

EUROPE · WINE · HISTORY · SACRED SITES · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · FOOD

 Moldova

One of Europe's least-visited countries is one of its most rewarding for wine lovers: Cricova and Mileștii Mici store vast collections in tunnels carved from limestone, and family estates pour bold reds at a fraction of French prices. Add cave monasteries in the cliffs above the Răut and Dniester, leafy Soviet-era Chișinău and the oddity of breakaway Transnistria.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Moldova.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Chișinău	 CURRENCY Moldovan leu (MDL) £1 ≈ MDL 23.83	 LANGUAGE Romanian, Russian Gagauz, Ukrainian	 BEST TIME May-Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £30-£140 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 3h 30m direct ~£100-£300 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Moldova is small, rolling and agricultural, wedged between Romania and Ukraine, and most trips use Chișinău as a base, with day trips radiating out. Within an hour or two you can reach the great underground cellars of Cricova and Mileștii Mici, the cave monastery of Orheiul Vechi in its limestone gorge, and boutique estates such as Castel Mimi and Purcari. Further afield lie the medieval fortress of Soroca on the Dniester, the cliffside monastery at Țipova, and Gagauzia, a Turkic-speaking autonomous region in the south. Transnistria, the unrecognised Russian-backed strip east of the Dniester, keeps its own checkpoints, currency and Soviet iconography.

Moldova is among Europe's cheapest destinations: a good dinner with wine costs little, and tastings at even the grandest wineries are inexpensive by western standards. Tourism infrastructure is still developing, so public transport into the countryside can be sparse and English is limited outside Chișinău; a hired car or driver makes a big difference. It suits wine travellers, Soviet-history enthusiasts and anyone curious about Europe's edges. Many visitors are surprised by Chișinău's leafy boulevards and café culture, by the warmth of rural hospitality, which usually involves homemade wine, and by how widely Russian is still spoken alongside Romanian.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

SACRED SITE

Orheiul Vechi

A cave monastery dug into limestone cliffs above a loop of the Răut river, still tended by monks, with a bell tower above and the village of Butuceni below. The wider archaeological reserve includes Golden Horde and Moldavian ruins.
- 2

FOOD

Cricova underground winery

Some 120km of tunnels beneath the town of Cricova, with street names and room for electric cars, store well over a million bottles. Book a tour for tastings and a look at the collection of historic vintages.

3

HISTORY

Soroca Fortress

Stephen the Great's 1499 wooden fort on the Dniester was rebuilt in stone in the 1540s as a perfect circle with five bastions. On the hill above town, the Roma community's ornate mansions make a curious contrast.

4

SACRED SITE

Țipova Monastery

Moldova's largest cave monastery, a warren of chambers and chapels hewn into cliffs high above the Dniester; legend says Stephen the Great married here. Paths lead down past waterfalls to the river.

5

ARCHITECTURE

Castel Mimi

A turreted château-winery founded by Constantin Mimi in 1893 at Bulboaca, restored and reopened in 2016 with cellar tours, tastings, a restaurant and rooms. Easily combined with a drive towards the Dniester.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Chișinău

≈ 720,000 people

A green, low-rise capital of Soviet boulevards, parks and Orthodox churches, with a good café and wine-bar scene. The natural base for day trips to wineries and monasteries.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Tiraspol

≈ 130,000 people

Capital of breakaway Transnistria, with Lenin statues, a T-34 tank memorial and Kvint brandy. Moldova's government has no control here, so check the FCDO travel advice before going.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Bălți

≈ 95,000 people

Moldova's northern hub, sometimes called the 'northern capital', is a functional, largely Russian-speaking city; useful as a stop on the way to Soroca and the northern monasteries.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Moldova

