



Visiting relatives in the cemetery in Rîșcani, Republic of Moldova. Most graves here are fenced-in, with benches and tables for visitors. Each year, on the Monday after Orthodox Easter, visitors eat meals in cemeteries in a "Dine with the Dead" tradition.

By MARK GILCHRIST

I lived in this post-Soviet-bloc country for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer, mostly in the north. I enjoyed this beautiful country and its beautiful people immensely, and I hope that someday you can, too.

Why should you go to Moldova? It is one of the least visited countries in Europe, so you can have a unique experience. And, it's cheap – easy to visit on \$50/day.

Moldova is "unspoiled," in a way. With a unique zoning code that tightly controls populations in clusters. Homes must be built within cities or villages, so while touring, you leave a village and see only farmland and forest until the next village.

Also, all land near water is public, with very little waterfront development, so all lakes and rivers are essentially public parks.

Rankings

Human Development Index: 107th best country to live in, based on life span, knowledge access and living standards.

Corruption: Local experts and businesspeople perceive Moldova as the 122nd least corrupt country.

Passport: Simple visa access to 108 countries for the world's 43rd most "powerful" passport. Many also qualify for Romanian passports.

Peace: 62nd in 2017 Global Peace Index.

Terrorism: 107th, for the "Lowest Impact of Terrorism"

Happiness: 56th, just a bit happier than South Korea.

Climate

Temperatures: Beautiful for a few months in the summer. Winter is cruel and long.

Tourist Seasons: View miles and miles of sunflowers coating rolling hills in July. Enjoy a long Christmas season starting late December through January. Easter is a good time to see the Orthodox rituals, but for warmth, come in the summer.

Geography

Location: In eastern Europe, east of Romania and west of Ukraine. Should border the Black Sea, but Ukraine won a swath of coastal real estate in the Great, Post-Cold-War Land-Grab.

Latitude: 47° north of equator

Time Zone: UTC +2, with DST. (7 hours ahead of U.S. East Coast.)

Size: About 13k sq. mi. a little larger than Maryland (136th in world)

Terrain: Rolling hills. Mostly farmland, with a few forests. Major rivers on east & west borders. A small seaport on the Danube River connects Moldova to the Black Sea.

Antipodes

If you could dive from Moldova, straight down through the center of the earth and come up on the exact opposite side, (and you can... someday!) you would be in the South Pacific Ocean, 1,746 miles east of Christchurch, New Zealand. (It's much easier to just use THIS.)

Holidays (2018)

Jan 7: Orthodox Christmas Day

Feb. 14: Valentine's Day, quietly observed

March 1: Mărțișor, first day of spring. Give friends a red-and-white amulet to wear and then hang on a first blossom.

March 8: Int'l Women's Day

April 8: Orthodox Easter

April 9: Easter Monday – visit graves and "Dine with the Dead."

May 1: International Day of Solidarity of Workers (Labor Day)

May 9: Victory Day (Germany's WWII surrender announced)



May 31: Last Day of School

June 1: Int'l Children's Day

Aug. 28: Independence Day

Aug. 31: Romanian Language Day

Sept. 1: First Day of School

Dec. 25: Christian Christmas (National holiday, but quietly observed)

Health

Life Expectancy: Women: 72, Men: 76 (99th in world)

Infant Mortality: 12 per 1,000 live births (123rd in world)

911: Fire: 901; Police: 902; Rescue: 903, (in cities.)

Day lengths

Longest: 15 hrs., 54 min. (June 20)

Shortest: 8 hrs., 30 min. (Dec. 20)

Difference: 7 hrs., 24 min.

People

Population: 3.47 million (With Transnistria, 129th largest in world)

Density: 267 people per sq. mile, similar to Ohio. (108th in world)

Ethnicity: 75% Moldovan, with other ethnicities from the region.

Religion: 90% Orthodox CIA



Technical

Electricity: 220 volt, Euro outlet.

Wifi: Many restaurants in cities

Cellular: Very good coverage

Internet: .md (popular with Drs.)

Telephone Calling Code: +373

Economy

GDP/cap: \$1,992 (U.S.)

Resources: Lignite, gypsum, limestone, arable land and rich soil.

Exports: Electrical wire, sunflower seeds, wine, seats. (130th in world)

Imports: Tobacco products, petroleum. (129th in world)

Associations: Moldova joined the World Trade Organization in 1991. It is a community member of the European Union.

UNESCO (1 site)

The Struve Arc is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has a station point in Moldova. The arc helped us, 200 years ago, learn that the earth is round. Well, most of us...

Transportation

Public Transportation: You'll find six times as many vehicles, (per capita,) on U.S. roads than Moldova, so, there's plenty of public transportation here. Taxis, vans, trolley cars, buses, but not many trains.

Half of all vehicles sold in the U.S. are pickup trucks, so I was taken aback that there are so few in Moldova – you could spend a day in the villages and not see one. I think traditions affect this, but also, farmers still use horse-drawn wagons, which are cheaper and a lot more fun.

Airport: Taxis are a cheap run to or from the airport in Chișinău, but if you really want to Scrooge away, take a bus for about 15 cents U.S. Overall, though, I recommend renting a car.

Road / Traffic Quality: Roads are terrible. Most vehicles have no shock absorbers left after a few years. Driving is a pothole-dodgeball challenge. This is everywhere, except for a fairly new highway from Soroca to Chișinău built by Americans.

