BIRDING AND NATURE WATCHING IN DANUBE DELTA

The Danube Delta is located at the confluence of the Danube and the Black Sea and has a total surface area of about 800,000 ha, four-fifths of which are located in Romania and one-fifth in Ukraine.

It is one of the largest wetlands in the world, which has led to an early protection. The Danube Delta was declared a Ramsar wetland of international importance and is listed as UNESCO World Heritage since 1991. In 1992 it was declared a biosphere reserve and nowadays it is also in the WWF World directory of the 200 most valuable ecological areas.

In order to form such a Delta, the Danube, Europe's second longest river after the Volga and the only one flowing from west to east, splits near Tulcea into three arms: Sfântu Gheorghe (Saint George), Sulina and Chilia. All of them flow into the Black Sea after a more or less direct course. A maze of waterways, with natural or artificial origins, numerous lakes covered with reeds and floating plants have developed in the course of time.

The Danube Delta is also an area of inter-ethnic cohabitation, where different minorities live – Lipovans, Ukrainians, Turks which determined the shaping of unique, eclectic social-cultural life forms.

PHOTOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES

The photo-tour “Birding and life watching tour in the Danube Delta” is specially designed for people who are interested in photography and nature.

It doesn’t matter if you’re a beginner or a pro, the focus is on the impressing variety of animals, the wild scenery and improving your photography skills with the help of our professional photographer.

No matter how spectacular the scenery of the Danube Delta, the majority of the photographers are attracted to the birds that nest, feed or rest during a long journey here. The Delta is home to over 5400 species of animals of which 325 bird species, including the largest population of ordinary pelicans (White Pelicans) from Europe (about 8000), 60% of the world population of pygmy cormorants (6000), 50% of the entire red-breasted goose population (approximately 40 000) and more than 7000 pink pelicans. The list can further be filled with herons, great egrets, spoonbill herons, a numerous variety of duck and geese species, shorebirds including the more spectacular Stilt (Blacked Winged Stilt), the Pied Avocet, the Oystercatcher. Different sized raptors reside the Danube Delta – the smaller ones such as the hawks, but also the spectacular ones like the white-tailed eagle. Depending on the season and water level the fabulous abundance of bird species varies, but each period distinguishes itself with highly interesting species for all photo enthusiasts and bird watchers.

OUR PHOTO EXPERT

‘The passion for image was born especially from that for the nature. I mostly like to take photos of the natural environment, of places as wild as possible and full of life. I have never forgotten the traditional Romanian village as well as places full of history’ says Dan Dinu about his passion.

Dan Dinu has over 70 photographic works accepted in national and international photography salons and is an artist of the International Federation of Photographic Art with AFIAP distinction.
He has had the opportunity to work on a series of important photography projects, such as Wild Wonders of Europe or Rewilding Europe. He is a professional photographer and collaborator of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), the largest environmental organization in the world. In 2010 he initiated the biggest nature photography project ever developed in Romania, Romania Wild.

**BE A LOCAL IN THE DANUBE DELTA!**

• Do not miss the sunset from your swinging boat in the middle of the delta! Look at the colours, keep them in your mind together with the undisturbed silence.

• Take a boat ride along the canals covered with white water lilies!

• Stop on the Letea sandbank and look forward upon the wild horses enjoying their freedom!

**ITINERARY**

**Day 1: Bucharest - Murighiol**

Meeting at noon in Murighiol, a small town on the edge of the Danube Delta, in the Eastern side of Tulcea district. Murighiol is notable due to its natural microreserve and the neighbouring Genoese fortress. In the evening we start out photo shooting while watching the lagoons at Saraturi. As the Romanian name implies (Saraturi literally means salty in Romanian), the lake has a high concentration of salts (chlorine-sulphate), which causes the existence of specific microfauna. This implies that in addition to the common bird species which we find here, we’ll also meet seashore species. The most frequent bird species found here throughout the whole year are the summer swans (Cygnus olor). Another interesting bird living here is the Blacked Winged Stilt.

Dinner and accommodation in a local guest house in the quiet fisher village Mile 23.

