

DER WEG IST DAS ZIEL ...

# Seidenstraße



## 2. TEIL: BALKAN EXPRESS

Tipps für eine Überlandreise entlang der Seidenstraße von Europa durch die Türkei und den Iran nach Pakistan und weiter nach China oder Indien.



# Disclaimer

Dieser Reiseführer ist als Einführung zur Planung einer Überlandreise von Europa entlang der Seidenstraße nach China gedacht. Er ersetzt auf keinen Fall kommerzielle Reiseführer, sondern soll vielmehr eine erste Orientierungshilfe unter der verwirrenden Vielzahl an Möglichkeiten bieten. Das Buch richtet sich hauptsächlich an Rucksackreisende, die einen Trip von Europa durch die Türkei und den Iran nach Pakistan und weiter nach China und/oder Indien planen. D.h., es enthält weder Informationen über die Transsibirische Eisenbahn oder die Route durch die zentralasiatischen Republiken noch autofahrerspezifische In-

formationen über Carnet etc.

Nach einer kurzen Beschreibung der Reiseroute gibt es detailliertere Informationen über die Länder und Sehenswürdigkeiten, die im wesentlichen von Lonely Planet und The Rough Guide stammen, gepaart mit einigen Einsichten von „No Shitting in the Toilet - The guide for when you've really lost it“. Noch mehr Informationen gibt es auf deren Websites ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com), [www.roughguides.com](http://www.roughguides.com) bzw. [www.petermoore.net](http://www.petermoore.net)). Die Texte sind alle auf Englisch, was aber kein Problem sein sollte und auf jeden Fall ein gutes Training ist, für das, was Euch unterwegs erwartet ;-)

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# Europa – Istanbul

Im „Orientexpress“ durch Südosteuropa in die Türkei.

Ich habe für diese Strecke zwei Wochen eingerechnet. Natürlich kann man sich Tschechien, Slowakeien, Ungarn, Rumänien und Bulgarien auch genau anschauen, wofür zwei Monate wahrscheinlich gar nicht reichen würden, aber dafür hat der Großteil leider nicht genügend Zeit. So würde ich mich nur auf ein paar Highlights beschränken.

Den ersten Stop würde ich in Budapest machen. Wem die Bahnfahrt durch Österreich zu teuer ist (ca. € 40,-), kann natürlich auch über Prag fahren und dort eine erste Pause einlegen.

Spartipp: Es ist wesentlich billiger, am Balkan lokale Fahrkarten von Grenze zu Grenze zu kaufen als ein internationales Ticket. Einziges Problem ist die Strecke zwischen den Grenzbahnhöfen. Einige

Schaffner sind nicht gerade glücklich, wenn man ihnen ein billiges nationales Ticket unter die Nase hält und versuchen daher, für die Strecke durchs „Niemandland“ weit überhöhte Preise zu verlangen.

Außerdem braucht man für den Fahrkartenkauf natürlich Landeswährung, die man zu Hause oft nur mit Verlust kaufen kann bzw. an der Grenze ist die Zeit zu knapp. Da ich mich oft genug mit lästigen Schaffnern herumgeschlagen habe, bin ich dazu übergegangen, mir Tickets bis zum ersten Halt im Nachbarland zu kaufen. Das erspart mir unnötige und nervenaufreibende Diskussionen, auch wenn es etwas teurer ist.

Wer bei der Bahn keine Ermäßigung mehr bekommt, sollte sich bei Eurolines / Deutsche Touring nach Busverbindungen erkundigen. Ge-

