Romania

Carpathians, Transylvania & Danube Delta (Relaxed)



Red-footed Falcons

Our exploration of Romania takes us through a remarkable range of habitats, from the forested slopes of the Carpathian Mountains around Sinaia and Zetea, to the vast wetlands of the Danube Delta, and the steppes and lagoons of the Black Sea coast around Histria, Sinoe and Vadu. This diversity supports an exceptional variety of birdlife and makes Romania one of Europe's most rewarding and underrated birding destinations. Along the way, we also experience elements of the country's rich cultural heritage, with visits to sites such as Bran Castle, associated with the legend of Dracula, the UNESCO-listed fortified church at Prejmer, and the elegant Peleș Castle.

We begin in Transylvania, exploring the Eastern Carpathians around Zetea, a region of rolling hills, traditional villages and extensive forests. These mountains represent some of Europe's last great wilderness areas. Here, we search for species such as Black Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Flycatcher and Ring Ouzel, while Cheile Bicazului (Bicaz Gorge) offers opportunities for Wallcreeper and Alpine Swift. The region also holds Europe's largest population of Brown Bear, with excellent chances from a dedicated hide.

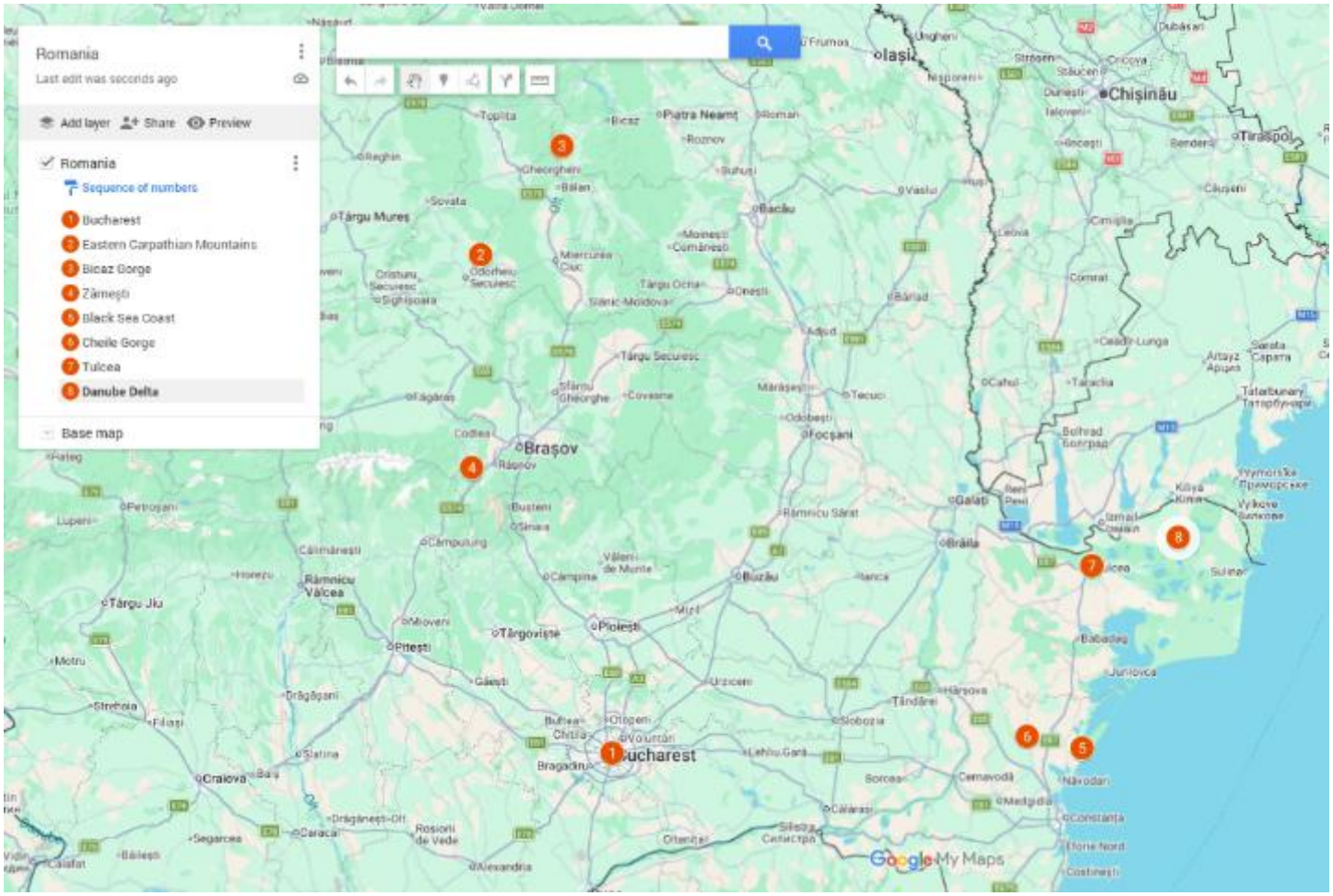
Moving south into the Southern Carpathians, based around Măgura and Zărnești, we explore alpine meadows, limestone gorges and forested valleys. These habitats support species such as Eurasian Crag Martin and Rock Bunting, along with more elusive birds including Ural Owl and White-backed Woodpecker. Traditional farmland provides relaxed birding with European Roller, Common Hoopoe and Red-backed Shrike.

