



Moldova

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Best Places to Eat

- » Vatra Neamului (p563)
- » Grill House (p563)
- » Carmelo (p563)
- » Beer House (p563)
- » Symposium (p564)
- » Oraşul Vechi (p564)
- » Kumanek (p572)

Best Places to Stay

- » Adresa (p561)
- » Chişinău Hostel (p561)
- » Hotel Codru (p561)
- » Orheiul Vechi Monastery (p568)

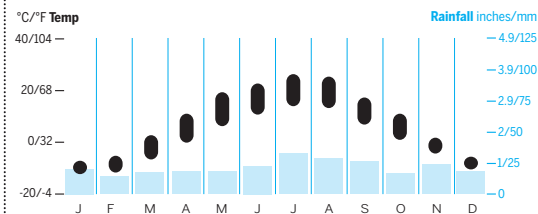
Why Go?

Moldo-who? The country is only vaguely known in Europe and is all but anonymous to the rest of the world; travel blogs about Moldova – consistently ranked near the bottom of the World Database of Happiness – are more often written by melancholy Peace Corps volunteers than tipsy revelers enjoying what is arguably the best-value wine-drinking (ad)venture on the planet. More sober tourist attractions are few but outstanding, such as the dramatic and beautiful cave monasteries and the always petulant breakaway republic of Transnistria, still plugging along as one of Europe's top (and most notorious) idiosyncratic wonders. Chişinău's unexpectedly superb dining and clubbing options have been known to extend a few visits as well.

Although Moldova is a perpetual contender for the 'poorest country in Europe' designation, prices here, particularly for accommodation, can be surprisingly high. Coming from Romania, expect to pay about the same for almost everything.

When to Go

Chişinău



June Parks and restaurant terraces fill with freed students, as do markets with fresh produce.

July High season, what there is of it, hits its peak with hiking, wine tours and camping all in full operation.

October The Wine Festival is on the second Sunday in October, with a 10-day visa-free interval.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Moldovan *leu* (plural *lei*)
- » **Language** Moldovan
- » **Money** ATMs abundant in Chişinău
- » **Visas** None for citizens of the EU, USA, Canada and Japan – but Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans need visas and more (see p579)

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 33,851 sq km
- » **Capital** Chişinău
- » **Telephone code** 373
- » **Emergency** police 902, ambulance 903

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	12.14 lei
Canada	C\$1	11.97 lei
euro	€1	16.53 lei
Japan	¥100	13.88 lei
New Zealand	NZ\$1	9.13 lei
UK	UK£1	18.74 lei
USA	US\$1	11.51 lei

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** 500 lei
- » **Two-course meal** 160 lei
- » **Museum entrance** 15 lei
- » **Beer** 25 lei
- » **City transport ticket** 2 lei to 3 lei

Resources

- » **Fest** (www.fest.md)
- » **Moldova Azi** (www.azi.md)
- » **Moldova.org** (www.moldova.org)

Connections

International connections from Moldova are little better than provincial calibre. Daily trains from Chişinău head to Iaşi and Bucharest, as well as branching out into Ukraine, some continuing to Minsk, St Petersburg and Moscow. Buses run similar routes, though transiting Transdniestru when going to Odesa (Ukraine) is discouraged. Buses from Chişinău to Transdniestru are frequent, but the 'border' crossing has historically been unpredictable; see the boxed text (p570) for details.

ITINERARIES

One week

Arrive in Chişinău – buy and uncork several bottles of wine to fuel partying...erm, civilised wine tasting. Use Chişinău as your base, making a trip out to the cave monastery at Orheiul Vechi. Take a tour around a big-name vineyard.

Two weeks

Follow the one-week itinerary, then spend a few memorably surreal days in Transdniestru, the country that doesn't officially exist. Tack on a few smaller vineyard tours around Chişinău, purchasing your customs limit, before returning home.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Wine** Cricova, Mileştii Mici and Cojuşna wineries and others offer the most fulfilling and inexpensive wine tours in the world.
- » **Fresh produce** There's nothing else available, and thank goodness, because Moldova is essentially one big, very rewarding farmers market.
- » **Muşchi de vacă/porc/miel** A cutlet of beef/pork/lamb.
- » **Piept de pui** Chicken breast.