebes, Savi's warbler, white-tailed eagles, hobbies, harriers, marsh terns, bitterns, penduline tits, rollers, bee-eaters, etc. The vastness of the Delta and sheer numbers and quality of birds is spectacular.



Egrets and Ibises in the Danube Delta

We will explore the Danube Delta by Ibis Tours own Floating Hotel and attendant craft. This allows us to maximize our time in the Delta, and enable us to get really close views of the wildlife and enjoy the peace and serenity. We shall also undertake short walks on land where woods and forest yield further species of interest.

The life style of the Delta's residents is fascinating to see, with waterborne transport the only viable way of getting around and fishing the predominant source of income. Our hosts have first hand experience of growing up and working in villages within the Delta, and so offer us an unrivalled insight into life in the area. We will visit a village where our Guide Daniel grew up, and walk around to get a feel for the place, and take a horse and cart ride into the heart of Letea forest. A visit to the Delta is an unforgettable experience in every respect.

3. The Lowland Steppes of Dobrogea and Black Sea coastal area.

The Lowland Steppes of Dobrogea lie between the River Danube, as it flows from south to north before forming the delta, and the lagoons and Black Sea to the east. The landscape is typically rolling steppe and agricultural country, dotted with woodlands and brackish and freshwater lakes. Many birds can be seen here, including such specialities as collared pratincole, pied wheatear, Calandra lark, lesser spotted eagle, hawfinch, black woodpecker, Saker falcon and numerous wetland species.

We will explore the Lowlands using the Ibis Tours Minibus and short walking excursions.

There are many lovely little wild flowers, some of which we know and others that we need help identifying. While in this area we will be joined by a specialist botanist, historian and archaeologist, Mihai Petrescu, and will have the opportunity to visit two or three archaeological sites. Mihai will point out all the cultural influences in the regions around Tulcea, where people settled over the centuries after fleeing from persecution in their own countries.

Romania has always been at a cultural crossroads, where northern and southern Europe meet, and where eastern Europe meets the western countries of the former USSR – Ukraine and Moldavia. Across the Black Sea is the Crimea, and on its south coast is Turkey. Human bones found in a cave in the south-west Carpathians are 42,000 years old and are the earliest of modern humans, homo sapiens, so far found anywhere in Europe– perhaps they were on the first migration route out of Asia and into Europe!

The sites we can visit are much more ‘modern’, the earliest being from the first millennium BC when this region of Romania was part of the Greek Empire. Later it was the Dacian Kingdom. The Romans became overlords as late as 106 AD and called it Roman Dacia, but it was the first province to be abandoned in 271 AD when the contraction of the Roman Empire began. However the ‘Roman’ name stuck and survives to this day.



Argamum Archaeological Site



Medieval Fortress of Enisala

The country was composed of three areas, Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, each of which had its own chequered history. The borders were rather fluid, and the country took its present form after the Second World War. As you might imagine, it was often necessary for Romanians to defend themselves from invaders from the Black Sea, and the remains of fortifications from different periods reflect this.

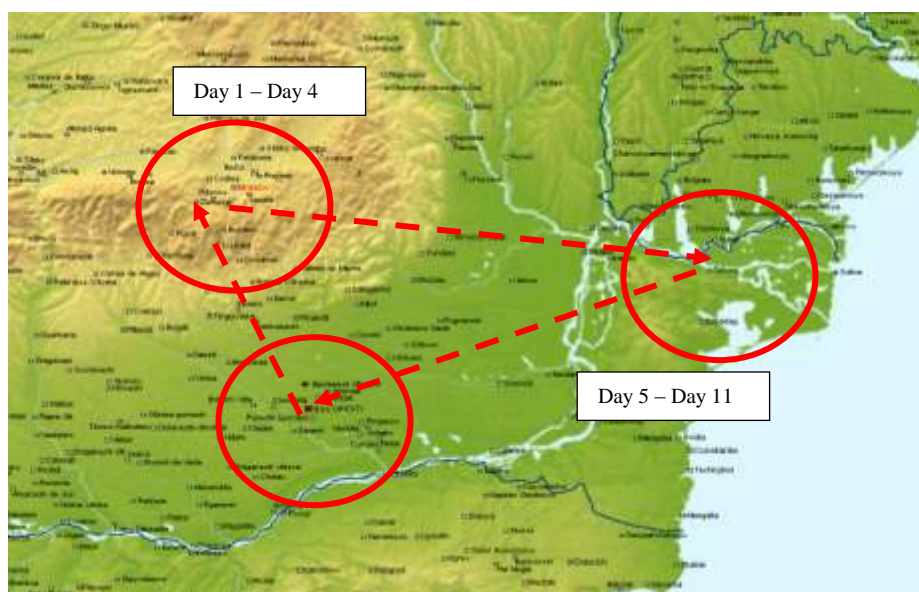
The Romanian language is interesting in that it differs markedly from the languages of its surrounding neighbours, Hungary, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Turkey. It is a Romance language with many similarities to French, Spanish and Italian. This is surprising, and shows a tenacity to retain autonomy throughout all the turbulence since the Roman Occupation nearly two thousand years ago.