From the mountains we descend to the Black Sea coast, where steppe, wetlands and coastal lagoons support a wealth of birdlife. Around Histria, Sinoe and Vadu, we encounter large numbers of waterbirds alongside species such as Paddyfield Warbler, Moustached Warbler and Bluethroat. The surrounding steppes, including Cheile Dobrogei, hold Calandra Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, Pied Wheatear and Levant Sparrowhawk, with raptors such as Long-legged Buzzard and Short-toed Snake Eagle regularly seen.

The tour concludes in the Danube Delta, where we explore an intricate network of channels, lakes and reedbeds by small boat. Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans dominate the wetlands, alongside Pygmy Cormorants, herons and ibis. Reedbeds hold Common Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler and River Warbler, while alluvial forests support Thrush Nightingale. The sheer abundance of birdlife provides a fitting finale to the tour.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Bucharest**
Day 2	**Bucharest to Zetea, Transylvania via Sinaia**
Days 3 & 4	**Eastern Carpathian Mountains**
Day 5	**Cheile Bicazului (Bicaz Gorge) & Lacul Roșu (Red Lake)**
Day 6	**Zetea to Zărnești via Prejmer fortified church**
Day 7	**Zărnești Gorge & Strâmba Valley, Southern Carpathian Mountains**
Day 8	**Zărnești to Vadu, Black Sea Coast via Bran Castle (Dracula's Castle)**
Day 9	**Black Sea Coast, Histria, Sinoe & Vadu**
Day 10	**Cheile Dobrogei (Dobrogea Gorges) & Sinoe**
Day 11	**Vadu to Tulcea, Danube Delta**
Days 12 & 13	**Danube Delta**
Day 14	**Danube Delta to Bucharest**
Day 15	**Final departure**





Danube Delta from the air

Sites in detail

Sinaia & the Carpathian Foothills. Our journey into the Carpathians begins around Sinaia, where montane forests provide an excellent introduction to Romania's woodland birding. Mixed coniferous and deciduous forests support a diverse range of species, and early walks here often produce a steady stream of activity.



Peles Castle

Typical species include Great Spotted Woodpecker, Coal, Crested, Willow and Great Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch and Eurasian Treecreeper, along with Goldcrest and Common Firecrest moving through the canopy. Warblers such as Wood Warbler and Common Chiffchaff are present in suitable habitat, while open streams may hold White-throated Dipper and Grey Wagtail. These forests also provide our first encounters with common European passerines such as Eurasian Chaffinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Red Crossbill and Eurasian Siskin.

Peleș Castle. Near the mountain town of Sinaia, we have the opportunity to view Peleș Castle, one of Romania's most elegant royal residences, set against the forested slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. Built in the late 19th century for King Carol I, the castle is notable for its striking architecture and picturesque setting. While our visit is brief, it provides an enjoyable cultural contrast to the surrounding natural landscapes and a glimpse into Romania's royal history.



Collared Flycatcher by Clayton Burne

Eastern Carpathians. The forests of the Eastern Carpathians represent some of the most extensive and least disturbed woodland habitats in Europe. We spend several days exploring this region, allowing time to build a strong list of forest species.

Woodpeckers are a particular highlight, with Black, Middle Spotted, Grey-headed and European Green Woodpecker all possible, alongside the more widespread Great Spotted Woodpecker. With luck, we may also encounter the more elusive Three-toed or White-backed Woodpecker.

