

Rosie's trip to Transylvania, Romania **Sunday 17th to Saturday 23rd April 2016**

Sunday 17th April - A leisurely breakfast at the Sofitel hotel (I was being thoroughly spoilt by the friend I was with!) before checking in for our British Airways flight to Bucharest.... a slight panic when said friend was pulled over through security - oh blast - the bottle of brandy she was bringing with her had been left in her hand luggage. Eventually we boarded the plane (without the brandy or an upgrade). Arrived in Bucharest to 27° and beautiful sunshine - uh oh I hadn't packed many summer clothes as the forecast had been for rain. Greeted by our driver, Robert, we met up with the rest of the group - a great bunch of ladies from Paris, Holland, Berlin and Scotland - we were all going to have a ball.

The 4 hour transfer took quite a bit longer due to a faulty vehicle - as the "are we there yet" rang through our heads we reached for the Komeny (the local caraway seed brandy) - Oh Gosh - that has quite a taste. Eventually we reached our hosts', Count and Countess Kálnoky's, guesthouse in Miklósvár and had yet more Komeny as we discussed the plan for the week ahead. A delicious dinner in the wine cellar, with its massive oak beams, and central fireplace... were we actually in a scene from a 19th century novel?

Monday 18th April - In glorious sunshine Iosif drove us to the stables some 35km from Miklósvár through the forest to reach Valea Crisului (Sepsikorospatak, "Round Brook"). After meeting our guide Laszlo and our steeds for the week we set off on our journey. A rather enthusiastic first canter (more some than others!) on fit and fresh (this was the first ride of the season) horses, we headed north along high pastures with magnificent views stretching to the high Carpathian Range. The scenery is really beautiful and I was fascinated by the traditional horse carts we saw along the way. Picnic lunch in beautiful sunshine and a quick siesta #HappyDays! Thanks to Laszlo's beady eyes we were lucky enough to spot bear tracks (Both mummy bear and baby bear..... a scene from Goldilocks maybe?) Then, icing on the cake for me and my hunting friend, was spotting a Romanian Fox - Tally Ho! There really are no fences - we passed shepherds and their flocks on the pastures (a scene from history books) before heading down through the trees to reach Malnas Bai (Malnasfurdo, "Raspberry Baths"). Tonight was spent with a local hunter's family who served us a delicious wild boar stew but not before we sampled the mineral water springs in the village - which tasted like Alka-Seltzer!



Tuesday 19th April - A traditional Romanian breakfast (not in bright sunshine but at least it wasn't raining!) before we set off, climbing north-westerly into the deep forests of the Hatod region, where 6 villages share the same woods (hatod = "one sixth"). We followed a quiet forest track, where we saw more bear tracks before we reached our lunch spot with panoramic views over the surrounding hills. The clouds were getting a little darker as we started our descent along the glassy slopes to the Batanii villages ("Big Bacon and Little Bacon") to reach the lovely "Little Bacon". We left the horses at a sheep farm, where 2 of

the local farmers provided great entertainment... I think they had had a little too much Komeny! We were driven just 5 minutes to our guesthouse. A couple of hours for the other riders to relax, whilst I made arrangements for another horse to be sent for my friend.... she just wasn't getting on with the one originally allocated, an experienced old hand on these rides, but having problems this time. I was worried about him and my friend. We decided my horse was too green for her to swap onto so finally, arrangements in place - 2 new horses would be arriving in the morning. Before dinner, we visited the still functioning watermill and traditional looms, which the owners showed us with great pride - as well as the photographs of Prince Charles and Prince Harry also visiting the watermill - shame it wasn't at the same time as us! A lovely stroll through the village on dirt tracks watching cows wandering home took us to another villager's home, where we had the most delicious meal. More Komeny and wine before walking back to our guesthouse.... It had been a very jolly evening.