Drive: Right side of road

Drinking: BAC limit: .03%

Photos & Videos



Sunflowers in Ciobanovca

Visit my [Moldova](#) page for photographs and videos taken over two years in Moldova.

History

Verrrrrry complicated. Moldova is in the center of history around here, and had joined Romania, (as Bessarabia,) before the World Wars. Russia took it after WWII and rent its population by deporting and importing hundreds of thousands of people. During the five decades of Soviet Rule, churches were emptied and used for storage, the Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet were forced, and socialism was the way of life. The country gained independence in 1991.

Recreation

Verrrrrry little. I saw only one or two power boats in the whole country, and not one golf course.

Government

Type: Parliamentary Republic.

Capital: Chisinau

Citizenship: By descent only

Suffrage: Age 18.

Currency: The Leu is worth about 5 cents U.S.

Conscription: 1 year at age 18

Flag: An eagle coat of arms on Romania's flag. One of only three flags in the world that is one-sided.



Transnistria: Caught between Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and history, the people in Tiraspol and Bender want to start a country. They have some help from Russia, but not from the rest of the world.

Corruption: See Rankings

Follow Me here

Visa: Not for U.S. < 90 days.

WINTER! Only for the adventurous. The snow is beautiful, but clearing it from streets, walkways and stairs here is manual labor.

Medical: don't drink the tap water, and be careful eating fish, as decades of agricultural runoff abuse has polluted lakes and rivers. Most dogs are small and vicious. (They are guard dogs and not pets, but are chained.) No poisonous insects or reptiles.

Vaccinations: Routine. [HERE](#)

Crime: So safe, I called Moldova a "giant, gated community," but then, someone did steal my bicycle...

Political: Some protests in Chișinău and Balti. Transnistria is peaceful and beautiful, but the U.S. embassy in Moldova has limited reach there.

STEP: The U.S. Govt. travel advisory program. Enroll [here](#).

Do What I Did

Visit Monuments: If you have time and a car, find beautiful, (or at least interesting,) monuments in any city or village. Many of the Lenin ones are being moved or removed, but WWII was fought hard here, and will not be forgotten, in stone, steel and song.

Hike: Find any two villages that are a few miles apart, and chances are good that you can easily hike along farm roads and paths from one to the other. I did this sort of "Volks march" while photographing, (without a car,) the 54 villages and cities of my district in a project called "Imagini Rîșcani."

See What I Saw

Chișinău: Capital city where you can easily spend a few days exploring. I stayed in the cheap places for \$20 U.S., but there are many beautiful, (expensive,) hotels and restaurants.

Milestii Mici: One of two government-owned wineries, with the largest wine cellars in the world.

Transnistria: You'll need to pass through a checkpoint manned by Russian soldiers to visit the Moldovan cities of Tiraspol and Bender, but it's worth it. Nothing scary here; just people wanting to govern themselves. But you'll be on your own, so don't expect help from the U.S. or any embassy.

Soroca: A touristy and progressive city on the Dniester River. Tour the fortress or climb 700 steps up to the "Luminaria," chapel. Gawk at the elaborate homes of the "Gypsy" Roma people.

Eat What I Ate



Moldova has delicious breads and interesting main dishes, but few spices and international flavors. Don't expect a lot of fresh seafood, but do enjoy plenty of fresh vegetables.

Drink What I Drank

Or, maybe... don't. Visit Moldova and you'll party with people who officially drink the world under the table. The availability of factory and homemade wine, cognac and vodka gives Moldova the highest drinking rate, per capita, of any country. Buy beer in any store for the price of soda, in bottles as large as three liters. Then, sit out front and drink.



Moldova was once joined with Romania for Bessarabia, and now is struggling to unify amid forces from the east and west.

Articles



View a photo spread, or read an editorial or article on Moldova [HERE](#).

My 3 Words?

conqueror
hems
nametags

Type these three words into your browser aimed at [www.whatthreewords.com](#) to magically visit a historical place; the Soroca fortress.

WHAT3WORDS

Do You Know MD?

Hollywood: "Playing the Moldovans at Tennis"

Celebrities: Moldova native I.A.L. Diamond teamed up with Billy Wilder to write several popular screenplays, including; "The Apartment" and "Some Like it Hot"



Say Hello!

Romanian is the official language, though Russian is very popular in many places, with Russian-only-speaking schools in many cities. You can use some English in larger cities.

Hello: "Boon-ah"

Goodbye: "La riv ah dairy"

Please: "Va rogue"

Thank you: "Mult su mesc"

How much?: "Kutz costa?"

Beautiful: "Fru mos"

Yes: "Da" **No:** "Nu"

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With very few sports and extra-curricular activities, dance is very popular in Moldova, and the recitals are exciting.



Rush hour in Mihaileni, Moldova.



Winters in Moldova are fairly mild, but long.



Nap time in Ramazan, Moldova. Daycare is free, here, in a holdover from socialism, where men and women worked.



Admitting patients in the hospital in Rîșcani.



Horse carts are still popular farm vehicles here.



On the last day of school, an older student carries a younger one for the "Last Bell" ceremony.



Many Moldovan families own cows and sell the milk. Village coops share chores such as driving cattle to feed each day.