

Castles of Transylvania: Istanbul to Budapest

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Overview

The Highlights

- Travel through four European countries, with four nights on board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*
- Sightseeing tour of Istanbul
- Special dinner in Bran Castle, the alleged inspiration for Bram Stoker's Dracula
- Peles Castle in Romania, considered by many one of the most stunning castles in Europe
- Accommodation at five-star Four Seasons Sultanahmet in Istanbul for 1 night

- Accommodation at five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace in Budapest for 1 night

The Tour

Absorb the vibrant cultures, ancient castles, and spectacular scenery on this 7-day "Castles of Transylvania" journey aboard the [Golden Eagle Danube Express](#).

Delve into the history surrounding Romania's most infamous historical figure, Vlad the Impaler – or as he is more commonly known, Count Dracula – on this 7-day rail cruise of Transylvania.

Itinerary

Day 1: Istanbul, Turkey

Arrive into Istanbul, where you will be met and transferred to the luxurious Four Seasons Sultanahmet for a one-night stay. Since 1895 this hotel continues to exude Belle Epoque charm for its guests. The Pera Palace Hotel offers excellent leisure with diverse, art-driven places that culminate in a warm crescendo that elegantly displays the historical sense of Istanbul.

This evening, we will enjoy a welcome reception dinner, giving you the opportunity to meet your fellow travelers.

Day 2: Istanbul

Istanbul is the fabled city that spans Asia and Europe. Today, we will visit a selection of Istanbul's must-see historic sites and see how old meets new and east meets west.

The Sultan Ahmet Mosque (the Blue Mosque), one of the most famous monuments in both the Turkish and Islamic worlds, 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.

Hagia Sophia, now a museum, 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 into a mosque and is today one of the most magnificent museums in the world. Take a moment to linger and admire the fine Byzantine architecture.

Next, visit Topkapi, the crown jewel of the Ottoman Empire, with its treasury and exotic buildings overlooking the Golden Horn. It is the largest and oldest palace in the world and was the primary residence of the Ottoman Sultans from 1465 to 1853.

Later this afternoon, board the *Golden Eagle Danube Express*, to begin your rail journey through

Bulgaria and Romania to Budapest.

Day 3: Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

This morning, enjoy the views from our private train as we climb over the Shipka Pass and arrive at our first stop, 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.

Your tour today includes the superbly preserved medieval Tsarevets Hill and Castle. There will also be free time to wander through the narrow alleyways of the ancient city.

This evening, relax in the Bar Lounge Car before dinner as our train continues through the scenic landscape and heads across the Romanian border.

Day 4: Sinaia & Brasov, Romania

Overnight, the train twists and turns as it climbs over the Carpathian Mountains and threads its way through a dramatic landscape dotted with clear mountain streams.

This morning, we arrive in Sinaia for a tour of Peleş Castle. The castle is a masterpiece of German new-Renaissance architecture, considered by many one of the most stunning castles in Europe. Commissioned by King Carol I in 1873 and completed in 1883, the castle served as the summer residence of the royal family until 1947. Its 160 rooms are adorned with the finest examples of European art, Murano crystal chandeliers, German stained-glass windows, and Cordoba leather-covered walls.

Returning to our private train for lunch, we continue onto Brasov in the afternoon for a visit to Bran Castle. Surrounded by an aura of mystery and legend and perched high atop a 200-foot-high rock, the 14th-century castle owes its fame to its imposing towers and turrets, as well as to the myth created around Bram Stoker's Dracula. Following a tour of the castle and its surroundings, enjoy a gala dinner tonight inside the castle walls.

Day 5: Sighisoara & Sibiu, Romania

This morning, we make an early departure from Brasov and arrive after breakfast into 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.

We return to the train for lunch as we continue onto Sibiu, known specifically for its Germanic architecture in the Old Town due to the legacy of 12th-century Saxon settlers. Today, the remains of medieval walls and towers can be seen around the city, including the 13th-century Council Tower, which connects the two main squares.

Tonight, we enjoy a final dinner on board our private train as we travel across the Great Hungarian Plain.

Day 6: Kecskemét & Lajosmizse, Hungary

This morning, we get the opportunity to explore Kecskemét, a fascinating city at the geographical center of Hungary, before the train heads to Lajosmizse for a spectacular ‘Pusztá’ horse show.

We then arrive late afternoon at the romantic and historic Hungarian capital, Budapest, located on the banks of the magnificent Danube, where we will enjoy a one-night stay in the five-star Four Seasons Gresham Palace hotel, a unique art nouveau landmark that combines historical elegance with ultra-modern comforts.

This evening, we will enjoy a farewell reception dinner at a local restaurant, giving you the opportunity to reflect on your journey through this fascinating part of Europe.

Day 7: Budapest, Hungary

This morning, after an overnight stay at the Four Seasons Gresham Palace, we enjoy our final breakfast on the tour.

Dates & Prices

2025 Dates

November 2 - November 8

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Deluxe Class	\$11,795	\$17,595	\$2,000
Superior Deluxe Class	\$15,595	\$25,395	\$2,500

All prices are per person.

2026 Dates

May 29 - June 4

September 23 - September 29

October 23 - October 29

Accommodation	Double	Single	Deposit
Deluxe Class	\$12,700	\$18,900	\$2,000
Superior Deluxe Class	\$16,400	\$27,300	\$2,500

All prices are per person.

2026 dates are preliminary and are subject to change.

More

A minimum of emergency medical and evacuation travel insurance is required for this journey.

Extend this journey by booking the [Balkan Explorer journey](#) beforehand - beginning in Venice and ending in Istanbul.