MOLDOVA MONASTERIES TOUR

DAY 1

Day 1: Arrival day

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: Chisinau city tour and visit of the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History

In the morning, you will enjoy a city tour of Chisinau that is the main administrative, scientific and cultural centre of Moldova. During the 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, the City Hall, etc.

After Chisinau city tour, you will be able to see the “millenary smile” of the nicest deinotherium of Moldova. You will find it at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, next to other famous archaeological treasures, carpets, national costumes and other valuable exhibits. The museum was built in 1905 in the oriental style, thus being a unique building of this kind in Moldova.

During the lunch at the restaurant, you will enjoy Moldovan traditional dishes.

You will continue your trip by exploring a new city, this time an underground city. 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. The jewel of the underground treasure is the National Collection, including over 600 types of wine totaling about 1 million bottles. Here you can admire the oldest bottle of wine - "Jewish Easter Wine", dating from 1902 and discover the tastes of Cricova wines.

HIGHLIGHTS: Chisinau city, National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, Cricova Underground Wine Galleries,

DAY 3

Day 3: Saharna and Tipova Monasteries – an unusual landscape with many waterfalls

In the morning you will visit Saharna Monastery - one of the oldest monasteries in the country. The monastic complex is composed of a cave monastery (the Annunciation) and a stone monastery (the St. Trinity). The

complex is located in a picturesque valley on the right bank of the Dniester River, near Saharna village. It is surrounded by rocks covered by forest. The legend says that the Virgin Mary left her footprint on the highest rock, named Grimidon. The history of the monastery is little known. The first prior of the holy place is considered the monk Bartholomew (1776-1790) who settled in a deep gorge, built a church, a few cells and enclosed the monastery with a stone wall. In Saharna you will enjoy the beautiful landscape created by the waterfalls. The River Saharna has 22 waterfalls on its way. The biggest waterfall is 4.5 m high.

Next, you will travel to Lalova village where you will have lunch at a local guesthouse.

After lunch, you will discover Tipova Cave Monastery. Located near Tipova village, the monastery with the same name is considered one of the oldest monastic establishments on the territory of Moldova. The heritage, which consists of 18 rooms, dug into the rock at an astounding altitude, represents an impressive museum in the open air. The Tipova River, on its flow to the Dniester, creates many waterfalls with the height above 10-16 meters, which a long time ago used to move the millstones of the numerous watermills.

HIGHLIGHTS: Saharna Monastery, Hanul lui Hanganu guesthouse, Tipova Cave Monastery,

DAY 4

Day 4: Discovery of Curchi Monastery

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 remnants of the first human settlements were found in the stone caverns from here. On the rocky hill, you will find the ruins of a strong Geto-Dacian fortification, which acted as a sanctuary for celebrating religious holidays and rituals in this prehistoric community. 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.

You will have lunch at a guesthouse in Butuceni village where you will taste dishes from the local cuisine.

After a copious meal, you will visit Château Vartely winery in Orhei town. Château Vartely is a modern complex, which comprises 4 hotel-type houses, 2 restaurants, 3 tasting rooms, and a huge inner yard. In the cellars and then in tasting rooms you will be acquainted with the particularities of Château Vartely wines, you will learn how they are made, kept and served and you will have the opportunity to taste some of them.

HIGHLIGHTS: Curchi Monastery, Orheiul Vechi - a 40 thousand years-old natural amphitheater, Château Vartely winery,

DAY 5

Day 5: Visit of Hincu and Capriana Monasteries

Today, you will travel to Hincu Monastery, a monastery of nuns founded by the boyar Mihalcea Hincu in 1678 in order to fulfill the request of his daughter who decided to dedicate herself to the monastic life. She became a nun, taking the name of Parascheva. Being closed during the period 1956-1990, the monastery reopened in 1990, at the request of the locals, soon becoming one of the most well-organized and visited monastic attractions.

You will continue your trip to Capriana Monastery, founded in medieval Moldova, which is one of the oldest monasteries in the country. It is located in Capriana in a picturesque forested area once called Codrii Lapusnei. The first significant reference dates from a document issued in 1429 that gave Capriana the status of royal monastery on behalf of Alexander the Good. During a long period, Capriana Monastery acted as the residence of the Moldovan archbishop. Being closed and devastated in the post-war years, it was one of the first monasteries that reopened in 1989, becoming soon the symbol of national revival.

In the afternoon, you will take a ride to Milestii Mici winery located at a depth of 40-85 m in Milestii Mici village. Measuring about 200 km, all underground streets make up the largest network of caves ever dug by a human being, which appeared after the extraction of limestone deposits. The winery holds an impressive collection of more than 2 million bottles. The "Golden Collection" of Milestii Mici winery, which has over 1,5 million bottles, is the pride of the whole country, as in August, 2005, it was registered in the Guinness World Records as the biggest wine collection in the world. You will feel like a king/ queen here, admiring the beauty of this place, tasting wines in which you will feel the fire of sun and vigor of earth and enjoying national cuisine dishes.

After a delicious lunch at Milestii Mici winery, you will travel to Hincesti where you will visit the Manuc-Bei Manor that now houses the Museum of History and Local History. The actual house is a real castle in the French style, with a winter garden, guard towers and a park - built in the second half of 19th century based on the project of Alexander Bernardazzi, and for decades was the estate of family Mirzoyan, descendants of Manuc-Bei. In the 70-ies of the 20th century, Manor House Museum was opened, including a collection that now number more than 20,000 artifacts. The most valuable is the collection of the Moldovan national costumes and textiles.

HIGHLIGHTS: Hincu Monastery, Capriana Monastery, Milestii Mici winery, Manuc Bei Manor,

DAY 6

Day 6: Traditional peasant feast in Palanca village and discovery of Hirjauca and Frumoasa Monasteries

You will start the day by travelling to Hirjauca Monastery located near Hirjauca village in Calarasi district. The monastery was founded in 1740 in Codri forest, a green island filled with birds twittering around, but at the same time with quietness. Here, lost among the beech alleys, hidden from the stranger’s eyes, you will feel the beauty and quietness of this place, being surrounded exclusively by the whisper of springs and ringing of bells.

In the afternoon, you will visit Casa Parinteasca (Parents’ House) craft centre in Palanca village where you will visit the museum, including the peasant house from the 19th century and enjoy traditional peasant dishes, typical for Palanca village served with homemade wine. The lunch will be served along with remarkable jam and tea made from herbs collected from the garden.

After lunch, you will travel to Frumoasa Monastery. Moldovan word “frumoasa” means “beautiful” and the monastery got this name because of the beautiful forests and gardens that surrounds it. Nowadays it is a female monastery though it was planned as a male one. Its architecture saves the imprint of Moldovan national style with elements of both classical and baroque styles.

HIGHLIGHTS: Hirjauca Monastery, Casa Parinteasca craft centre, Frumoasa Monastery,

DAY 7

Day 7: Departure day

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.