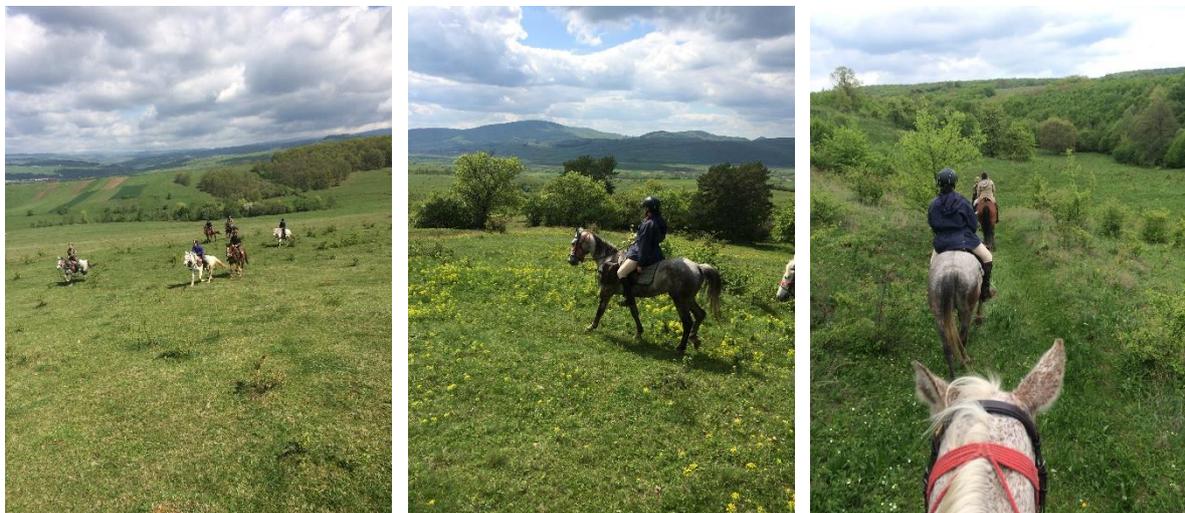


Wednesday 20th April - Woken at 5am by the rain hammering on the windows.... Today was looking pretty bleak. Head to toe in waterproofs (with 2 new horses), we rode northwest again, through the village of Herculian (Magyarhermany), then through forests and farmland, to climb up to Szep Arca ("Pretty Face") hill on the southern slopes of the Hargita Range. With wide open views out on the distant Barot and Olt Valleys, we rode down into Filia Erdofule. Luckily for us it was just half a day's riding, as we were all rather cold and wet. Lunch on the terrace before being driven further into the Kormos ("Sooty") Valley to a private villa. An afternoon to relax, go for a walk etc. but as it was pouring with rain we all took a nap! Rain gave way to allow us to have drinks around the outside fire before dinner. Surrounded by a forest.... I wonder how many bears and wolves were close by!



Thursday 21st April - No sounds of wolves or bears through the night, which was a shame (I think). The rain had moved on but it was really very cold - wrapped up in our layers we enjoyed some gentle canters along the lower slopes of the hills, before passing the villages of Filia Erdofule ("Forest's Ear") and Barot. We really felt like there was nobody else around (apart from the odd shepherd and his few hundred sheep)

- The landscape was breath-taking with endless views of vibrant green hills and forests. Our lunch stop today was by a pretty lake with the sound of frogs singing reverberating around the area (I have never heard anything quite like it before!). None of us were too keen on a siesta today and as it threatened to rain again we set off along the gentler slopes, with lots of canters down the valley of the river Olt navigating our way through the overgrown forest tracks (just like out hunting, I was in my element!) to reach Miklósvár, our destination for the night. This evening our rooms were situated within spacious gardens, with storks nesting on nearby rooftops, just a short walk from the main guesthouse.



Friday 22nd April - Our last days riding and the sun came out to play. We had a great time riding through the picturesque forested hills, crossing valleys and streams, with no roads or villages for 25km! I definitely wanted to take my horse (Kaosz) hunting. We rode down a steep valley and came across a table set out for lunch - this was at Prince Charles's property in Zalănpatak. A delicious lunch served in the beautiful Romanian sunshine... we did not want to leave. Begrudgingly we set off riding again and as we got closer to Korospatak (home of the horses), the landscape changed quite dramatically and we were no longer alone in the wilderness. Here we said goodbye to the horses... finished off a bottle of Komeny (I think Laszlo was quite surprised how much 6 ladies could drink!) and returned by car to Miklósvár for our last night, where the evening was spent consuming yet more wine in the wine cellar until the early hours...



Far away off the beaten track, Romania is probably one of the most beautiful European riding countries I have experienced so far. Lose yourself in the peaceful open grasslands - a brilliant place to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life! Step back in time to a wonderful horse-drawn society...