Romania Special Holiday Tour Itinerary overview.

(Please note that this itinerary may change to make the most of new circumstances & weather).

- Day 1. Morning flight to Romania from London Heathrow for UK residents or other airports for those living elsewhere. Arrive Otopeni Airport in Bucharest mid afternoon, to be met by Ibis Tours Mini Coach. Travel to Zarnesti near Brasov in the Carpathian mountains.
Night at Elena Pension Hotel in Carpathians.
- Days 2-3. Explore Carpathians around Cheile Zarnesti & Valea Stramba for montane and forest birds such as woodpeckers, owls, thrushes, pipits, raptors and buntings. Wonderful scenery and short walks. Visit the area of Dracula's Bran Castle. Brown Bear excursion one evening. Last night festive meal and local music and fun. Nights at Elena Pension Hotel in Carpathians.
- Day 4. Drive through the mountains of Transylvania to the lowlands of Dobrogea and Black Sea region of eastern Romania, with stops to look at scenery, birds and other wildlife along the way. During our journey we will get a feel for the vastness of Romania.
Night on board the Floating Hotel in Tulcea.

Orkney Island Holidays Romania Special Tour Outline Map.



- Days 5-7. Aboard our Floating Hotel we explore the famous Danube Delta. We will cruise amongst the channels between the reed beds and woodlands of the Delta. There will be a myriad of waterbirds, birds of prey, warblers, rollers and woodland species, plus beautiful wild flowers and large mammals. We will see the way people live and work in the Delta. Special excursion by pony and trap into remote Letea Forest desert.
Nights afloat in the Delta.
- Day 8. Our fourth and final day exploring the Danube Delta, before our return cruise through the channels of the Delta to Tulcea.
Night on board the Floating Hotel or Ibis Tours Hotel in Tulcea.
- Days 9-10. Explore the lowland plains of Dobrogea, hills, woodlands, lakes, and coastal Black Sea lagoons for raptors, waterfowl, songbirds, waders & wild flowers. Each day will also include an archaeological or historical site in the company of a specialist guide. Nights at Ibis Tours Hotel in Tulcea.
- Day 11. Travel to Bucharest for late afternoon flight back to London Heathrow for UK residents or other airports for those living elsewhere.

[The Birds and Wild Flowers and other Wildlife of Romania.](#)

Many birds in Romania are easy to see and identify at fairly close range. Others are a little more challenging and we hope to improve your identification skills and confidence. Repeated sightings improve familiarity with the commoner species.

We do not aim to chase around seeing as many species as possible, but rather to help you identify birds and flowers as we come across them, by visiting a wide range of habitats.



[A female black woodpecker](#)



[An alpine pasque flower](#)

On our past trips we have seen about 180 species of birds and a wide variety of wild flowers, plus a few mammals such as deer, wild boar, otter and wildcat.



[Reed stacks in the Danube Delta](#)



[Roe deer swimming by Sydney Benjamin](#)

Many of the wild flowers are endemic to Romania and thus quite unfamiliar if you have never been to Romania before. Daniel our guide helps us identify some of the flowers, and on one of the days we will enjoy the services of a very skilled local botanist from the University in Tulcea. There is as yet no English text version of a wild flower book for Romania, so flower identification is quite challenging. However, many of the plants fall in to familiar groups that we are used to in the UK and other parts of Europe, and a good European wild flower guide book is very useful.