Best time: **May–Sep.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

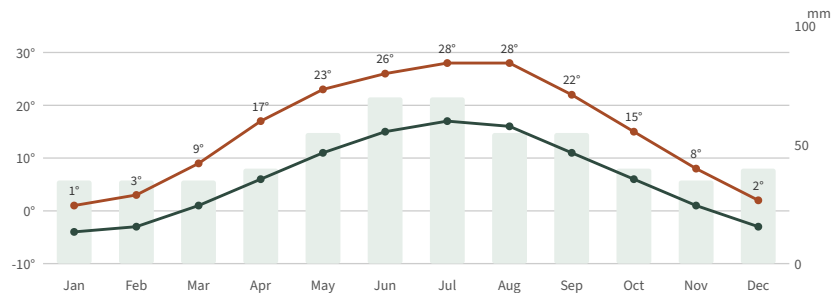
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Chișinău

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec	Christmas Moldova marks Christmas twice, on 25 December and on the Orthodox date of 7 January, with carol singers going house to house and a festive market in Chişinău.
Mar	Mărţişor On 1 March Moldovans exchange red-and-white tasselled tokens to welcome spring, worn through the month; Chişinău also hosts the long-running Mărţişor music festival.
Oct	National Wine Day On the first weekend of October, central Chişinău fills with winery stalls, folk music and tastings to celebrate the harvest; it is the country's biggest party.

How much does Moldova cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ MDL 715 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ MDL 1,668 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £140 per person / day ≈ MDL 3,336 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Mămăligă Golden cornmeal polenta served with brânză (salty sheep's cheese), smântână (sour cream) and often a pork tocană stew or fried eggs.	Plăcinte Flaky stretched-dough pies filled with brânză, cabbage, potato, pumpkin or sour cherries, sold at bakeries and served as a starter in homes.	Zeamă Soured chicken soup with homemade noodles, lovage and vegetables, sharpened with borş; Moldova's favourite cure after a long night of toasting.
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Getting around

In Chişinău, trolleybuses and minibuses (rutiere) are cheap and frequent. Minibuses from the city's Central, North and South bus stations reach most towns, though rural services thin out by afternoon. Wineries and monasteries are far easier with a hired car or driver, or on a tour from Chişinău. Taxis are inexpensive and usually ordered by phone or app. Trains are few and slow; main roads have improved, but rural lanes can be rough.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 112 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +373	TIME ZONE UTC+2 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% is standard in Chişinău restaurants; round up taxi fares and tip winery guides if a tasting was generous.

ETIQUETTE

Bring flowers in odd numbers (even numbers are for funerals) when visiting a home, and expect to remove your shoes. Women cover their heads in monasteries, and men remove hats.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Eugen Doga Chişinău International Airport (RMO), Chişinău

Visas & entry for Moldova

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Moldova for tourism or business without a visa for up to 90 days in a 6-month period. You must be able to show a return or onward flight ticket.

You need a work permit or residence permit to work or for stays of more than 90 days. See more information on work and residence permits.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Moldova

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026

Christmas Day (by new style)

Fri 1 Jan 2027

New Year's Day

Thu 7 Jan 2027	Christmas Day (by old style)
Fri 8 Jan 2027	Christmas Day (by old style)
Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day
Sat 1 May 2027	International Workers' Solidarity Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Easter
Mon 3 May 2027	Easter
Sun 9 May 2027	Europe Day · Victory Day and Commemoration of the heroes fallen for Independence of Fatherland
Mon 10 May 2027	Day of Rejoicing
Tue 1 Jun 2027	International Children's Day
Fri 27 Aug 2027	Republic of Moldova Independence Day
Tue 31 Aug 2027	National Language Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Romanian

ENGLISH	ROMANIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Bună ziua	<i>BOO-nuh ZEE-wah</i>
Thank you	Mulțumesc	<i>mool-tsoo-MESK</i>
Please	Vă rog	<i>vuh ROG</i>
Excuse me	Scuzați-mă	<i>skoo-ZAHTS-ee-muh</i>
How much is this?	Cât costă?	<i>kut KOS-tuh</i>

Know before you go

The cellars at Cricova and Mileștii Mici can only be visited on booked tours, and they stay at around 12°C all year, so bring a warm layer even in August.

Transnistria has its own checkpoints, currency (the Transnistrian rouble) and rules, and UK bank cards may not work there. Check the FCDO travel advice and your insurance first.

Rural hospitality revolves around homemade wine and toasts, and glasses are refilled the moment they empty; pace yourself, and arrange a driver if you plan a day of tastings.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.