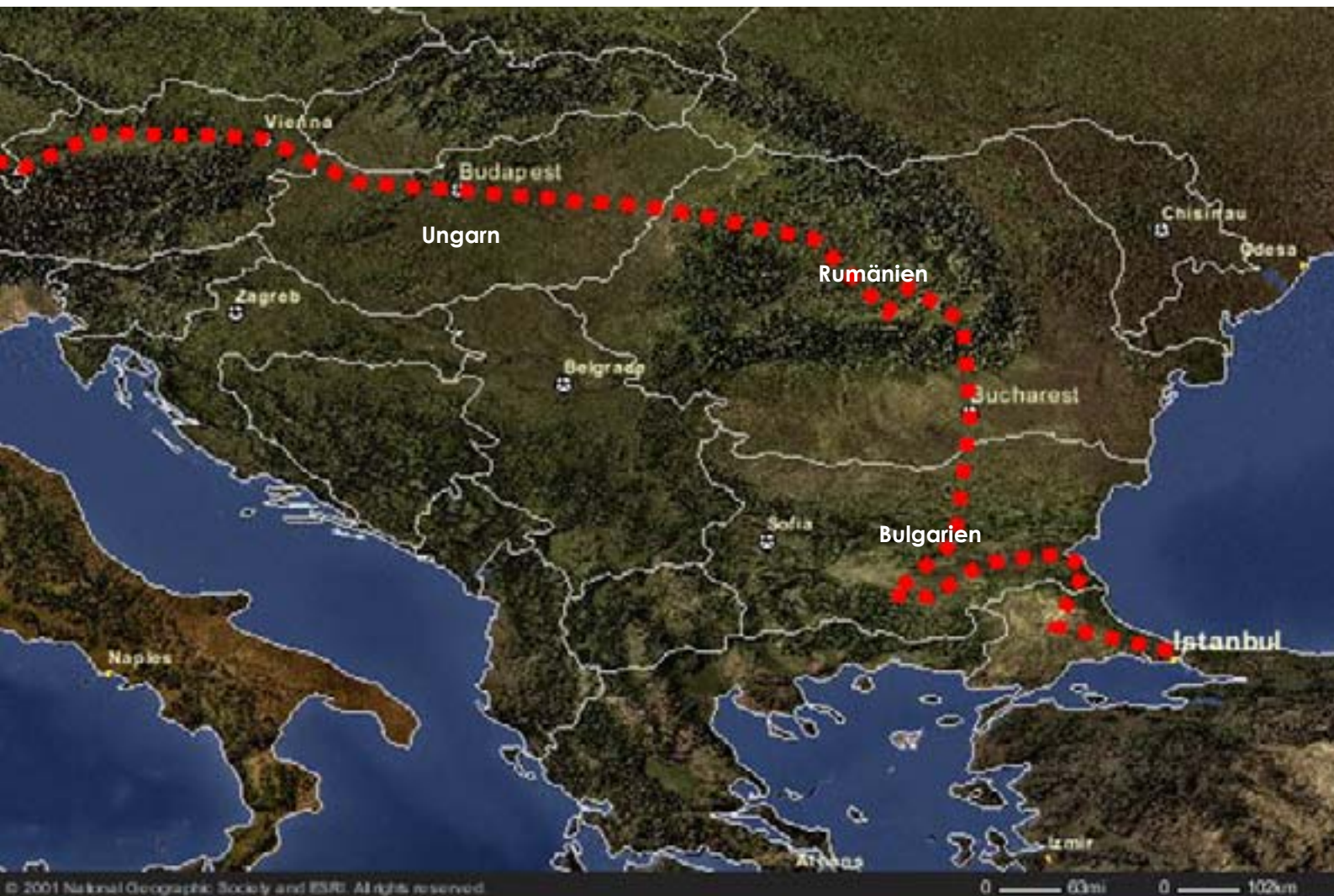
rade einfache Strecken sind mit dem Bus oft wesentlich billiger als mit der Eisenbahn.

Von Budapest können Ganzeilige in ca. 36 Stunden mit dem Zug direkt über Bucharest nach Istanbul fahren oder man lässt es langsamer angehen und macht einige Stops in Rumänien, einem wunderschönen Land mit schwerem Image-Problem.

Wer es langsamer angehen lässt, braucht nicht den Bogen Richtung Süden nach Arad auszufahren, sondern kann von Budapest direkt nach Osten an die rumänische Grenze reisen. Oradea/Großwardein ist eine Stadt mit ca. 200.000 Einwohner und einer netten, kleinen Altstadt, die sicher einen Tag wert ist.

Obwohl Sibiu/Hermannstadt etwas abseits der Hauptroute liegt und daher mit öffentlichen Ver-





kehrsmitteln nur etwas umständlich zu erreichen ist, lohnt sich der Aufwand auf jeden Fall.

Der Geburtsort von Dracula, Sighisoara/Schässburg, lockt mit einer perfekt erhaltenen mittelalterlichen Stadt am Burghügel und wirkt beinahe unwirklich romantisch. Die kleine Stadt eignet sich auch gut für Ausflüge in die ländliche Umgebung.

Nach all den Städten bietet eine kleine Bergwanderung durch das Bucegi Gebirge / Transylvanische

Alpen Abwechslung. Über Brasov/Kronstadt fährt man mit dem Zug nach Busteni. Von dort geht es per Seilbahn und zu Fuß zum Gipfel des Omul (2.505 m). Nach einer Übernachtung auf einer Schutzhütte wandert man am nächsten Tag in ca. sechs Stunden hinunter nach Bran/Törzburg, wo Draculas Schloss steht. Im Anschluss an die sehr schöne Wanderung kann man mit dem Bus wieder nach Brasov zurückfahren.

Brasov/Kronstadt ist sicher weni-

ger interessant als die vorhin genannten Orte, aber noch immer besser als das weitläufige, heiße und nur mäßig spannende Bucharest. Von Brasov kann man mit Bus oder Bahn (ggf. in Bucharest umsteigen) direkt nach Istanbul weiterfahren.

In Bulgarien würde ich meinen ersten Stop in Veliko Tarnovo einlegen. Die direkt an der Bahnlinie nach Istanbul gelegene Stadt liegt dramatisch oberhalb einer Schlucht des Yantra Flusses.

Nachdem der Zug den Balkan ü-

## GRIECHENLAND

## Santorin



berquert hat – richtig gelesen, der Balkan ist eigentlich kein Sammelbegriff für Südosteuropa, sondern ein Gebirgszug in Bulgarien – stoppt er in Plovdiv, der zweitgrößten Stadt des Landes. Eine schöne Altstadt mit reich verzierten Häusern aus dem 19. Jahrhundert und das 30 km südlich gelegene Bachkovo Kloster warten darauf entdeckt zu werden.

Wer in der Türkei nicht an die Mittelmeerküste fährt, findet in Sozopol an der bulgarischen Schwarzmeerküste eine hervorragende Al-

ternative für letzte Badetage. Sonst kann man von Plovdiv direkt nach Istanbul weiterfahren, oder man unterbricht die Reise in Edirne, der ersten größeren Stadt in der Türkei.

