TOP SOVIET ERA EXPERIENCES IN MOLDOVA

DAY 1

Day 1: Arrival day and Chisinau city tour

On arrival at Chisinau International Airport, you will be transferred to your accommodation in Chisinau. After settling in, you will enjoy the city tour of Chisinau. During the tour, you will discover the main historical and cultural sights such as the Nativity of Christ Cathedral, the Bell Tower, the Arch of Triumph, the Monument of Stephen the Great, etc. You will also see some soviet buildings and apartment blocks, such as Circus building, Romanita Collective Housing Tower, Library din Hol, Soviet Memorial to Communist Youth, Chisinau Hotel (an excellent example of Stalinist Empire style architecture), etc.

After lunch, you will have an excursion at the Eternity Memorial Complex and the Military Museum. The Eternity Memorial Complex is a memorial located in Chisinau dedicated to soviet soldiers who died in the battles of the Second World War. The Military Museum has displays of Moldova's past military campaigns and, in a park outside, a small open-air military exhibition displaying Soviet-made tanks, fighter planes and other military toys inherited by Moldova's armed forces.

Next, you will have an excursion at Chisinau Railway Station built on 15 August 1871. The 2nd World War destroyed the station building, as it was blown up by the Red army in 1941. It was partially restored in 1944, but air attacks destroyed it once again. In 1948, the station was rebuilt. In 1990 at the Station’s Square there was unveiled a temporary stone commemorating the Victims of Stalinist Repression and mass deportations in Soviet Moldova in 1940-1951 - the Train of Pain. A permanent memorial was set up at the site in 2013.

In the evening, 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.

HIGHLIGHTS: Chisinau city, Eternity Memorial Complex , Railway Station in Chisinau , Milestii Mici winery,

DAY 2

Day 2: Orheiul Vechi - a natural amphitheater revealing a territory which was first inhabited 40 000 years ago

The day will begin with an excursion at the National Fine Arts Museum of Moldova founded in 1939 by sculptor Alexandru Plamadeala. The museum building is a former middle school for girls. In Soviet times, the Center of the Communist Party of the MSSR was located in the building of the current museum. The museum, that has more than 30,000 exhibits, displays impressive art collections from local and European artists. There you will still notice the hammer and sickle, the symbols of the Soviet Union.

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 is the most iconic place of Moldova, due to its historic value. It holds scenic views of the hills and caves, including a monastery in a cave, as well beautiful views over the Butuceni and Trebujeni village. The cave monastery, which is so famous for its placement is as well known for its legend of hiding pilgrims and orthodox Christians during the Soviet Union period. As religion was forbidden, many followers and monks used this place as their sacred space. Today it is still a church that is used by locals for praying and a visit point for locals and foreigners.

At Butuceni guesthouse, you will taste traditional Moldovan dishes such as “zeama” (chicken soup with homemade egg noodles) and “mamaliga”.

The day will continue at Pivnitele din Branesti winery located in the forest near Orheiul Vechi in Branesti village. It has 50 km of underground cellars, reaching to depths of 60 m beneath the surface. There are two tasting halls at Branesti, one of which is located underground. Here you will be able to enjoy dry white and red “collection” wines and sparkling wines. In the Soviet Union period, Branesti was one of wine producers that imported wine all over the Soviet countries.

In the evening, you will have dinner at La Taifas traditional restaurant in Chisinau. During dinner at the restaurant, you will be enveloped in the traditional atmosphere, created by the traditional style of the restaurant, the traditional dishes and of course the traditional live music show – the special flavor of the restaurant.

HIGHLIGHTS: Orheiul Vechi - a 40 thousand years-old natural amphitheater, Pivnitele din Branesti winery,

DAY 3

Day 3: Visit of Tighina Fortress – one of the first-class fortresses in the Russian Empire

In the morning, you will visit Serpeni Headbridge Memorial located 40 km east of Chisinau, on the right bank of River Nistru which was erected in the memory of the heroes who died during the Iasi-Chisinau operation of 1944 meant to free Chisinau of the fascist occupation. The Serpeni battle was one of the cruelest in the World War II history even if it represented just a small episode of the war.

The day will continue with a visit of Tighina Fortress located in Tighina town and built in the 15th century by the prince of Moldova, Stephen the Great. 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 Moldovan villages). The fortress suffered during the Russian-Turkish war of 1806-1812. In 1818, the fortress was visited by the Emperor of Russia Alexander I, and in 1828 by Nikolai I. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it enters the first-class fortresses in the Russian Empire. Tighina Fortress is an architectural ensemble of irregular quadrilateral plan, surrounded by wide walls, 2-3 meters thick, made of limestone and brick.

Later, you will enjoy a city tour of Tighina with stops at the Historical Museum and the Military Museum. In the suburbs, in the town of Varnita, there is a famous museum dedicated to events during the expulsion of the Swedish king Charles XII after a crushing defeat in the battle of Poltava.