[In the Carpathian Mountains](#) we hope to see green and black woodpeckers, rock bunting, alpine swift, tree pipit, crested tit, firecrest and yellowhammer, plus dipper and grey wagtail along the rivers in the limestone gorges. Birds of prey can include goshawk, sparrowhawk, common and honey buzzard, lesser spotted eagle and kestrel. The limestone here holds several species of flowers endemic to the Carpathians, plus the first alpine flowers appearing after the winter snows. We also hope to see Brown Bears on a special evening excursion in the woods.



A Brown Bear in the woods

[The Danube Delta](#) is incredibly rich in breeding birds. For example Romania hosts the world's largest population of the globally threatened pygmy cormorant with over 7000 pairs, and most are here in the Delta. There's also Europe's largest population of Eurasian white pelican about 3500 pairs, crucial numbers of Dalmatian pelican and the core European population of ferruginous duck. Europe's largest lesser grey shrike population also breeds here. Many *Locustella* and *Acrocephalus* warblers such as savi's, sedge, paddyfield, moustached, marsh, reed, great reed warblers have their largest European breeding populations in Romania.



A Whiskered Tern and a rare Dalmation Pelican which has the largest wingspan of any bird in Europe at over 3 metres.

Typical sights include feeding glossy ibis, egrets, herons, and cormorants, which can gather in impressive numbers where the water levels are low. Large flocks of white pelicans glide serenely overhead whilst in the shallower channels kingfishers are ubiquitous and common sandpipers, green sandpipers and greenshanks feed along the banks. The reeds fringing the waterways contain families of penduline tits and other reed bed species such as little bittern.

We will also see breeding marsh terns such as white-winged black terns, which nest on the lily pads. Raptors will include frequent sightings of marsh harriers and hobbies, whilst red-footed falcons will be seen in small groups hunting insects and if we are lucky starting to take over the nests of rooks. White-tailed eagles are possible anywhere in the Delta, and there is always a chance of locating one of the ten breeding pairs of these magnificent animals. Migrating waterfowl and waders mingle with resident species and white pelicans often gather in huge numbers to feed and roost.

In open areas bee-eaters, hoopoes, rollers and shrikes are quite common and the woodlands support five species of woodpecker.

There are a wide variety of butterflies and other insects for us to attempt to identify, plus several snakes, tortoises and lizards are usually seen. On several occasions we have glimpsed wild boar, musk rats, deer, fox, wildcat and otters in the Delta on previous trips, so keep your eyes peeled for the unexpected.



Water lilies abound in the Delta

We will visit Letea, the village where Daniel our Guide grew up. It is now a conservation area using only traditional building materials and techniques. No motorized vehicles are permitted in the Delta forest, so we will enjoy a trip with horse and cart to get to a tiny desert in its midst.

The Lowland Steppes of Dobrogea host a common and endearing rodent called the European Souslik, which lives colonially in a network of burrows. They often sit upright in a begging posture, similar to Meerkats we've all seen on TV. They of course provide a good food resource for resident and migrant raptors such as honey buzzard, long legged buzzard, Saker falcon, lesser spotted eagle and marsh harriers.

Other birds include, stone curlew, pied wheatear, Isabelline wheatear, rock thrush, Ortolan bunting, corn bunting, woodchat shrike, lesser grey shrike, firecrest, bee-eaters, hoopoe and roller. The scenery here is wonderful with lovely wild flowers and small mountains popping up out of the plains.

The fourteenth century Fortress of Enisala, built on the site of earlier fortifications, makes an interesting diversion and is a good vantage point for birds of prey.



Alpine purple crocuses



Local transport

The Black Sea Coast area has a series of shallow, brackish lakes salt marsh containing scattered pools, which are extremely rich in birds. On our previous visits this area has been stuffed full with a bewildering number of bird species, so it is best to take your time and absorb the spectacle. Herons, egrets, terns and ducks can be seen in large numbers, as well as passage warblers, shrikes, hoopoes and rollers. Other birds possible are bluethroat, Balkan yellow wagtail, numerous waders, and pratincoles etc. This is also the main feeding area for the small population of Dalmatian Pelicans in the Delta. We hope to have a guided visit to the archaeological sites of Argamum or Histria on this day, with remains dating from the first millennium BC to the 7th Century AD, reflecting turbulent life near the Black Sea at that time. Our guide will also show us how Romania has often been a haven for people escaping persecution, and has been at the crossroads of Eastern and Western European culture right up to the present day, emerging from Communism to join the EU.