Eine Alternative zur zuvor beschriebenen Route sind die Fähren von Italien nach Griechenland, von wo man sich entweder auf dem Landweg durch Mittel- und Nordgriechenland nach Istanbul durchschlägt oder von Athen über diverse Ägäisinseln direkt die türkische Küste ansteuert. Nachteil: Die heftigen Hafengebühren und Istanbul

liegt dann auch nicht mehr direkt am Weg.

Seit sich Serbien wohlverhält, ist auch die während des Balkankriegs blockierte Direktroute durch Jugoslawien wieder möglich. Allerdings gibt es keine durchgehenden Züge nach Istanbul mehr, was es aber einem erleichtern sollte, in Ljubljana/Laibach, Zagreb, Belgrad und Sofia Stops einzulegen, bevor man in Plovdiv wieder auf die oben beschriebene Route stößt.





LONELY PLANET

# Hungary



**H**ungary's central position and experience in welcoming travellers makes it the ideal place to enter Eastern Europe. The majority of travellers arrive in picturesque Budapest, which has a lively arts, café and music scene, and is host to a range of cultural and sporting festivals. To venture outside the capital is to travel through plains, resort-lined lakes, Baroque towns, and rustic villages. Hungary's other attractions include sampling its quality wines, 'taking the waters' in a relaxing thermal spa, or bird-watching in

some of the best spots in Europe.

## When to Go

Though it can be pretty wet in May and June, spring is just glorious in Hungary. The Hungarian summer is warm, sunny and unusually long, but the resorts are very crowded in late July and August. Like Paris and Rome, Budapest comes to a halt in August (called 'the cucumber-growing season' here because that's about the only thing happening).

Autumn is beautiful, particularly in the hills around Budapest and in the Northern Uplands. November

is one of the rainiest months of the year, however. Winter is cold, often bleak and museums and other tourist sights are often closed. Animal lovers will also want to skip this season: half the women are draped in furry dead things throughout the winter.

## Facts for the Traveler

Visas: Citizens of the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Asian countries and most European countries don't require visas; German and French citizens need only show their identity cards. Nationals of Australia

## KETTENBRÜCKE

## Széchenyi lánchíd



require visas, which are valid for between 30 and 90 days. Visas may be purchased upon arrival.

### Getting Around

Hungary's domestic transportation system is efficient, comprehensive and inexpensive. Volán run yellow buses between neighbouring cities and towns, and yellow-and-red long-distance buses to far-flung smaller communities. Rail services, run by MÁV, are less extensive, although they do have some delightful excursions, including a 'nostalgia' steam-train trip around Lake Bala-

ton in summer. There are also a number of narrow-gauge trains, operated by United Forest Railways, which run in wooded and hilly areas. Ferries operate on Lake Balaton, the Danube between Budapest and Esztergom, and the Tisza River, but these are generally warm-weather pleasure-trips rather than real means of transport.

There are no scheduled domestic flights in Hungary at present, although several routes are planned. Major international car-rental agencies have offices in Budapest, and

there are scores of local companies throughout the country, but don't count on any bargains. Motorists can expect good roads, widely available fuel, and petrol stations that stay open all night.

Local transport in the cities and towns is well developed, and includes buses and trolley buses, as well as trams in Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged and Miskolc. Budapest also has an underground Metro and a suburban commuter railway called the HÉV. Taxis are plentiful and, if you're charged the right fare (not





always the case in Budapest), very reasonably priced.

### **Money & Costs**

**Currency:** Forint (Ft)

### **Relative Costs:**

Meals

- Budget: US\$2-4
- Mid-range: US\$4-8
- Top-end: US\$8 and upwards

### **Lodging**

- Budget: US\$8-14
- Mid-range: US\$14-50
- Top-end: US\$50 and upwards

Hungary remains a bargain destination for foreign travellers. If you

stay in private rooms, eat at medium-priced restaurants and travel 2nd-class on trains, you should get away on about US\$25 a day without scrimping. Those putting up in hostels, dormitories or camping grounds and eating at self-service restaurants or food stalls will cut costs substantially.

You can exchange cash and travellers' cheques up to 30,000 Ft at banks and travel agents, usually for a commission of 1% to 2%. Post offices almost always change cash, but rarely cheques. ATMs accepting

credit and debit cards can be found throughout the country, but it's always useful to carry a little foreign cash, preferably US dollars or Euros in case your plastic doesn't work. Credit cards can be used in up-market restaurants, shops, hotels, car rental firms, travel agencies and petrol stations.

Hungary is a very tip-conscious society and virtually everyone routinely tips waiters, hairdressers, taxi drivers and even doctors, dentists and petrol-station attendants about 10%. Not leaving a tip, or leaving a

very small tip, is a strong signal that you were less than impressed with the service. Never leave money on the table in a restaurant: tell the

waiter how much money you want to leave as a tip as you are paying the bill. Bargaining is not the done thing in Hungary, but you can try a

little gentle haggling in flea markets or with individuals selling folk crafts.

# Budapest

Hungary's capital straddles a gentle curve in the Danube. It's the administrative as well as the business and cultural centre of Hungary, and virtually everything that happens in the country starts, finishes or is taking place here. But the beauty of Budapest is what really makes it stand apart. Its broad avenues, leafy parks and harmonious blend of architectural styles has earned it the nickname the 'Paris of Eastern Europe'. Budapest also has a turn-of-the-century feel to it, for it was then - during the industrial boom and the capital's heyday - that most of the city was built. The city is well laid-out, rarely confusing, and ideal for walking.

