



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA & PARTNERS

June 22 - July 3, 2026

Enchanting Balkans & Transylvania Bulgaria and Romania



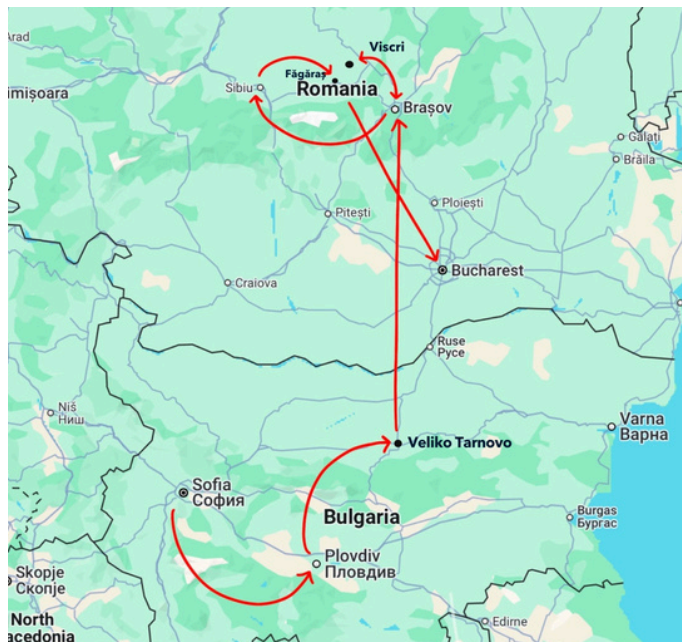
led by Dr. Joseph Benatov

Join us for an exciting journey through the beautiful landscapes of Bulgaria and Romania. Enjoy Sofia, Bulgaria's vibrant capital, as well as picturesque Plovdiv, Europe's oldest city. Meet with leading scholars, intellectuals, and diplomats for an in-depth investigation of the politics and culture of Bulgaria and Romania. Take in the beauty of the Balkan & Carpathian Mountains, visit East Orthodox monasteries, and learn about the customs of the ancient Thracians. Sample delicious indigenous wines, and taste traditional dishes from both countries' national cuisines. Explore fascinating Transylvania, home to royal palaces, Saxon citadels, and magic castles. A highlight of the tour will be Bran Castle, of mythic Dracula fame. Take in the beauty of Brasov and Sibiu, two of Romania's most stunning fortified cities. End the tour in Bucharest, Romania's charming capital, and savor its turn-of-the-century Parisian flair.



Meet Joseph Benatov

Joseph Benatov holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches Hebrew. He is originally from Sofia, Bulgaria, and he received his BA & MA degrees from Sofia University. Joseph has over 25 years of experience leading travelers on specialized tours across the Balkans, including UNESCO missions, Jewish-themed trips, Balkan dance, music, and folklore programs, and arts & crafts tours. Joseph takes a keen interest in Balkan cuisine and winemaking, so be prepared for some fine wine-and-dining along the way. You will also meet leading Bulgarian sommeliers, oenologists, chefs, winemakers, culinary experts, and gifted village home cooks who will provide specialized insights into the world of Bulgarian viticulture and gastronomy.



2026 | 12-DAY 11-NIGHT ITINERARY

SOFIA

Day 1 | June 22

Arrival and hotel accommodation. Initial orientation around downtown Sofia. Tour orientation and welcome dinner

Accommodations: Grand Hotel Sofia ☆☆☆☆☆

SOFIA

Day 2 | June 23

Sofia's center affords the unique opportunity to walk down a real "yellow brick road," paved in 1907 with Austro-Hungarian cobblestone. Important landmarks include the imposing Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the Russian Church, the Sofia Synagogue, the National Theater and city garden, parliament, the Royal Palace, the fourth-century Roman Rotunda and newly excavated Roman ruins, and the 1950s socialist administrative complex.

Free time in the afternoon to enjoy the vibrant city center, visit a museum or gallery, or relax at some of the capital's popular cafes. Meet with a leading Bulgarian scholar for an overview of the country's political and social landscape.