Our Hotels on Land.

Our Hotels at Zarnesti in the Carpathians and in Tulcea at the gateway to the Danube Delta have excellent ensuite facilities and all the comforts of modern Hotels. The Hotel in the mountains is run by family friends of Ibis Tours, and is spacious and modern. Our hosts look after us very well and cook lovely homemade cuisine. On the third and final night they prepare a festive feast with live local music and entertainment. Hotel Mirela on the outskirts of Tulcea is owned and run by our Guide Company Ibis Tours. It has a spacious feel, providing excellent food using local ingredients and Romanian style. Another festive evening with local musicians will celebrate the end of our Holiday in Romania.

Our Floating Hotel in the Danube Delta.



The Floating Hotel provides us with a really special and comfortable mobile home, with small, but modern ensuite cabins. The food on board is excellent, and the scene from the restaurant panoramic. There are spacious wildlife viewing areas in the stern for us to enjoy the changing scenery as we motor along. We explore narrower twisting channels in specially converted lifeboats. The Romanian Floating Hotel is probably a novel concept for most of us. The advantages are that our home comes with us as we explore the Delta, and gives us the flexibility which land based Hotels cannot offer. We can wake up in different parts of the Delta each day and also enjoy the silence and peace of the Delta at night. It is a wonderful experience.



The Floating Hotel moored up in the Danube Delta.



Ready for dinner on board.

The floating Hotel is about 30 metres long and has two decks. The upper dining/lounge area with galley and small bar, and an outside viewing area. The cabins are below decks at water level. The Floating Hotel unit is towed by a separate motor launch or tug.

In addition, converted lifeboats are towed behind us when we travel along the main channels in the Delta. These smaller craft are used to enable us to explore the numerous smaller channels within the Delta. When we do this the Floating Hotel relocates further along the Delta, for us to join later in the day.

There are 10 cabins and each of them has two single beds, not one on top of the other, but with a narrow aisle between them and a small bedside cabinet. All cabins have their own ensuite shower and toilet and there is hot water permanently on the boat.



The converted lifeboat for exploring the narrower channels in the Danube Delta.

The cabins are small and simply appointed, about 2 metres wide by 3 metres long, and have a porthole to see outside. There is very little storage space, so suitcases and most of your luggage is best stored under the beds. It is like having a berth on a small yacht. We and our guests have found the Floating Hotel very comfortable and well maintained.

Access to the upper deck is by an interior stair directly to the dining room/lounge area. This room has fantastic all round visibility because of its large panoramic windows. So while we are eating meals we can bird watch and enjoy the scenery. In addition there is a large outside viewing area.

There is an excellent cook who prepares good quality home cooked meals, often with a local flavour. We often return to the Floating Hotel in the Delta for lunch.

There will be about 9 staff operating the Floating Hotel and attendant craft, including the cook, helmsmen, boatmen and general workers and room maids. Alcoholic drinks and soft drinks are available to purchase from the mini bar on the boat at all times of day. There is a chit system to pay at the end of the trip in cash Euros, not credit card on the boat. There are also maps and postcards and small souvenirs too.



Some general information about our Romania Special

The Weather.

The weather is usually a pleasant T-shirt temperature, warmer in windless sunshine, cooler in showers and in the evening, with the possibility of occasional strong winds and rain. Over the years we have experienced all types of weather, even snow in the hills, so it is well to be prepared for it to be changeable. In May it is rarely too hot, but if it is, we seek the shade in the middle of the day and take a rest or explore in the shade. Up in the mountains it can of course be quite cool, and on the excursions in the Delta and Black Sea area the wind can be very fresh sometimes.

Flights to Romania.

Flights can be booked for you by our local Travel Agent Ridgway Travel in Kirkwall, Orkney. ABTA Licence Number 66402. They are experts at getting the best flights and the best prices for everyone. You will pay Ridgway Travel separately for your flights.

British residents will usually fly from London Heathrow using scheduled flights with for example British Airways, KLM or Romanian Airways. Flights from other airports worldwide can be arranged to link up with the British guests in Romania.

If you prefer to book your own flights please check with us that your arrival and departure times are compatible with our transfer arrangements with Ibis Tours in Romania.