The walled Castle District is the premier destination for visitors, and contains some of Budapest's most

important monuments and museums. It consists of two distinct parts: the Old Town, where commoners lived during medieval times; and the Royal Palace, the original site of a castle built in the 13th century. The Old Town is filled with attractively painted streets, decorative churches and the famous Fishermen's Bastion. The latter was built as a viewing platform in 1905, and named after the guild of fishermen responsible for defending this stretch of wall in the Middle Ages. It has commanding views over the city, and is dominated by seven gleaming turrets (representing the seven Magyar tribes who entered the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century), and a statue of St Stephen on horseback. Immediately south of the Old Town is the Royal Palace.

Razed, rebuilt and redesigned over the past seven centuries, the palace houses a number of museums, including the National Gallery, which has an enormous collection devoted exclusively to Hungarian art.

The oldest and one of the most interesting parts of the city is Óbuda. The area is remarkable for its Roman ruins, and its small, quiet neighbourhoods which seem unchanged since the turn of the century. It also has its fair share of museums, including the Kiscelli Museum, which features an impressive art collection and rooms furnished with Empire, Biedermeier and Art-Nouveau furniture. North of Óbuda is the Roman civilian town of Aquincum, the most complete in Hungary. Established at the end of the 1st century, it was among the



most developed towns on the continent with sumptuous single-storey houses, fountains and courtyards. Not much remains of that today, but you can still see their outlines as well as those of the big public baths, market and a temple devoted to the sun god Mithras. The Aquincum Museum tries to put it all in perspective - unfortunately only in Hungarian. However, you can check out the 3rd-century water organ, pottery moulds and floor mosaics,

and the sculptures and stone sarcophagi outside.

Budapest's other highlights include a cruise along the Danube, strolling along the riverfront or across romantic bridges, browsing through antique bookshops and jewellery stores, or 'taking the waters' at one of the city's many spas.

Budget accommodation can be found in Pest or the Buda Hills, respectively west and east of the city centre, while there's plenty of cheap

places to eat in the Castle District. The Eszterházy flea market (in the XIX district, south of the city) is one of the best and biggest in Eastern Europe, and sells everything from Soviet army watches to Fred Astaire top hats. Budapest has an ample choice of things to do after dark - from opera, theatre, ballet and dance to rock, pop, jazz, and meat-market discos.



# LONELY PLANET

## Romania



Horse-drawn carts jostle for space against fast cars whose drivers are talking money on mobile phones; farm workers watch Bay-watch courtesy of satellite dishes standing in the rear yard of their medieval farmhouse. Romania is clawing itself forward, slowly and surely sloughing off the remnants of the Ceausescu era. The transition is not easy, and for some it's downright painful. In the middle of the picturesque scenery and the head-long rush to development where the money is fast and the suits Armani,

parts of the country are being left out. But in 1996 a neocommunist government was voted out and replaced by one talking about genuine reform, so the country is not without hope.

Romania has majestic castles, medieval towns, great hiking and wild-life, and the cheap skiing of much of the 'undiscovered' former Eastern Bloc. And the Romanians, despite being among Europe's poorest people, generally haven't cottoned on to the scams and ploys so common elsewhere to separate travellers

from their money. You'll be floored at how different Romania is, but you'll almost certainly see signs that it's chasing the dreams of the rest of the West.

### When to Go

May and June are the best months to visit, followed by September and early October. At these times, you can visit the medieval painted monasteries in southern Bucovina, and enjoy them minus the tourist hordes. Spring and autumn are also the best times for birdwatching in the Danube Delta. Romania has



## BUCOVINA Moldau Klöster



harsh winters, when tourism is centred on the ski resorts like Poiana Brasov and Sinaia. Snow lingers as late as mid-May, and the hiking season doesn't begin in earnest till June. The resorts along the Black Sea coast start filling up in late June and stay packed until mid-August.

### Facts for the Traveler

Visas: EU and US citizens with valid passports have the luxury of being able to visit Romania visa-free

for 30 days. All other Western visitors need a visa, obtainable in advance at a Romanian embassy or upon entry to Romania.

