

MADE TO EXPLORE

THE DANUBE ROAD

In search of imperial cities, riverside villages and the soul of the Danube

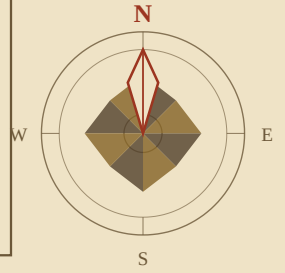
9 stops · 2,700 km · by campervan

LEGEND

- the driving route
- the Danube
- stage stop
- tributaries

SCALE — KILOMETRES

0 100 200 300



Between Vukovar and Moldova Nouă the river runs through Serbia. The route goes around it to the north, via Szeged, Arad and Timișoara.

1

DONAUESCHINGEN

*Baden-Württemberg — the source you step across***THE RIVER**

In the park of the Fürstenberg palace there is a stone basin of clear water with an inscription saying the Danube begins there. It is not quite true: the river is born a kilometre and a half downstream, where the Brigach and the Breg meet. The two towns have argued for centuries over which is the real source. Either way, here you cross the water in one stride.

THE CAMPER

This is Germany, so Stellplätze everywhere and nothing to think about. It is the last stage where the country you are in does not matter — from Passau on, it does.

FREE

The basin sits in the park and needs no ticket. The Brigach–Breg confluence a few kilometres on is marked with a stone and is the more moving of the two.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Camper area · Wohnmobilstellplatz Donaueschingen, Prinz-Fritzi-Allee · GPS 47.94745, 8.51219

Donaueschingen → Ulm → Regensburg → Passau, about 540 km · ~7 h by camper. At Kelheim the river becomes commercially navigable.

2

PASSAU

*Bavaria — where the river doubles***THE RIVER**

Three rivers meet at a single point: the Danube, the Inn and the Ilz. The Inn carries more water than the Danube and comes from further away, so hydrologically speaking it is the Inn that flows on from Passau. You can see three colours side by side: alpine green from the Inn, brown from the Danube, black from the Ilz.

THE CAMPER

The Ilzbrücke camper area sits right on the bank of the Ilz, five minutes on foot from the old town, which is narrow and best walked; stays are limited to 24 hours, and the area closes when the river floods. This is where you cross into Austria, where the vignette becomes compulsory.

FREE

The tip of the peninsula, the Dreiflüsseeck, where the three waters touch. It is free and it is exactly what you came for.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Camper area · Reisemobilstellplatz Parkdeck Ilzbrücke, Halser Straße 2 · GPS 48.57818, 13.47366

Passau → Linz → Melk, about 200 km · ~3 h by camper. The German–Austrian border runs down the middle of the water.

3

WACHAU

*Lower Austria — thirty-six kilometres of world heritage***THE RIVER**

Between Melk and Krems the river cuts a narrow valley with vine terraces on both banks, inscribed on the UNESCO list. Melk Abbey stands above the water like a yellow ship. At Dürnstein, in the ruin on the rock, Richard the Lionheart was held prisoner in 1192 on his way back from crusade.

THE CAMPER

Campsites at Melk, Spitz and Krems. The road along the northern bank is narrow and slow in summer — drive it early.

FREE

The climb to the Dürnstein ruin takes twenty minutes and costs nothing. The small ferries crossing at Spitz and Weissenkirchen cost about as much as a coffee and are the best way to see the valley.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · ÖAMTC Donaupark Camping Krems, Yachthafenstraße 19 · GPS 48.40330, 15.59248

Wachau → Vienna, about 80 km · ~1½ h by camper. The capitals begin here.

4

WIEN*Austria — the capital that moved its river*

THE RIVER Vienna has rearranged the Danube twice. First in the nineteenth century, straightening it so it would stop flooding the city. Then in the 1970s, digging a second parallel channel — and the spoil became the Donauinsel, twenty-one kilometres of artificial island that is now the city's beach.

THE CAMPER Camper places lie outside the centre and you go in by underground. Do not attempt the inner ring with a camper.

FREE The whole Donauinsel. And from above, at the Kahlenberg, you see the city and the bend of the river in one look, for nothing.

WHERE TO SLEEP Campsite · MICAMPA Wien Wienerwald, Hüttelbergstraße 80 · GPS 48.21475, 16.25010

Vienna → Bratislava, 80 km · ~1 h by camper. No two capitals in the world are closer.