Mixed flocks include Coal, Crested, Marsh, Willow, Eurasian Blue and Great Tit, accompanied by Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian

Nuthatch and Eurasian Treecreeper. Flycatchers are well represented, with Spotted, Red-breasted, European Pied and Collared Flycatcher all possible.

More secretive species include Hazel Grouse and Ural Owl, while the surrounding forests also support Western Capercaillie. An evening visit to a dedicated hide offers excellent chances of observing Brown Bear at close range, one of the standout wildlife experiences of the tour.



Ural Owls

Cheile Bicazului & Lacul Roșu. Cheile Bicazului (Bicaz Gorge) is one of the most dramatic landscapes in the Eastern Carpathians and a reliable site for one of Europe's most sought-after species, the Wallcreeper.

The towering limestone cliffs provide ideal habitat for this species, while other birds of interest include Alpine Swift, Eurasian Crag Martin, Peregrine Falcon and Ring Ouzel. The fast-flowing river below often holds White-throated Dipper and Grey Wagtail.

Nearby Lacul Roșu (Red Lake) adds a scenic contrast, with its flooded forest of standing dead trees creating a striking setting. The surrounding wetlands and meadows may produce species such as Common Rosefinch, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Great Grey Shrike, alongside a variety of common open-country birds.

Sânpaul Fishponds. These productive wetlands provide an important stop en route through Transylvania. A series of shallow ponds and reedbeds attracts a wide range of waterbirds.

Typical species include a variety of ducks such as Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Ferruginous Duck and Tufted Duck, along with grebes including Little, Horned and Great Crested Grebe. Herons and egrets are well represented, and both Great and Pygmy Cormorant are usually present.



Wallcreeper by Adam Walleyn

Reedbeds support Sedge, Eurasian Reed, Great Reed and Savi's Warbler, while Bearded Reedling and Eurasian Penduline Tit are regular highlights.

Prejmer Fortified Church. En route between Transylvania and the Southern Carpathians, we visit the impressive, fortified church at Prejmer, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the best-preserved examples of Saxon defensive architecture in Romania.

Originally built by the Teutonic Knights, the church is surrounded by massive defensive walls up to 12 metres high and 4 metres thick. Within these walls, individual storage rooms once allowed villagers to shelter during times of invasion, with provisions such as grain and cured meats stored to withstand prolonged sieges.

Prejmer occupied a strategic frontier position and was attacked numerous times throughout its history, yet the fortress was only successfully breached once. Today, it offers a fascinating insight into the region's past, as well as an opportunity to explore its unique architecture and setting.



Prejmer Fortified Church

Piatra Craiului & Bucegi Mountains. This region combines spectacular mountain scenery with excellent and accessible birding. Flower-rich meadows, traditional farmland and forest edges around Măgura support a wide range of species in a relaxed setting.

Typical birds include Common Hoopoe, Eurasian Wryneck, Syrian Woodpecker, Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Golden Oriole and a variety of larks, buntings and warblers. Open areas hold Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and Tree Pipit, while villages support Eurasian Tree Sparrow and other familiar species.

Zărnești Gorge offers more specialised mountain species. Here we search for Wallcreeper on the limestone cliffs, alongside Alpine Swift, Eurasian Crag Martin, Peregrine Falcon and Rock Bunting. Streams provide habitat for White-throated Dipper and Grey Wagtail. With luck we may even find the tricky Chamois.



Brown Bear by Rob Williams

Strâmba Valley adds further diversity, with a mix of woodland and open habitats supporting European Honey Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle, European Bee-eater, River and Barred Warbler, along with a full suite of forest passerines.

Bran Castle (Dracula's Castle). En route to the Black Sea coast, we make a brief stop at Bran Castle, dramatically situated on a rocky outcrop in the Carpathian foothills and widely associated with the legend of Dracula.

While its connection to Bram Stoker's character is largely symbolic, the castle remains one of Romania's most iconic landmarks. Now operating as a museum, it displays a collection of art and furnishings gathered by Queen Marie of Romania, offering insight into the country's royal history.



Bran Castle

The visit provides a short cultural interlude and a scenic contrast to the natural focus of the tour before we continue our journey toward the Black Sea coast.

Histria, Sinoe & Vadu (Black Sea Coast). The wetlands and coastal habitats around Histria, Sinoe and Vadu are among the most productive birding areas in Europe. A mosaic of lagoons, reedbeds, steppe and coastal marshes supports a huge diversity of species.