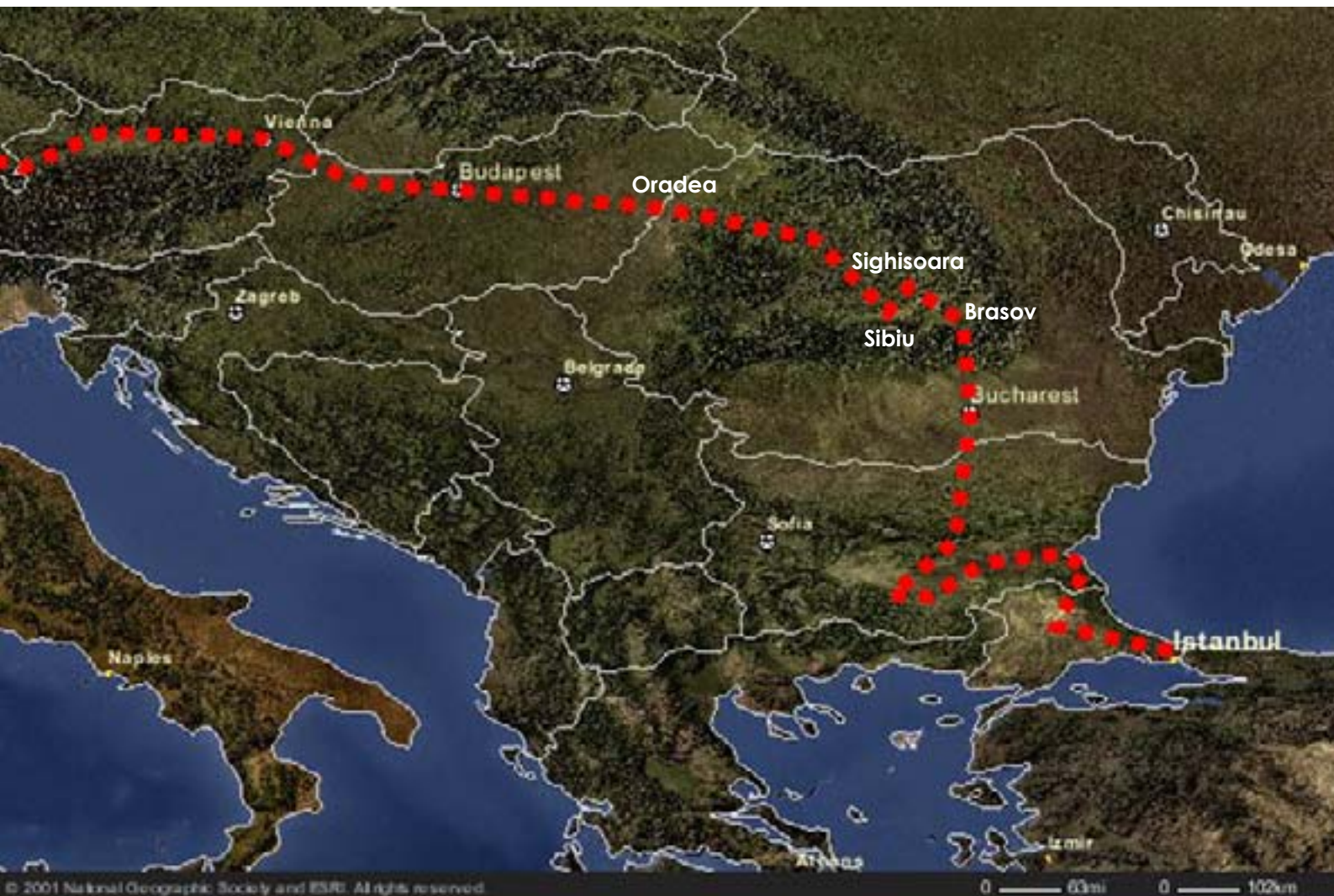
### Getting Around

Romania's national airline Tarom flies at least four times weekly between Bucharest and the other major cities. A single fare is usually around US\$50, and returns are exactly double the single fare. Buses are dead cheap and dead slow. It

costs about US\$2.50 to travel 200km (124 mi), but buses are infrequent and only one or two buses a day service most routes. Buses are generally used only for outlying villages and more rural areas.

Train has long been the most popular way of travelling around Romania. Trains provide a frequent service to most cities, towns and larger villages within the country. There are five different types of





train: personal are so slow that they generally travel with the doors open so passengers can leap on or off when the train is in motion; accelerated are faster, more expensive and less crowded; rapid and express trains travel reasonably quickly and serve international as well as domestic routes; and Inter-City trains are no faster than the others (apart from personal trains) but are twice as expensive and twice as comfortable. Seat reservations are obligatory for all trains (except personal) and

this is included in the fare.

Most Romanian roads are best suited to 4WD. They are in poor, potholed condition. Other hazards include horse-drawn carts piled high with hay, cows, pigs, drunkards and playing children! Similarly, if you want to cycle, the potholed roads makes the going tough for anything less than a robust touring or mountain bike. Boat is the only way of getting around much of the Danube Delta. Most towns within Romania have local buses, trams and trolley-

buses, and Bucharest has a metro underground system. Taxis are available in all cities and towns, but can be more expensive for foreigners.

### Money & Costs

**Currency:** leu (ROL)

**Relative Costs:**

Meals

- Budget: US\$2-5
- Mid-range: US\$5-20
- Top-end: US\$20 and upwards

**Lodging**

- Budget: US\$6-25





► Mid-range: US\$25-40

► Top-end: US\$40 and upwards

Accommodation will be your biggest expense in Romania. Cheap accommodation is scarce in Bucharest. Expect to pay at least US\$25 for a double room with shared bath in any hotel within walking distance of the centre of most Romanian cities and towns. Accommodation in private homes in the countryside starts at US\$10 a night, including a home-cooked breakfast.

The cost of dining is rising - Romanians can't afford to eat out, so most restaurants are geared to 'rich foreigners'. In Bucharest it's tough to eat for less than US\$5 per head, not including alcohol. Eating out is

cheaper elsewhere, and a bottle of good Romanian wine can be as little as US\$1.50. Seeing a film or play costs about US\$1, and entrance fees to museums are about 20 cents. Public transport is dirt cheap by Western standards. US\$3 will take you approximately 100km by bus or comfortable express train. Petrol is around 45 cents a litre.

It's easy to cash travelers checks in Romania, but not very easy to replace stolen ones. Only American Express has an office that issues replacements in Bucharest. Cash-dispensing ATMs accepting Visa, MasterCard and plenty of other plastic are becoming increasingly widespread in Romania. Credit

cards are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants and shops. They are essential for hiring a car, unless you want to pay cash up-front. Marked, torn or very used notes will often be refused at exchanges. Ensure whatever currency you bring is in good condition.