5

BRATISLAVA*Slovakia — the castle and the Iron Curtain*

THE RIVER The castle stands on its rock above the water, and ten kilometres upstream, at Devín, the Morava joins the Danube. For forty years that confluence was the Iron Curtain itself: Austria lay on the far bank, and this one was mined and patrolled. Today it is a park.

THE CAMPER The city's campsite, Camping Bratislava, is at Lake Zlaté piesky on the north-eastern edge, with tram 4 200 m away and about 20 minutes to the centre; it is open from May to mid-October. Slovakia uses an electronic vignette tied to the number plate.

FREE The bank at Devín and the confluence are open; only the castle charges. The SNP bridge, with its flying-saucer restaurant, is crossed on foot on the lower deck.

WHERE TO SLEEP Campsite · Camping Bratislava, Cesta na Senec 2 (Zlaté piesky) · GPS 48.18866, 17.18635

Bratislava → Győr → Budapest, about 200 km · ~2½ h by camper.

6

BUDAPESTA*Hungary — the river as a spine*

THE RIVER It is the only city on this route built on the idea of having a river: Buda on the hills, Pest on the plain, and seven bridges holding them together. To the north, at Visegrád, the Danube turns through almost a right angle and changes direction from east to south — the Danube Bend.

THE CAMPER Campsites on the Buda side, and public transport into the centre. Hungary sells an e-vignette by county or for the whole country; for this route take the national one.

FREE The embankments, the Fisherman's Bastion and Gellért Hill. And on the Pest quay stand the Shoes on the Danube Bank, the memorial to the Jews shot here in 1944 — sixty pairs of iron shoes at the water's edge.

WHERE TO SLEEP Campsite · Ave Natura Camping, Csermely út 3 (Zugliget) · GPS 47.51470, 18.97297

Budapest → Baja → Mohács → Osijek → Vukovar, about 300 km · ~4½ h by camper. This is the natural exit if you only have two weeks.

7

VUKOVAR*Croatia — the town that does not hide*

THE RIVER From here down, the Danube becomes a border. Vukovar was besieged for eighty-seven days in 1991 and almost entirely destroyed. The water tower, riddled with shell holes, was deliberately left that way and stabilised only enough to keep standing. The town has been rebuilt around it. It is not a sad place; it is a place that decided not to pretend.

THE CAMPER Croatia is in the EU and on the euro, so nothing special at the border. Campsites at Vukovar and at Osijek, forty kilometres west.

FREE The tower is visible from anywhere in town; only going up it costs. The bank and the promenade are open. Osijek has the largest baroque fortress in Croatia, the Tvrdá, and you walk through it freely.

Vukovar → Osijek → Mohács → Szeged → Arad → Timișoara → Moldova Nouă, about 550 km, two days · ~10½ h by camper. From here the river runs through Serbia and the route goes around it to the north.

8

CAZANELE

The Iron Gates — nine kilometres between cliffs

THE RIVER	Here the river narrows from a kilometre wide to a hundred and fifty metres and enters walls of limestone. On the Romanian bank is the face of Decebalus, fifty-five metres high, carved between 1994 and 2004 and the largest rock relief in Europe. Opposite, on the Serbian side, is the Tabula Traiana of the year 100. And beneath the water lies Ada Kaleh, the Turkish island drowned in 1970 when the dam was built.
THE CAMPER	You drive the DN57 from Moldova Nouă to Orşova along the Romanian bank. Narrow road, tunnels cut into the rock and few places to pull over — take your time and do not do it in the dark. You sleep at Eşelnița, at Camping Cazanele Dunării, on the bank: small, ten pitches, for campers up to 8 m, open from May to the end of September.
FREE	The whole gorge is visible from the road, the face of Decebalus included, from a distance. Getting close needs a boat from Orşova or Dubova, and that costs.
WHERE TO SLEEP	Campsite · Camping Cazanele Dunării, Strada Duzilor 1, Eşelnița · GPS 44.68642, 22.36884

Cazanele → Drobeta → Calafat → Giurgiu → Brăila → Tulcea, about 700 km along the Romanian bank · ~13½ h by camper. The longest stage of the route.

