

I've never been interested in "traditional" tourist destinations. As a child, when friends and neighbours were talking about going on holiday to Spain, I was always dreaming of visiting Asia or the Middle East, or happily thumbing my way through old copies of *National Geographic* that my aunt sometimes used to bring me on her visits.

My interest in Eastern Europe started when I was working as a technical trainer in Amsterdam, conducting training courses for the whole of Europe, which were well visited by participants from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria amongst others. During breaks and in the evening, I would hear stories about life in Prague, Bratislava and, to me, other interesting and far-flung places.

My travels to these cities and countries began in earnest when I first moved to Germany. Working as a field quality engineer for an automobile manufacturer, I often visited Eastern Europe to conduct on-site vehicle investigations and to provide training to our people based there. Due to the distances involved and flight schedules, I had many opportunities to stay overnight and was therefore introduced to many wonderful new cities. At this time, the Eastern Europeans had relatively few visitors, and were therefore very keen to show the best they had to offer, to my great delight.

The first visit to some of these places by motorcycle was in 2005. During a one week motorcycle holiday with a friend, we decided one evening that we should try and ride to Belgrade, for the simple reason that it sounded "exotic". We didn't make it that time, but this trip started a love of touring Eastern Europe by motorcycle.

During the first half of 2007, I rode to Călărași in Moldova, one of the twin-towns of my adopted hometown of Bühl in Southwest Germany. The main reason was to define and report on the route for a charity bicycle ride from Bühl to Călărași, and to gather information for the local council on the current state of the orphanage and school for mentally handicapped children located there, the recipient of all monies raised from the bicycle ride.

This book was written with one main objective in mind - to support this project, with all proceeds going to the orphanage and school for mentally handicapped children in Călărași. Through the purchase of this book, you are directly helping children in Moldova, one of the poorest nations in Europe, and indeed the world. I also hope this book serves as inspiration to those intending to travel to Eastern Europe by motorcycle, and to show that it's still possible to have an adventure without travelling to the far corners of the world. Please note that I am not a professional writer and this is my first attempt at putting pen to paper. Any mistakes contained therein are entirely mine.

Dave Barrett
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