Tipping is not common in Romania, though you should always round up the bill to the nearest 500 lei. Some bartering, but not much, goes on at flea markets. Taxi drivers drive a hard bargain, so always haggle.



GROSSWARDEIN  
Oradea



## Oradea

© **LONELY PLANET.** Of all the cities of the old Austro-Hungarian empire, Oradea (Grosswardein in German, Nagyvárad in Hungarian) is probably the one that has best retained its 19th-century elegance. When Oradea was ceded to Romania in 1920, this example of Habsburg majesty became the backwater it remains today. Oradea's most impressive architectural monuments are on the two city-centre squares, Piata Unirii and Piata Ferdinand..

## Sibiu

© **ROUGH GUIDES.** "I rubbed my eyes in amazement," wrote Walter Starkie of Sibiu in 1929. "The town where I found myself did not seem to be in Transylvania, for it had no Romanian or Hungarian characteristics: the narrow streets and old gabled houses made me think of Nuremberg." Nowadays the illusion is harder to sustain, in a city surrounded by high-rise suburbs and virtually abandoned by the Saxons themselves, but the old

town is still a startling sight and home to some of Romania's best museums.

Sibiu is an attractive and lively town where many of the houses are painted sky blue, red, apricot or pea green, and cafés and restaurants do a busy trade along the length of the promenade. The town is split into a historic centre and a lower new town, and has many fine old churches, as well as the remains of the original Saxon Bastions that formed the town's fortifications.





HERMANNSTADT

Sibiu



## Sighisoara

© **LONELY PLANET.** Like Brasov, Sighisoara is a Saxon medieval town surrounded by hills in Transylvania. But it is more beautiful and less hyped than Brasov, and has a greater amount of perfectly preserved medieval buildings. For many, its great drawcard is the Dracula connection - within the

walls of the medieval citadel you'll find the Dracula House, in which Vlad Tepes was born in 1431 and reputedly lived until the age of four. It is now a bar and restaurant.

Sighisoara's other main sights are also inside the citadel walls, with its nine surviving towers. The clock tower, a history museum and the Church of the Dominican Monastery, which became the Saxons'

main Lutheran church in 1566, are all worth seeing. And don't miss climbing the 172 steps of the covered stairway to the Gothic Church on the Hill. Just 4km northeast of Sighisoara is the village of Albesti, home to the Sandor Petofi Museum, which commemorates the Hungarian poet who died in battle here in 1848. Sighisoara is well served by both local and interna-





tional bus and train services.

## Brasov

© **LONELY PLANET**. Brasov, a medieval Saxon town surrounded by verdant Transylvanian hills, is one of Romania's most visited places. It was in Brasov that the first public opposition to the Ceausescu regime occurred - in 1987 thousands of disgruntled workers, angered by wage cuts, long

hours, and rationing, took to the streets demanding basic foodstuffs. Ceausescu's response was to call in the troops (three people were killed) and cut rations even further. Brasov's main attraction is the Black Church, said to be the largest Gothic church between Vienna and Istanbul. The church's name comes from its blackened appearance following a fire in 1689.

Many people use Brasov as a base

for visiting nearby attractions. The main magnet for tourists is Bran Castle, commonly known as 'Dracula's Castle', 30km south of Brasov. Despite popular myth, the castle has no links with Vlad Tepes, the medieval prince most often associated with everyone's favorite vampire. And, with its fairytale turrets and whitewashed walls, the castle is not exactly menacing. Less touristy and more dramatic is Ras-

## KRONSTADT Brasov



nov Castle, en route to Bran Castle from Brasov. The ski resorts of Poiana Brasov and Sinaia are also within easy reach by bus or train from Brasov. Plenty of local and international buses and trains stop at Brasov.

## Bucharest

© **LONELY PLANET.** Romania's capital - named after its legendary founder, a shepherd called Bu-

cur - lies on the Wallachian plains, between the Carpathian foothills and the Danube River. In the 1930s it was known as 'the Paris of the East'. Since then, earthquakes, WWII bombing and Ceausescu have combined to destroy much of its pre-war beauty.

In the 1980s Ceausescu bulldozed 7000 homes and 26 churches in historic southern Bucharest to build a Civic Centre. The focal point of

what locals dubbed 'Ceausima' is the enormous 12-storey Palace of Parliament, intended to be the largest building in the world - it's actually the second, after the Pentagon. Ceausescu - who was executed just as it neared completion - intended it to house the president's office, central committee and all the state ministries. The Iliescu government did not know what to do with this white elephant - many people



## BUKAREST

## Bucuresti



wanted it demolished - but in 1994 decided to use it to house the Parliament and to host international conferences. There are guided tours, so you'll get a chance to gawp at the ornate 3100-room interior as well as the mesmerising exterior.

For a taste of the old, head for central Bucharest, where the 16th-century Old Court Church contains beautifully preserved frescoes. The George Enescu Museum displays

the musician's manuscripts and personal belongings. Also here is Romania's very own Raffles, the Athenee Palace Hotel, centre of early-20th-century decadence, and the meeting place of Olivia Manning's characters in *The Balkan Trilogy*. It has just had a US\$50 million facelift and is the city's classiest and most expensive hotel.

In western Bucharest you'll find Ghencea Civil Cemetery, final rest-

ing place of the Ceausescus. Nicolae's grave is quite ornate and decorated with flowers and candles, but Elena is apparently less revered by those who still mourn their overthrow. Their son Nicu (Transylvania boss, drunkard, playboy and one-time partner of the Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci) is buried close by.