Accommodations: Grand Hotel Sofia ☆☆☆☆☆

BACHKOVO MONASTERY—PLOVDIV

Day 3 | June 24

Your morning drive will take you through the picturesque Thracian Valley. Our first stop is the Bachkovo Monastery, perched in the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains. Established in the 11th century, this is one of Bulgaria's largest monasteries and an important spiritual center. The marketplace outside of the monastery offers many homemade Bulgarian jams,

mountain honey, and some particularly unique traditional spices and herbs. Continue on to Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city. After you settle into your hotel, be sure to explore in the evening the lively Kapana neighborhood, home to some of the city's best restaurants, sweetshops, galleries, and cafes. Overnight in Plovdiv.

Accommodations: Hotel Residence City Garden

☆☆☆☆☆

PLOVDIV

Day 4 | June 25

Bulgaria's oldest city combines layers of its Thracian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Bulgarian Revival past. As we walk the cobbled streets of the Old Town, we'll see some of the most impressive examples of opulent nineteenth century vernacular architecture, a second-century Roman theater



and stadium, and a 14th century mosque. Plovdiv's promenade has lovely cafes and restaurants and is a popular destination for afternoon and evening walks. Plovdiv is also home to a spectacular Roman archaeological complex - the newly excavated 4th-century CE Bishop's Basilica. Overnight in Plovdiv. **Accommodations: Hotel Residence City Garden** ☆☆☆☆☆

SHIPKA-ETURA-VELIKO TURNOVO **Day 5 | June 26**

Today we travel north through the world-famous Rose Valley, stop at the Shipka memorial church, and cross the Balkan Mountains through the historic Shipka pass. We will visit Etura, a unique open-air crafts museum where artisans keep old traditions alive. Along the way lies Gabrovo, an important 19th century industrial center. Arrive in Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria's medieval capital. We'll stroll through the town's historic Samovodska merchant street and watch potters,

Turnovo's steep streets and the winding Yantra river are a joy for photographers. Overnight in Veliko Turnovo. **Accommodations: Hotel Gurko Boutique** ☆☆☆

SINAIA, ROMANIA-PELES CASTLE-BRASOV **Day 6 | June 27**

After your last breakfast in Bulgaria, we head north toward the Danube River. As you cross the bridge connecting Bulgaria and Romania, you will not need to go through a border checkpoint thanks to the countries' recent admission into the border-free Schengen zone. We will bypass Bucharest and continue toward the southern Carpathians. On our way lies Ploiești, where the world's first oil refinery was built in 1856. (In 1944, the city was carpet bombed by the Allies.) The mountain resort of Sinaia is home to a 17th-century monastery, named after Mount Sinai. Visit the nearby 19th-century Peleş Castle, which King Carol I built as his summer retreat. Our final stop today is

Brasov, one of the most fascinating cities in Transylvania. Overnight in Brasov. **Accommodations: Radisson Blu Aurum Hotel** ☆☆☆☆☆

BRASOV-VISCRI-BRASOV **Day 7 | June 28**

Brasov's picturesque old town will impress you with its Gothic Black Church, the Council Square and its iconic clock tower, the citadel, and the medieval ramparts, all set amid gorgeous natural scenery. As we leave Brasov, we will drive past the Rupea Citadel, perched high above our road. We'll visit the Saxon village of Viscri and explore its fascinating fortified church. Find out why King Charles fell in love with Viscri and purchased one of the colorful houses on the main street. Afternoon return to Brasov. Overnight in Brasov. **Accommodations: Radisson Blu Aurum** ☆☆☆☆☆

BRAN CASTLE-SIBIU **Day 8 | June 29**

A short morning drive will take us to the world-renowned Bran Castle - of mythic Dracula fame

- set amidst breathtaking natural surroundings. Continue your drive through central Transylvania to the imposing 14th-century Fagaras Fortress. Stop at the fascinating Astra National Museum Complex - an open-air ethnographic exhibit portraying traditional rural ways of life and rustic architecture. Continue to the gorgeous town of Sibiu. After check-in, go out for an initial orientation around the city's downtown area. Overnight in Sibiu.