**Day 2 – 3 - 4: Uzlina - Isac lake – Matita – Merhei**

The village Mile 23 is the perfect starting point for trips to the nearby water channels. We have scheduled a morning and evening boat ride in order to capture birds in the best light possible. There’s also a good chance, depending on water level and season, that we’ll lurk around in order to capture the birds in this magnificent scenery. Our main focus for the next days are the lakes Uzlina and Isac, the grind area Caraorman, the lakes Matita and Merhei, side canals and hidden lakes from the region Mile 23.

Uzlina is one of the smallest villages in the Danube Delta and is located on the right arm of St. George, in the region where the river makes a huge loop. Its most important area is the nature reserve where you can run into all kins of rare birds.

Caraorman is also an interesting source of rare flora and fauna examples. Caraorman means black forest in Turkish and it’s a strictly protected area with brown oak trees, white and black poplars, white willows, where we will spot the white-tailed eagles, falcons, wild cats and wolves.

The two lakes, Matita and Merhei, are two of the most important sights in the Danube Delta, which we visit after a scenic boat trip through the Eracle channel and the lakes Trei Iezer and Bogdaproste.

Lunch, dinner and accommodation in a local guest house in Mile 23.
Day 5: Sulina

Sulina is the easternmost point of Romania and has an ancient history, being mentioned for the first time in 950 by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetes. Sulina was called one at a time Selina, Sunnem, Solina and finally Sulina. The city used to bustle with traders from both Europe and Middle East, adventurers and pirates. The small city’s attractions are the Greek Church of Saint Nicholas on the waterfront, the 60-foot-tall lighthouse in the centre of the town and the 25-mile-long fine-sand beach.

We’ll observe here the birds from the marine area and the typical vegetation on a wild stretch of beach.

Lunch, dinner and accommodation in a local guest house in Mile 23.

Day 6: Letea forest

One-day photo shooting in Letea forest, the northernmost subtropical forest in the world, an extremely special place hidden from the eyes and paths of tourists. To get here, we’ll have to cross a myriad of channels, covered mostly with water lilies.

Letea forest is Romania’s oldest nature reservation and it’s impressing throughout its natural complexity. It is covered with sand dunes, lianes, oaks (some specimens are 700 years old) and up to 50 m high birch trees. These are just a few examples – the forest is home to more then 500 different species of plants and trees, many of which exotic. But the most impressing fact about Letea forest is its amazing diversity and sudden change of scenery – from subtropical forest to sand dunes and desert, from delicate waterways covered with lilies to horses running freely on the meadows.

It’s not only nature which impresses in this little hidden paradise, but it’s also the people who make the story complete. They are mostly Russians, while those living in the the villages nearby are Romanians and Periprave Lipovans – a true example of multicultural cohabitation.

Lunch at an inn in the area.

Dinner and accommodation in a local guest house in Mile 23.

Day 7: Mile 23 - Tulcea

Departure from Mile 23 and final photo shooting on our way to Tulcea.

Recommended seasons: spring and autumn

PRICES

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<tr>
<th>Maximum group size</th>
<th>Tarif per person based on double occupancy</th>
<th>Single room supplement</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 persons</td>
<td>1200 EUR</td>
<td>250 Euro</td>
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Scheduled departures: 5-11 September 2014
Price / person is based on double occupancy. The prices are calculated per person and in Euros. The given rates may vary slightly in 2015.

INCLUDED SERVICES

- 6 nights accommodation, double occupancy in local 3* guest houses
- Full board (3-course meal and water)
- Photo-Trainer for the entire stay and guide
- Private transport by boat, according to the program
- Danube Delta travel brochure with useful information

NOT INCLUDED

- Air travel and transfer by car to Tulcea
- Transfer from Bucharest to Murighiol and from Tulcea to Bucharest
- Travel insurance
- Drinks
- Single room supplement: 50 € / person / for the whole period

REQUIRED PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

- Long trousers, long sleeve shirts
- Cap and sun hat
- Jacket / Raincoat (raincoat stays in your backpack all the time)
- Sunscreen
- Cream or spray against insects
- You can bring your own hydration cremes and energy drinks (the ones that are suitable for athletes)
- Waterproof protection case for mobile phones and camera equipment
- Waterproof bags or containers for clothing and equipment

Note:

- Optional activities will be charged additional. The guide will assist you with all necessary information.
- The daily schedule can change according to the weather, to local social and cultural events, without any fundamental change to the program’s structure.
- On request we can provide a list of bird species which can be seen in the Danube Delta according to the Collins Bird Guide.