Bucharest offers a wide range of accommodation options, including



PALATUL PARLIAMENTULUI

# Parlamentspalast



private rooms, university campuses, hostels and hotels. The main places are in the centre or around the main train station (Gara de Nord). Bucharest has seen a rapid influx of flashy, upmarket, expensive restaurants offering international cuisine, but it is still easy to track down traditional Romanian cooking in central Bucharest. This area is also the focal point for nightlife: you'll find plenty of entertainment here, including bars, nightclubs, theatres and cinemas.

## LONELY PLANET

# Bulgaria



When Bulgaria ran away with the topsy-turvy capitalist circus, no-one told its people they were swinging without a safety net. Consider that citizens resorted to digging up the streets to pull copper from the telephone wires and you'll realise the act wasn't exactly an overwhelming success. But what the visitor encounters now is a country struggling valiantly to adapt and people who remain remarkably hospitable in the face of social and economic chaos. Urban Bulgaria, especially Sofia, is much changed. In the villages though, you can still find

folk who drive the donkey to work, eat homegrown potatoes and make their own cheese. The difference is that they settle down for an evening in front of the satellite TV.

Of course, what high inflation means for visitors with stronger currencies (that's most of you), is that the ski and beach resorts are ridiculously cheap. And you don't need wads of cash to appreciate Bulgaria's dramatic mountains, haven-like monasteries, churches, mosques, Roman and Byzantine ruins, and the excellent coffee you'll be offered wherever you go.

### When to Go

Bulgaria has a temperate climate, with cold damp winters and hot dry summers. Spring (April to mid-June) is a good time to visit, with mild and pleasant weather and a host of cultural events taking place. Summer (mid-June to September) has reliable weather, perfect for hiking and outdoor festivals but the beaches on the Black Sea coast can get insanely crowded, and accommodation and camping grounds in coastal resorts tend to fill up. The coast is virtually deserted from mid-September to mid-May. The ski sea-





son begins in mid-December and can last until April.

#### **Facts for the Traveler**

Visas: Nationals of some 30 countries - including the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the UK and other EU countries - are admitted without a visa for stays of less than 30 days. Alternatively, a 90-day visa costs between US\$30-60 depending on which country you apply from. Visitors of most other nationalities are issued visas on a shifting fee scale depending on the type of visa sought - transit, tourist or business.

#### **Getting Around**

Bulgaria's bus and train networks are extensive and pretty cheap, although plagued by illogical timetabling, mysterious cancellations and office staff with very important crosswords. Private buses compete with government transport over major routes, often making up for a slight price hike by including extras such as shock absorbers. You're unlikely to avoid a soundtrack composed of pop music you hoped you'd forgotten, and one hopes there is no connection between the

filthy seats and the soft-porn wallpaper.

