CULTURAL TOUR IN MOLDOVA

DAY 1

Day 1: Arrival day

Chisinau

On arrival at Chisinau International Airport, you will be transferred to your accommodation in Chisinau. After settling in, you can have a walk through downtown and explore the city centre on your own.

DAY 2

Day 2: Curchi Monastery, Orheiul Vechi - a 40 thousand year-old natural amphitheater and Cricova winery

Chisinau – Curchi – Orheiul Vechi – Trebujeni – Cricova – Chisinau

The first stop of this day will be at **Curchi Monastery**. The monastery is surrounded by a high wall of stone, set with towers at each corner, creating the impression of a fortress. The Nativity of Virgin Mary Church built in 1775 by Iordache Curchi is an example of neo-byzantine style, while St. Nicholas Church has monumental forms built in classicism style with baroque elements.

Next, you will set off on a time travel to Orheiul Vechi (Old Orhei) to see a natural amphitheater revealing a territory which was first inhabited 40 000 years ago. The **Cultural, Natural and Landscape Reserve Orheiul Vechi** includes a series of historical and cultural monuments as well as natural landscapes in the gorge of the Raut River. Ancient fortifications, cave monasteries, monks and hermits – here you can follow the history of this region. The originality of Orheiul Vechi landscape is due to the gorge of the Raut River, dug under the form of a canyon in the limestone layers of the former Sarmatian Sea, about 14 million years ago.

After visiting Orheiul Vechi, you will travel to Trebujeni village where at a local guesthouse you will learn how to prepare local pastries during a **culinary masterclass**, which will be served at lunch together with other traditional specialties.

You will continue your journey to **Cricova winery** – the only wine enterprise that was awarded the highest state prize “The Order of the Republic” and has been declared by law a national cultural heritage. During the excursion at Cricova winery in the tourist train, at a depth of 80 m, you will discover the wonders of this place. Cricova underground galleries are formed by over seventy streets covering an area of nearly 120 km, each bearing Bacchic names: Sauvignon, Cabernet, Cahors, etc. The jewel of the underground treasure is the National Collection, including over 600 types of wine totaling about 1 million bottles. Here you will admire the oldest bottle of wine - "Jewish Easter Wine", dating from 1902 and discover the tastes of Cricova wines.

HIGHLIGHTS: Curchi Monastery, Casa de sub Stinca guesthouse, Cricova Underground Wine Galleries,

DAY 3

Day 3: Time travel in Tiraspol – Back in the USSR

Chisinau – Tighina – Tiraspol – Chisinau

In the morning, you will discover **Tighina Fortress** located in Tighina town and built in the 15th century by the prince of Moldova, Stephen the Great. Originally built as a small wooden fort, it was later fortified in stone by the prince of Moldova, Petru Rares. Occupied by the Ottomans in 1538 (in a campaign lead by the sultan Suleiman the Magnificent), the fort was strengthened in 1541 and became the center of an Ottoman "raya" (in which were included the surrounding Moldavian villages). In the 18th century, the fort was strengthened by Moldovan craftsmen under the direct supervision of Dimitrie Cantemir. Tighina Fortress is an architectural ensemble of irregular quadrilateral plan, surrounded by wide walls, 2-3 meters thick, made of limestone and brick.

In Tiraspol, you will discover a real treasure – **Aquatir Sturgeon Complex**, one of the largest hatcheries in Europe. The complex is equipped with the latest technologies and the fish can reach the size of a man. You will get the chance to taste one of the most expensive culinary delights – caviar.

In the afternoon, you will have lunch at a restaurant in Tiraspol.

After lunch, you will have a **tour of Tiraspol city**, during which you will discover Vladimir Lenin’s monument and the tank left from the Second World War. The city seems to be a vestige of the Soviet past. Nevertheless, you will be amazed by the contrasts, one of which is the football complex „Sheriff” - a pearl of contemporary architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS: Tighina Fortress, Aquatir Sturgeon Farm, Tiraspol city,

DAY 4

Day 4: Discovery of Gagauzia

Chisinau – Comrat – Vulcanesti – Besalma – Chisinau

In the morning, you will travel to **Comrat** where you will enjoy a **city tour**. Comrat is the capital of the autonomous region of Gagauzia, located in southwest Moldova. This is a very interesting territory since the majority of its habitants are Gagauzians. These are the only representatives of Turkic origin that affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox Church. Gagauzians migrated from Bulgaria together with ethnic Bulgarians and settled in Moldova in 19th century. You will see such attractions as the Cathedral of St John the Baptist, Museum of Gagauz Culture, Gagauz Art Gallery, Gagauz National University and Alley of Gagauz Glory.

The day will continue at **Karagani winery** – a family winery with a specific emphasis on the Gagauz origins of the Cerven family, who owns the company. Located in Vulcanesti, in the southern part of Moldova, this small family enterprise is engaged in grape cultivation and wine production. Karagani wines are produced by original technology from selected grapes of European and national varieties, grown on its own vineyards. On this land, you will discover the tastes of Karagani wines and the specificity of Gagauz cuisine, while tasting

Gagauz dishes.

After lunch, you will visit the **National Gagauz Museum of History and Ethnography "D. Cara-Ciobanu"** in Besalma village. The museum presents the history, culture and everyday life of the Gagauz people from ancient times until nowadays. One of the personalities of this small nation was the writer D. Cara-Ciobanu, who spent his life promoting this culture. He founded this museum, which features more than 6,000 exhibits, including works by famous writers, poets and famous artists in Gagauzia. One of the most valuable items in the museum is the collection of original films produced during the Gagauz colonization of the steppe of Bugeac.

HIGHLIGHTS: Comrat city , Karagani winery, National Gagauz Museum of History and Ethnography "D. Cara-Ciobanu",

DAY 5

Day 5: Chisinau city tour and visit of Asconi winery

Chisinau – Puhoi – Chisinau

Chisinau is the main administrative, scientific and cultural centre of Moldova. During **Chisinau city tour**, you will discover pieces of history and culture of the city such as the Nativity of Christ Cathedral, the Bell Tower, the Arch of Triumph, the Monument of Stephen the Great, etc.

The day will continue with the excursion at the **National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History** built in 1905 in the oriental style, thus being a unique building of this kind in Moldova. Here, you will discover famous archaeological treasures, carpets, national costumes and other valuable exhibits and you will be able to see the "millenary smile" of the nicest deinotherium of Moldova.

Next stop of the day will be at the **Medieval Wooden Church Assumption of Virgin Mary** which is the oldest wooden church in the country. It was built of oak trees from Calarasi woods by the freeholders of Hiriseni in 1642 in the courtyard of Harjauca Monastery. In 2010, the church was dismantled and reassembled in Chisinau. It is the only wooden church in Moldova that keeps its classical medieval Moldovan architecture.

The journey will continue at **Asconi winery** founded in 1994 and located in Puhoi village. The winery achieved a lot due to modern wine making technologies. Nowadays at Asconi estate European varieties are grown, but special attention is paid to indigenous varieties such as Rara Neagra, Feteasca, etc. One of the features of Asconi winery is that they pick up the grapes mechanically at night when the grapes are still cold. During the excursion, wine tasting and lunch at the winery you will be able to discover the wonders of this place.

HIGHLIGHTS: Chisinau city, National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, Medieval Wooden Church Assumption of Virgin Mary, Asconi winery,

DAY 6

Day 6: Departure day

Chisinau

On departure day, you will be transferred from the hotel to Chisinau International Airport. If your flight is in the afternoon, you will have the option to explore Chisinau for a while on your own in the morning and buy some souvenirs.