Large numbers of waterbirds are a constant feature, including Great White and Dalmatian Pelican, herons, egrets, Glossy Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbill. Ducks are abundant and diverse, while terns and gulls are well represented, including Gull-billed and Sandwich Tern and Pallas's Gull.

Raptors are frequent, with Western Marsh, Pallid and Montagu's Harrier, White-tailed Eagle and Long-legged Buzzard all likely.

Reedbeds hold key species such as Paddyfield, Moustached and Savi's Warbler, while surrounding grasslands and scrub produce Bluethroat, Western Yellow Wagtail and Red-throated Pipit.



Bluethroat by Rob Williams

Cheile Dobrogei. Cheile Dobrogei provides a striking contrast to the wetlands, with dry steppe and limestone habitats supporting a specialised suite of species.

This is one of the best areas for steppe birds such as Calandra Lark, Isabelline and Pied Wheatear, while rocky slopes hold Common Rock Thrush. Raptors are a major feature, with species such as Long-

legged Buzzard, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Booted Eagle and, with luck, Saker Falcon. The area also supports Levant Sparrowhawk, a localised and sought-after species in Europe.



Eurasian Penduline Tit by Adam Riley

Pădurea Babadag & Enisala. The forests of Babadag provide a final opportunity for woodland and raptor species before entering the delta. Key targets include Sombre Tit and Icterine Warbler, along with a range of woodpeckers and passerines.

Nearby Enisala offers excellent vantage points over coastal lagoons and steppe, where migrating and resident raptors such as Booted Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle and Red-footed Falcon may be seen.

Danube Delta. The Danube Delta is one of Europe's premier birding destinations and provides a fitting finale to the tour. Exploring by boat allows access to remote channels, lakes and reedbeds that are otherwise inaccessible.

Pelicans are a constant presence, with both Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans often seen feeding in large groups. Pygmy and Great Cormorant are abundant, while herons, egrets, Glossy Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbill are widespread.

Open water supports Red-crested Pochard and Ferruginous Duck, while grebes include Little, Great Crested and Red-necked Grebe. Reedbeds hold Common Reed, Great Reed and River Warbler, while Eurasian Penduline Tit nests along sheltered channels.



Short-toed Snake Eagle by Rob Williams

Alluvial forests add species such as Thrush Nightingale and a variety of woodpeckers, and raptors including White-tailed Eagle are regularly seen overhead. European Bee-eater and European Roller are often encountered along sandy banks.

The sheer abundance of birdlife, combined with the tranquillity of travelling by boat through this vast wetland, makes this one of the most memorable birding experiences in Europe.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Comfortable. Suitable for most birding and wildlife interest levels with a reasonable level of mobility.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Many species offer good viewing in open habitats, though some montane & reedbed species require patience.
Accommodation		Comfortable throughout, including well-appointed hotels. *See detailed notes for Danube Delta.
Walking / Trails		Moderate. Mostly short to medium walks, including some uneven, rocky or sloping terrain in mountain & gorge areas.
Vehicles / Roads		A mix of good, sealed roads & some rougher tracks. Several longer drives, broken up with regular birding stops.
Photography		Good to very good. Excellent opportunities in open habitats & wetlands; some forest species may be more challenging.
Annoyances		Variable weather. Warm to hot days on the coast & delta, with limited shade at times. Occasional rain possible. Insects (including mosquitoes) may be present in wetland areas.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15;
- All lodgings;
- Ground & included boat transportation;
- All reserve & site entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

***Danube Delta accommodation**

During our time in the Danube Delta, we will be based in a land-based hotel situated deep within the Delta itself. From here, we will explore the Delta using a small boat, allowing access to both main waterways and narrower channels. We typically make two excursions each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, returning to the hotel in between for lunch, rest and facilities. This arrangement provides a flexible way to experience the Delta, with spacious accommodation, good facilities and excellent access to a wide range of habitats.

If the group reaches 10 or more paying guests, this section of the tour will instead be operated using a floating hotel. In this case, accommodation will be on board, and daily excursions by smaller boat will still be undertaken to access narrower channels and key birding areas.

- Fitness: This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.



Small boat travel



Floating hotel

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins with a welcome dinner at our hotel in Bucharest on the evening of day 1 and concludes here, after breakfast on day 15.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Bucharest Henri Coandă International Airport (IATA: OTP) is the main port of entry & departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.