#### **Money & Costs**

**Currency:** Bulgarian leva

#### **Relative Costs:**

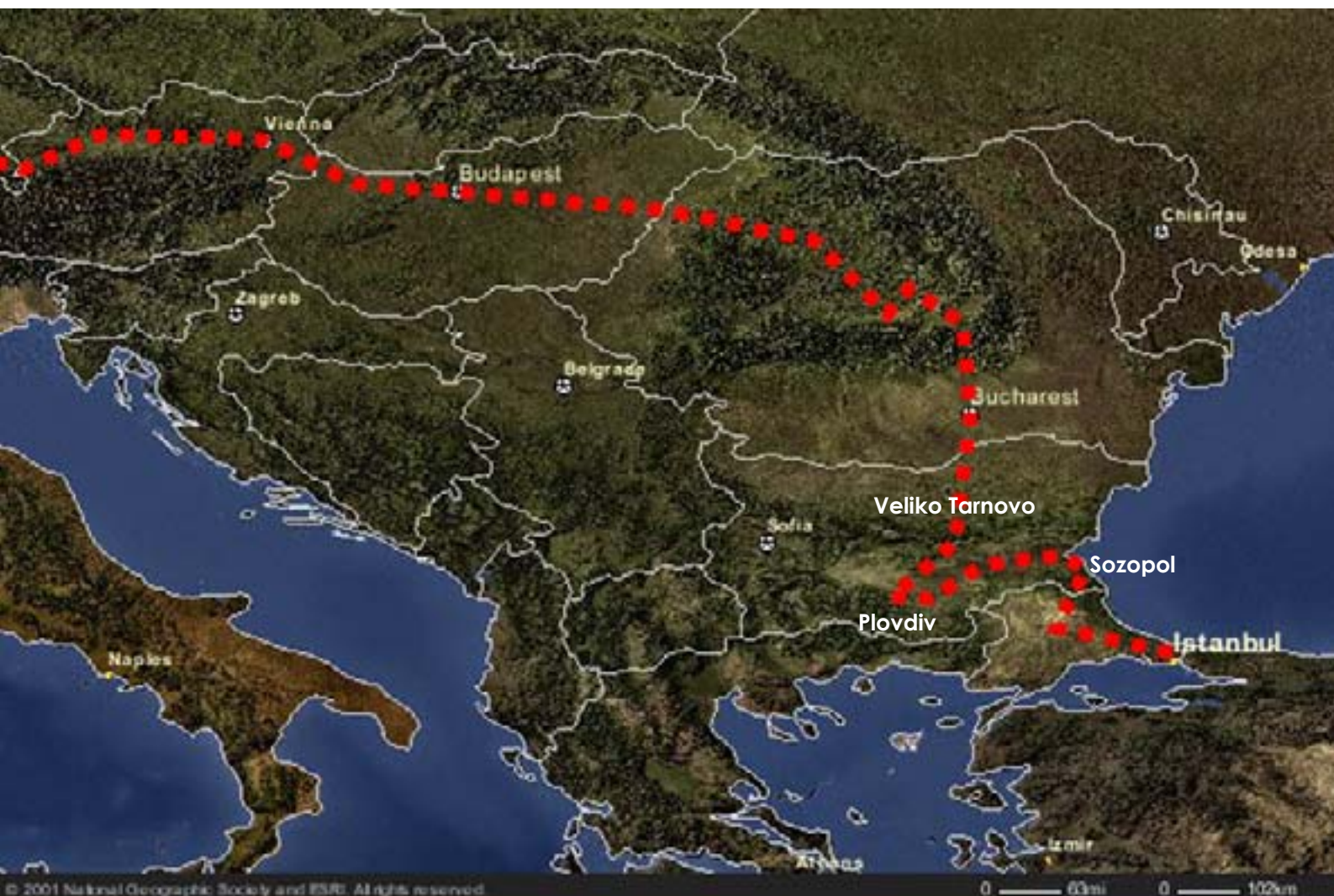
Meals

- Budget: US\$1-4
- Mid-range: US\$4-10
- Top-end: US\$10 and upwards

#### **Lodging**

- Budget: US\$8-16
- Mid-range: US\$16-40
- Top-end: US\$40 and upwards

Despite a 22% value-added tax, you'll probably find that souvenirs,



admission prices, food and drink, and all forms of transport (including taxis) are cheap. Anything you can get for the same price as a Bulgarian will be cheap, but when there's a higher tourist price (as there is for almost all accommodation) things can get expensive. You can get by on a budget of US\$20-40 a day, depending on the level of comfort you require.

Cash is easily changed at numerous small exchange offices, usually for no commission. Travellers'

cheques are more of a hassle as many banks do not accept them, and those that do will charge a commission of around 5%. ATMs are a common sight in Sofia and at Black Sea resorts, and cash advances on credit cards are also available in these areas. Still, it's best to bring plenty of cash to Bulgaria.

Waiters and taxi-drivers expect the bill to be rounded up to the nearest convenient figure. With non-metered taxis you needn't add a tip to the fare you agreed on before-

hand.





## Veliko Târnovo



## Veliko Târnovo

© **LONELY PLANET.** Veliko Târnovo, capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185-1393), is laced with history. The Yantra River winds through a gorge in the centre of the city and picturesque houses cling to the cliffs. The ruined Tsaravets Citadel, almost encircled by the river, was a vast fortress sacked by the Turks in 1393. The rebuilt Church of the Blessed Saviour at the top of the hill is great squizzing territory. You can look down on the foundations of the ruined Royal Palace, home to 22 successive tsars. Execution Rock is a daunting bluff directly to the north, where traitors were once pushed into the Yantra River.

Because Veliko Târnovo is a university town, it's quite

a lively place to lob for a few days. There are lots of bars on the uphill side of the main drag, and you only need to follow the clouds of cigarette smoke to work out where it's all happening. It's only a short roll down the cobblestones to a number of reasonably cheap hostels, hotels and restaurants.

## Plovdiv

© **ROUGH GUIDES.** Lucian the Greek called Plovdiv "the biggest and most beautiful of all towns" in Thrace; he might have added "and Bulgaria", for the country's second-largest city (with a population of 360,000) is one of its most attractive and vibrant centres, with arguably more to recommend it than Sofia, which the proud locals tend to regard with some disdain. Certainly, there's

# Plovdiv



plenty to see: the old town embodies Plovdiv's long and varied history – Thracian fortifications utilized by Macedonian masons, overlaid with Byzantine walls, and by great timber-framed mansions erected during the Bulgarian renaissance, looking down on the Ottoman mosques and artisans' dwellings of the lower town. But Plovdiv isn't merely a parade of antiquities: the city's arts festivals and trade fairs rival Sofia's in number, and its restaurants and promenade compare very favourably with those of

the capital.

## Sozopol

© **ROUGH GUIDES.** The small fishing port of Sozopol is the favoured resort of Bulgaria's literary and artistic set since the beginning of the last century, and popular with German and Eastern European package tourists since the 1970s.

An engaging huddle of nineteenth-century houses on a rocky headland, backed up by two fine beaches, scores of bars and restaurants, and a lively promenade, So-

zopol is fast overtaking Nesebâr as the coast's prime attraction. Slightly incongruously, its harbour also serves as one of Bulgaria's chief naval bases, with ranks of gunboats anchored off the neighbouring island of Sveti Kirik.

For the first ten days of September, Sozopol hosts the Apollonia Arts Festival, comprising classical music, jazz, theatre and poetry, and frequent open-air pop concerts take place throughout the summer. Be warned that finding accommodation can be difficult in July and August,



# Sozopol



when the tourist season is at its height.

► Im 3. Teil geht es weiter in die Türkei. Von Istanbul, der Stadt auf zwei Kontinenten, nach Dogubayazit im Schatten des Berg Ararat, wo Noah mit seiner Arche gestrandet sein soll.