MOLDOVA – UKRAINE TRAVEL ITINERARY (ODESSA REGION)

DAY 1

Day 1: Arrival in Chisinau, Moldova

Chisinau

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

DAY 2

Day 2: Discovery of Cricova winery (120 km) - one of the largest underground wine cellars in the world

Chisinau - Curchi - Butuceni - Orheiul Vechi - 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.

You will enjoy a **culinary masterclass** ("pacinte" making) and lunch at a guesthouse in Butuceni village where you will taste the "placinte" made during the masterclass and other Moldovan traditional dishes.

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 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: Curchi Monastery, Traditional dishes at Butuceni guesthouse , Orheiul Vechi - a 40 thousand years-old natural amphitheater, Cricova Underground Wine Galleries,

DAY 3

Day 3: Trip to Gagauzia - Comrat city tour and visit to the winery from this region

Chisinau - Comrat - Vulcanesti - Besalma - Chisinau

You will start the day by travelling 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 the 19th century.

Next, you will travel to **Karagani winery** - a family winery located in Vulcanesti, in the southern part of Moldova. This is a small family enterprise that committed 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.

After the excursion at the museum, you will be transferred to Chisinau.

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

DAY 4

Day 4: 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 set off on a time travel. During the **city tour**, 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.

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

After lunch, you will visit **Kvint wine and brandy factory** where harmony, refinement and tradition underlie the oldest and most genuine spirits. Here you will be acquainted with the taste of Kvint, Doina, Tiras, Nistru and Surprise spirits.

In the evening, you will be transferred to Chisinau.

HIGHLIGHTS: Tighina Fortress, Tiraspol city, Kvint wine and brandy Factory,

DAY 5

Day 5: Discovery of Odessa city - the pearl of the Black Sea in Ukraine

Chisinau - Odessa

In the morning, you will be transferred to Odessa city, known as the pearl of the Black Sea.

Once arrived in Odessa, you will have lunch at a local restaurant where you will enjoy Ukrainian traditional dishes.

During the **guided tour of Odessa city**, you will discover the varied architecture of urban development which will allow you to take a journey through all the old epochs and styles. You will see such architectural pearls as the Opera and Ballet Theater, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful buildings in the city, Potemkin Stairs, considered the city's flagship, the Seaside Boulevard and the De Ribas Street serving as a meeting place for locals and tourists. De Ribas Street was named after José de Ribas, a Spanish military officer from Naples who was the builder of Odessa, the head of military and civil administration and had a house on this street. In addition, you will discover the Port of Odessa and its extraordinary history and see the statue of the Duke De Richelieu who was the Governor of Odessa. During his administration the city greatly increased in size and importance.

HIGHLIGHTS: Odessa city,

DAY 6

Day 6: Exploration of Odessa Catacombs and cognac tasting at Shustov cognac factory

Odessa

The day will begin with the exploration of **Odessa Catacombs**. The catacombs form perhaps the largest network of tunnels in the world which appeared during the construction of the city 200 years ago, when the stone was extracted from the mines. The Catacombs are on three levels reaching a depth of 60 m below sea level and running up to 2,500 km. They consist of a network of basements, bunkers, drainage tunnels and storm drains as well as natural caves. During the city's first years of construction, the catacombs became a refuge for various gangs who organized deposits of various goods exported from Odessa by smuggling.

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

After lunch, you will visit **Shustov cognac factory** where you will enjoy an excursion and cognac tasting. Shustov cognac factory is the oldest company of such kind in Ukraine. The biggest Shustov's victory was awarding their products the Grand Prix at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900. It was then when they were honoured to write cognac on their products, and not a customary brandy.

HIGHLIGHTS: Odessa Catacombs, Shustov cognac factory ,

DAY 7

Day 7: Excursion at Akkerman fortress and discovery of Shabo Wine Culture Centre

Odessa - Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi - Shabo - Odessa

In the morning, you will be transferred to Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi where you will visit the **Akkerman fortress** (White fortress) that today represents one of the most majestic examples of medieval defensive architecture in all Europe. The fortress dates back to the 13th century, when it was erected by Genoese merchants. In the 14th century, the territory came under the control of the Principality of Moldova. Bilhorod was called Cetatea Alba (literally the White Fortress). By 1440 were built the main elements of the fortress. The fortress had 34 towers, some as tall as 20 meters.

Next, you will visit **Shabo Wine Culture Centre** that is not just one of the leading Ukrainian wineries that follows the standards of high grape growing, but is also aimed at promoting high culture of noble beverages drinking. It is located in Odessa Region, one of Europe's oldest regions where winemaking traditions are dated as far back as the ancient times. Shabo is a unique Europe terroir where grapes have been grown since the 6th century. It was founded in 1822 and has over 1,200 hectares of vineyards. Shabo Wine Culture Center is the only tourist complex in Ukraine located right on the premises of an active winemaking enterprise, combining state-of-the art, high-tech production process with unique historical and cultural landmarks.

After visiting Shabo Wine Culture Centre, you will have lunch at a restaurant in Shabo where you will taste Georgian cuisine dishes.

In the evening, you will be transferred from Shabo to Odessa.

HIGHLIGHTS: Akkerman fortress, Shabo Wine Culture Centre ,

DAY 8

Day 8: Travel back to Moldova and visit to Château Purcari winery - famous all over the world due to the legendary wine “Negru de Purcari”

Odessa - Purcari - Chisinau

The day will begin with the transfer to **Château Purcari winery** founded in 1827 in Moldova. If you are a wine enthusiast or just love to be in beautiful, pristine surroundings and listening the songs of birds, Purcari estate is definitely the place you need to visit. The old mansion’s galleries feature great collections of Purcari wines, some bottles dating back to 1948. The winery is famous all over the world due to the legendary wine “Negru de Purcari” - the elixir that in 1878 was highly appreciated on the international arena by being awarded the gold medal at Paris World Exhibition. In the tasting room, decorated in royal style, you will have the opportunity to taste Purcari wines and enjoy an exquisite lunch.

After lunch, you will travel to Chisinau, the capital and the main administrative, scientific and cultural centre of Moldova. During the **tour of Chisinau city**, 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.

HIGHLIGHTS: Château Purcari winery, Chisinau city,

DAY 9

Day 9: Departure from Chisinau, Moldova

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.