

*specialist holidays*  
**CYCLING TOUR**

PAMELA GOODMAN FINDS THAT A BIKE IS IDEAL FOR EXPLORING RURAL TRANSYLVANIA

I arranged to meet Oli Broom last autumn on the advice of friends who had recently returned from a Slow Cyclist holiday in Romania and were waxing lyrical about their trip. Over coffee, Oli explained that, after a mammoth cycle ride from London to Australia and subsequent trips exploring Rwanda and Romania by bike, he had decided to launch a company specialising in high-end cycling trips to both countries - an intriguing, if rather unlikely, duo of destinations to which, this year, Tuscany has been added.

Oli's passion for and knowledge of these countries - in particular, the Saxon villages of Transylvania, where his Romania trips are based - had me hooked, along with the idea that a bicycle journey is a wonderful way to dig a little deeper into the heart and soul of a destination.

While The Slow Cyclist offers the odd set departure date when solo travellers or couples can join a group, most trips are bespoke. So I find myself with a group of nine friends on a Wizz Air flight from Luton to Cluj-Napoca (first-time experiences all round), wondering whether we fit the description of our briefing notes as 'curious travellers with a bit of juice in their legs' and whether 'juice' could ever be substituted for 'gin'.

Oli, of course, has this eventuality covered. For those who are tentative about their biking prowess (be it through age, fitness or gin consumption), there are electric bikes; for hardier, more competitive types there are mountain bikes. And while the cycling is demanding

at times, it is never completely overwhelming, and there are mornings and afternoons when walking is offered as an option for those who would like to take a different route or are perhaps a little saddle sore.

Either way, at all times the scenery is very spectacular - a green and rolling landscape of Carpathian Mountain foothills, which in late May, when I visit, is a riot of wildflowers. We cycle along country lanes through high grassy meadows, dense woodland and open pasture. At times it feels strangely like rural England, until you see bear prints in the mud and are reminded that this is one of Europe's last domains of wild lynx, wolf and brown bear.

Our journey begins in the tiny village of Richis and follows a route over the course of five days to the exquisite Saxon villages of Malancrav, Crit and Viscri, by way of the picture-book town of Sighisoara with its celebrated citadel. Each night brings a new accommodation experience - a fifteenth-century mansion, or a restored village house or farm, but always picturesque and unexpected. And herein lies part of the brilliance of this trip - there are numerous 'surprises' (to elaborate here would be to ruin them) laid on each day, particularly at meal times. Prepare yourself for a treat - in the quality of the guides (two cycle with each group), the food, the wine (Romanian wine is surprisingly good), the places you stay and, above all, the history and antiquated rural landscapes of Transylvania. I would go back in a heartbeat.

*Ways and Means*

Pamela Goodman travelled as a guest of The Slow Cyclist (020-7060 4487; [theslowcyclist.co.uk](http://theslowcyclist.co.uk)), which offers similar trips from £1,600 per person, based on a group of 10, including five nights' accommodation, all meals, wine and beer, guiding, transfers and mountain-bike hire (electric bikes cost more), but excluding flights □