9

DELTA

Tulcea — where the river stops being a river

THE RIVER	After two thousand eight hundred kilometres the Danube splits into three arms — Chilia, Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe — and ends in five thousand eight hundred square kilometres of reed. It is the second largest delta in Europe and a biosphere reserve. The pelicans are here from April to September, with the spring migration as the peak.
THE CAMPER	This is where you leave the camper. There is no road through the delta: you park at Tulcea or Murighiol and continue on water. Plan two or three days without the vehicle, and a safe place for it to stand.
FREE	The scheduled boats to Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe cost a fraction of a private charter and call at the villages. Once there, the beach at Sfântu Gheorghe and the Letea forest are walked for hours without paying anything.
WHERE TO SLEEP	Campsite · Camping Dan Pescarul, Strada Mahmudiei 17, Murighiol · GPS 45.04036, 29.15619

End of the route. Constanța is 120 km away, Bucharest 300, and Vienna — where the route passed — 1,200.

THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Distance	~2,700 km
Driving time	~43 h in all, without stops or waiting for ferries
Recommended time	25–32 days
Stage stops	9
Countries	DE · AT · SK · HU · HR · RO
Halfway exit	Budapest, day 14
Direction	west → east
Best months	May–Jun

GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU LEAVE

The last stage is on the water: there is no road through the delta, so you leave the camper at Tulcea or Murighiol and continue by boat.

You need a vignette in Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania; the Slovak one is electronic, linked to the registration number.

Summer means mosquitoes in the delta, forty degrees in the Bărăgan and full campsites in Austria.

WHEN TO GO

Ideal: May and early June. The delta is in full migration, the Romanian plain has not yet burned, and the Wachau is green.

Workable: September, on the way back. Fewer people everywhere, but the delta is poorer in birds.

Avoid: July and August. Mosquitoes in the delta, forty degrees on the Bărăgan plain and full campsites in Austria.

Short version: with two weeks, do the source to Budapest and turn round. The first half is the imperial route and it stands on its own.

VIGNETTES, COUNTRY BY COUNTRY

Germany: no vignette. Motorways are free for vehicles under 7.5 t.

Austria: vignette compulsory, digital or as a sticker. Some tunnels and alpine roads are tolled separately, but this route does not touch them.

Slovakia: electronic vignette tied to the number plate, bought online in minutes.

Hungary: e-vignette sold by county or for the whole country. For this route the national one works out cheaper than the counties you cross.

Croatia: no vignette; motorways are paid at the barrier, by distance.

Romania: the rovinietă is compulsory on national roads, bought online against the plate. The bridges at Giurgiu and Fetești are tolled separately.

WHERE YOU SLEEP

Germany and Austria have the densest network of camper places in Europe. The first third of the route needs no planning.

Hungary and Croatia have good campsites around the towns, but fewer prepared camper places in between.

Romania has few proper aires. Along the Danube you sleep at campsites, at guesthouses with a yard, or in tolerated parking outside the villages.

In the delta the camper does not follow you. Pick somewhere it can stand safely for two or three days, at Tulcea or Murighiol, and pay for that.

THE DELTA BY CAMPER

What is not possible There is no road through the delta. None. The camper stays at the edge of dry land and everything after that happens on water. Anyone who has not worked this out in advance reaches Tulcea and discovers their route ended two days early.

The scheduled boats Far cheaper than a private charter, leaving from Tulcea and calling at the villages. The timetable is sparse and changes by season, so check it the day before, not on the morning.

The permit The reserve charges a small visitor fee, valid by the day. It is bought online or in Tulcea. Fishing and access to the strictly protected zones have separate rules.

Mosquitoes Not a joke. From June to August, in the evening, they are the difference between a trip and a punishment. Screens on the windows and long sleeves, or come in May.

Can you drive a camper into the Danube Delta?

No. There is no road through the delta. You park the camper at Tulcea or Murighiol and continue on water, by scheduled boat or by charter.

Why does the route go around Serbia?

Between Vukovar and Moldova Nouă the river runs through Serbia, and the route goes around it to the north, via Szeged, Arad and Timișoara. That is about 550 km and two days' driving.

How many vignettes does the route need?

Six countries, six regimes: Germany has no vignette, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary do, Croatia pays at the barrier, and Romania has the rovinietă. Each is bought separately.

When is the best time for the route?

May and early June: the delta is in full pelican migration, the Romanian plain has not yet burned, and the Wachau vines are green.

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

“A river is not a road, but it behaves like one.

From the basin in the park to the reed it is the same thread of water.

What changes along the way are the people on the banks.”

Documentary check: September 2026. Places, hours and conditions change — check them before you leave.