Next, you will have an excursion and brandy tasting at Kvint wine and brandy factory. In Kvint cellars they

keep 11 million liters of beaux-de-vie spirits aged from 1 year to 60 years. Kvint is one of Transnistria's largest exporters, mainly to Italy and China, as well as Russia and Ukraine; its brandy has gone to the Vatican and into space. The factory is one of only a few enterprises in the former Soviet Union that can assure a kosher production process. "Surprise" divin (brandy) was created in 1961, it was dedicated to the upcoming 22nd Congress of the Communist Party. During several decades, it was considered the best "communist" divin. "Victoria" divin (25 years) was created in 1977, the name was given by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldavia. Having tasted the new drink, he exclaimed: "This is Victoria! A complete victory of the Moldavian winemakers!".

In the evening, you will check in and have dinner at a hotel in Tiraspol.

HIGHLIGHTS: Serpeni Headbridge Memorial, Tighina Fortress, Kvint wine and brandy Factory,

DAY 4

Day 4: Time travel in Tiraspol – Back in the USSR

The day will begin with a city tour of Tiraspol. Transnistria, along with Moldova after WWII, officially became part of the Soviet Union, and was established as the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1947 with its borders as they are today. In Tiraspol, you will have the opportunity to travel in time back in the USSR. You will start by visiting the monument of Vladimir Lenin and tanks left from the Second World War, the City Hall, Memorial of Glory, Military Museum, Recreation Park "Victory". The city seems to be a ghost of the Soviet past.

In Tiraspol, you will visit one of the largest fish hatcheries in Europe – Aquatir Sturgeon Complex. The complex is equipped with the latest technologies and the fish can reach the size of a man. You will get the chance to see how is processed one of the most expensive culinary delights – caviar. You will have opportunity to taste caviar with a shot of vodka or a glass of sparkling wine.

In the afternoon, you will have lunch at Soviet Stolovka.

After lunch, you will visit the Bottle Museum - the unique museum of alcoholic beverages located in the village of Tirnauca, which is located on the left bank of the Dniester. The collection is stocked inside a building that resembles a bottle of 28 meters in shape. Four floors, five rooms decorated with many carved images and a huge number of bottles from more than 100 countries of the world. All bottles are listed in the Museum register. The bottles are the most varied: from the tiniest, as a bottle of Mexico in the form of a cartridge, which has 10 grams of whiskey, to a huge pushy bottle with Ukrainian horilka.

In the evening, you will have dinner at the hotel in Chisinau.

HIGHLIGHTS: Tiraspol city, Aquatir Sturgeon Farm, Bottle Museum,

DAY 5

Day 5: Discovery of Gagauzia

You will start the day by travelling to Comrat where the majority of inhabitants are Gagauzians. These are the only representatives of Turkic origin that affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox Church. During the tour

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 and of course the monument of Vladimir Lenin.

You will continue your trip to Vinuri de Comrat winery, which is the oldest winery of southern Moldova. Here you will discover the tastes of Vinuri de Comrat wines and the specificity of Gagauz cuisine, while tasting Gagauz dishes. Comrat Wines was one of the leading wine producers in Soviet Union. Currently Vinuri de Comrat is a modern complex processing 4 thousands tones of wine and spirits using closed-loop cycle, including production and processing of grape, production and bottling of dry, semi-sweet, desert, selected and vintage wine, production of wine spirit. Its portfolio lists more than 50 collections of wine, however, it is very famous for the Cahors wine.

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.

In the evening, you will have dinner at a local restaurant in Chisinau.

HIGHLIGHTS: Comrat city , Vinuri de Comrat winery, National Gagauz Museum of History and Ethnography “D. Cara-Ciobanu”,

DAY 6

Day 6: Discover Cricova winery visited by Yuri Gagarin in 1966

You will begin the day by visiting the Water Tower in Chisinau built in 1892. The famous architect Alexandru Bernardazzi designed it in an eclectic style. The tower marked the beginning of a centralized urban water supply, being the first water supplier in Chisinau. Since 1940, the building was used as a fire tower. In 1980 the building was closed and rebuilt of stone - before that the water tower was wooden. Five years later, it opened a museum of the city. The terrace on the top floor of the building offers a beautiful view of the city.

Next, you will have a walk through Valea Morilor Park set up at the initiative of Leonid Brezhnev in 1950. It was originally named the "Central Leninist Comsomol Culture and Leisure Park". The park is located on the shores of Valea Morilor Lake and is situated on a terrain with a varied relief, with 4 entrances. A ring road about 2.5 km was built around the lake and you can ride a bike or enjoy a walking tour through the park. On the territory of the park, there is also located the Summer Theater, with a capacity of 5000 seats. The waterfall staircase of the park is made up of 218 steps and is longer than the famous staircase of Potemkin in Odessa (which has 200 steps).

You will have lunch at La Placinte traditional restaurant in Chisinau.

You will continue 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. There is one story always told in this place about the Russian pilot Yuri Gagarin, who during a visit in 1966 got lost and missed the exit. He went out the next day, having spent the night in the tasting room, currently named after him. In one of

Cricova’s luxurious tasting halls, a couple years ago the former Russian president Vladimir Putin celebrated his 50th birthday. Here you can admire the oldest bottle of wine - "Jewish Easter Wine", dating from 1902, discover the tastes of Cricova wines and have dinner at Orasul Subteran Cricova’s restaurant.

HIGHLIGHTS: Water Tower, Valea Morilor Park , Cricova Underground Wine Galleries,

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.