



Moldova

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Best Places to Stay

- » Adresa (p768)
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Best Places to Eat

- » Vatra Neamului (p769)
- » Oraşul Vechi (p769)

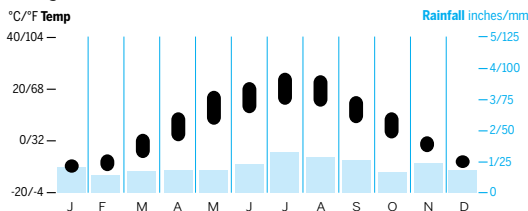
Why Go?

Only vaguely known in Europe and all but anonymous to the rest of the world, Moldova remains a mysterious and misunderstood land: part Romanian, part Russian, all Soviet. Once at the very edge of the USSR, Moldova has gone it alone since the early nineties, even if independence has been both economically painful and racked by civil war between the central government and the secessionist Russian-speaking region known as Transdnestr, which continues to exist as a state within a state today.

Moldova gets a tiny number of tourists and isn't much set up for travellers, but this is one of its greatest charms. Sights may be few and far between, but they are generally impressive, such as the dramatic and beautiful cave monasteries, Transdnestr's Soviet time-capsule feel, and the country's sophisticated and fascinating viniculture. Look no further for adventure: this is eastern Europe's last unknown land.

When to Go

Chişinău



Jun Parks and restaurant terraces fill with freed students, and the weather is warm.

Jul High season hits its peak with hiking, wine tours and camping all in full operation.

Oct The excellent Wine Festival is on the second Sunday in October.

AT A GLANCE

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

Fast Facts

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

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	12.97 lei
Canada	C\$1	12.22 lei
Euro Zone	€1	15.86 lei
Japan	¥100	13.16 lei
New Zealand	NZ\$1	10.39 lei
UK	UK£1	18.78 lei
USA	US\$1	12.41 lei

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** 400 lei
- » **Two-course meal** 150 lei
- » **Museum entrance** 15 lei
- » **Beer** 25 lei
- » **City transport ticket** 2 lei

Resources

- » **Republic of Moldova** (www.moldova.md)
- » **Fest** (www.fest.md)
- » **Moldova.org** (www.moldova.org)

Connections

Despite its awkward geopolitical situation, Moldova has pretty decent overland links to its neighbouring countries. Daily buses and trains from Chişinău head to Iaşi and Bucharest in Romania, as well as to Odesa in Ukraine. Trains also serve Kyiv and Lviv in Ukraine; Minsk in Belarus; and Moscow and St Petersburg in Russia. Buses to Odesa avoid Transdnistr and thus the delays at the border. Trains between Chişinău and Odesa go via Tiraspol, but delays are minimal.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Use the capital Chişinău as your base and get to know this friendly and fast-changing town. Make day trips out to the stunning cave monastery at Orheiul Vechi and to one of the local big-name vineyards for a fascinating tour and tasting.

One Week

Spend a night or two in surreal Transdnistr before returning to Chişinău and tack on a few smaller vineyard tours around Chişinău, purchasing your customs limit.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Muşchi de vacă/porc/miel** A cutlet of beef/pork/lamb.
- » **Piept de pui** Chicken breast.
- » **Mămăligă** A cornmeal porridge with a bread-like consistency that is a staple accompaniment to every Moldovan dish.
- » **Sarma** Cabbage-wrapped mince meat or pilau rice packages, similar to Turkish *dolma* or Russian *goluptsy*.
- » **Brânză** Moldova's most common cheese is a slightly sour sheep's milk product, similar to those made in Ukraine and Slovakia.
- » **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.