Accommodations: Art Hotel Boutique ☆☆☆☆

SIBIU **Day 9 | June 30**

Your city tour of Sibiu will take you to the main square, surrounded by striking examples of Baroque and Renaissance architecture. Important landmarks include the Brukenthal Palace, the Council Tower, and the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Other iconic stops along our walking tour include the Bridge of Lies, the Luxembourg House, the Orthodox Cathedral, the old city walls, and the charming

medieval lower town. Overnight in Sibiu. **Accommodations: Art Hotel Boutique** ☆☆☆☆

SIBIU-COZIA MONASTERY **-BUCHAREST** **Day 10 | July 1**

As Sibiu remains behind us, we will head toward Cozia Monastery. Built in the late 14th-century, it is one of the preeminent monuments of Romanian medieval art and architecture. Continue along the picturesque Transfagarasan road, one of the most scenic drives in Romania. Our final destination for the day is Bucharest, Romania's charming capital. After hotel check-in, we will go out for an initial walking tour of the area surrounding your hotel. Overnight in Bucharest.

Accommodations: Hilton Garden Inn Old Town ☆☆☆☆

BUCHAREST **Day 11 | July 2**

Our day is devoted to a detailed exploration of Bucharest's landmarks and sights of general historic and cultural significance. Walk along The

Lipscani district, one of the most vibrant areas of the city, with charming cobbled streets lined with cafes, restaurants, and bars. Not to be missed is the serene Stavropoleos Monastery. The capital's boulevards, parks, and narrow streets grant the city a distinct Parisian atmosphere, while the monumental architecture of the communist era - best exemplified by the colossal Palace of Parliament - is a stark reminder of Romania's recent past. We will also visit the famous Revolution Square, where the events of 1989 led to the toppling of Romania's communist regime. We will also stroll along the iconic Calea Victoriei and stop in front of the gorgeous Athenaeum building. We will end the day with a festive farewell dinner. Overnight in Bucharest.

Accommodations: Hilton Garden Inn Old Town ☆☆☆☆

BUCHAREST - AIRPORT **Day 12 | July 3**

Free time and departure.





Land Price

\$5,280 per person in double room ♦ Single travelers - add \$950 to your deposit.

Payment Schedule

First deposit of \$1000 to reserve a spot.
Second deposit of remaining balance due by 15 February 2026.
If signing up after 15 February 2026, full payment is due.

Cancellation Policy

Three months prior to departure - full refund; 45 days prior to departure - refund 50% of paid amount. Less than 45 days - no refund. We recommend travel insurance.

Included

- Accommodation in centrally located luxury hotels.
- Two meals per day -- breakfast and either lunch or dinner, depending on the day's itinerary.
- Professional English-speaking tour leaders in Bulgaria and Romania.
- Additional local guides as needed.
- Entrance fees per itinerary.
- Meetings with local scholars, politicians, and intellectuals.
- Transportation in a full-size, modern, airconditioned bus with a functioning bathroom.
- Complimentary bottled water on the bus.
- Road tolls, gas, parking fees.
- Tour leaders' hotel accommodation and per diem.
- Hotel portage.
- Arrival and departure airport transfers.

Notes:

Maximum group size: 27 travelers.

We will be collecting \$180 per person for tips for waiters, local guides, driver, etc. You can pay by check in February, together with your second deposit.

A US travel agent specializing in airfare to Bulgaria is available to provide assistance booking flights.

Please purchase your insurance through our group account. We use commissions for bottled water on the bus and other extras.
If you decide to arrive early or depart late, we can book rooms.

**For additional details, contact the World Affairs Travel Team at:
travel@wacphila.org • 800.942.5004**





How to make a reservation:

Call: 800.942.5004

Text: 267.802.1252

OR

Visit tour page to request reservation:

<https://wacphila.org/tour/enchanting-balkans/>