We will give you contact details for Ridgway Travel who can book your flights for you. This is only done after we have confirmed sufficient clients on the trip to ensure it is going ahead and we will advise you on this.

Money to take with you.

It is best to take Euros which can be used in most places. If this is not possible say in a market, our Guides will help by changing small amounts of money on your behalf. We suggest you take some cash Euro for souvenirs, tips and drinks etc.

Bar bills can be settled in Euro or by credit card in the land based Hotels, but not credit card on the Floating Hotel.



Time for a spot of painting



Naked Man Orchid in Babadog forest

Tips for the Ibis Tours staff.

This is a purely personal matter and at your discretion. We will make an opportunity to give whatever you wish at the end of the trip.

Single Travellers.

Single travellers are very much welcomed and we hope you will enjoy making new friends on your Holiday with us. If you are single and elect to share we will do our best to pair you with a suitable room mate. Then of course you will avoid the single room supplement. If this is not possible then the single supplement will apply.

Mary Rowlands wrote after her Holiday to Romania with us in 2008:

“It’s been quite difficult to come down to earth after such a wonderful Holiday experience, which exceeded expectations aroused by your excellent brochure. Thankyou for everything, especially the excellent organisation (so that means thanks to Daniel too). At various times of day I go back to drifting along amongst the lily pads, or glimpsing the squacco herons taking off or the “squadrons” of pelicans thermalling in the sky. It’s all been so enriching.”

Check the Dates & Prices tab on our website or See our Holiday Schedule for current dates and prices for this Holiday.

What is included in the cost.

All transport and transfers within Romania as per the itinerary.

Full board ensuite accommodation at the two Hotels and on the Floating Hotel, including lunches which may be packed lunch on some days.

Daily transport by minibus or boat and short walking excursions as per the suggested itinerary.

Brown Bear watching excursion. Entrance fees to all sites. Pony and trap excursion in Letea.

Two local musical evenings.

Guiding with Paul or Louise and Ibis Tours Staff for the duration of the Holiday.



Some local musical entertainment

What is NOT included in the cost.

Scheduled flights to and from Bucharest in Romania.

Travel and medical insurance: It is your responsibility to make sure you are adequately insured. We can advise.

All drinks from the bar, telephone calls, laundry costs, and other things of a personal nature.



Amongst wild paeonies in the Steppes.



Frogs croaking in the Delta.

Once you have booked.

We will send confirmation of your booking on receipt of your completed booking form and deposit payment. Then when your balance is paid 10 weeks before departure, we will send you suggestions of what clothing and other things you might bring with you, suggestions about a few identification books that may be useful, a bird check list and any other relevant pre-departure information.



A beautiful Squacco Heron

Falco cherrug local wildlife group for children.

Falco cherrug is a wildlife group set up and run by staff of Ibis Tours to educate young people about the wonders and value of their natural world. It means Saker Falcon and is an iconic raptor which breeds in Romania. Each year some of our guests have taken unwanted binoculars, telescopes and wildlife books to give to the children. If you wish to do this please bring them along, and we will present them to the group. This is always very much appreciated and helps to nurture empathy for nature amongst Romanian children.

Is this the Holiday for you?

Are you looking for a multi interest Holiday in Romania? To explore the country with a small group of friends with experienced Guides to help? Would you like a relaxed pace, in a friendly and fun atmosphere, with everything organised for you? Would you like to have a good time and learn about lots of aspects of this fascinating country? Then this Holiday is for you. We very much hope you will come with us.



We walk amongst picturesque villages in the Delta with no motorised transport noise except boats.

What to do now.

If you have any questions about this Holiday please get in touch with us by phone, letter or email, and we will do our best to help.

We think Romania is a terrific Holiday destination at a time of year when the wildlife and scenery especially are at their very best.



Working out where we have been and where we are going next!

If you would like to come to Romania, please complete the enclosed booking form and post it to us as soon as you can, together with your deposit payment made payable to Orkney Island Holidays Ltd.

Our normal Orkney Island Holidays booking conditions apply. If you need a copy of these we will be happy to send them to you.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

[Paul & Louise Hollinrake.](#)

[All photos by Paul & Louise Hollinrake, Daniel Petrescu of Ibis Tours and some past Orkney Island Holidays Guests.](#)



“Three Cheers for your trip to Romania”