

WORDS & PICS: NIK

# TRANSYLVANIAN TRAVELS

## PART FOUR So, the morning of Day Four - Brasov.

It was a bit damp first thing, but that was okay 'cos the plan was for a walking tour of the old city in the morning, followed by heading out for the day's riding in the afternoon, and Brasov is a lovely old place so that was groovy. Most places in Romania have done well to hide most of the signs of Communism and the revolution that occurred in 1989 when Nicolas

Ceausescu was overthrown and executed (Romania is still the only Eastern Bloc country to this day that's overthrown its Communist leaders and executed them), but the Post Office in Brasov still bears the scars of bullets from the fire-fights there. Apart from that, it's really just another lovely old walled city with a stunning Gothic church, the Biserica Neagra ('Black Church'), that's apparently the largest Gothic-style church in south east Europe and gets its name from the smoke blackening that occurred in the great fire that swept through the city in 1689, a council building that makes yer average town hall look like a Portacabin, and lots of really interesting looking little bars and cafes that we were, unfortunately, unable to check out because Romania has a zero-tolerance attitude to alcohol and driving and none of us wanted to find out what the inside of even an ex-Communist police cell looks like. The place is well worth a visit, though.



Bran castle, don't be a numpty like me and bypass it!



Amazing fortified church at Viscri



The churchyard keeper's cottage - spawny get!

Anyway, after lunch it was back on the bikes and off again. The rain (well, drizzle) had stopped and the temperature was climbing into the 'phew, what a scorcher' (copyright The Sun 1976) range. We were heading for the little, impossibly picturesque town of Sighisoara, but we had a couple of stops planned on the way. The roads out of Brasov were a bit more crowded than we'd been used to of late, but it soon thinned out and we were hooning at 80mph as usual before long. I'd taken my customary place at the rear of the group and was happily whizzing along using the power of the GS1200 to haul me past cars and trucks that the others'd already passed when, suddenly, it all very nearly went horribly, horribly wrong ...

The others had got a bit of a lead on me, as I'd stopped to take a pic or slowed to look at summat, can't really remember what, and so I was pressing on at a smidge under 100mph. The road was wide and well-surfaced and there was very little traffic on it, definitely nothing behind me for as far as the eye could see. On a straight stretch, with nothing in front of me on my side of the carriageway, I glanced down at my speedo and, in that fraction of a second that it took to do that, an Audi coming

I vant to pitch my tent ... ha ha-ha!



Horse-drawn hearse from years gone by had obviously been targeted by Scousers...



When the roads are like this, you can see why you need trail bikes, can't you?



The Romanians like their churches to have extraordinarily ornate spires...

### IT WAS LIKE RIDING BACK INTO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, INTO A PAINTING BY JOHN CONSTABLE

the other way pulled out to overtake the car in front and missed me by inches, if not centimetres. I have to say it scared the crap out of me - I can only too easily see the headlines of the local paper in me mind's eye, 'English motorcyclist killed in road accident' and imagine the grief it'd've caused my family back home - and all for the sake of perhaps one more second's wait for the car driver, you know? Frightening, it really is.

Shortly after that (once I'd emptied the contents of me underwear of me trouser leg like you pour water from a welly), we turned off the main road

Abandon hope all ye who enter here ... especially if you're as unfit as I am - this ancient covered staircase was steep!



We could hardly go to Transylvania and not have at least one graveyard pic, could we?



Ummm, dragon burger anyone?

and set off down a narrow unpaved track for the village of Viscri, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

If you needed further proof of why Transylvania Live use big trail bikes for their tours, this was it. It was, really, truly amazing - once we'd left the tarmac it was like riding back into the Eighteenth Century, into a painting by John Constable. All around us, stooks of hay and racks of it were drying in the Sun in much the same way as they've been laid out to do so for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and women in long dresses and head scarves and men in baggy trousers and shirts and caps worked in fields using hoes and scythes, not power tools or tractors any where in sight, while horses pulled ploughs and carts. The only concessions, if you like, to the modern age were the fact that the carts had rubber tyres, not wooden or iron hoops, and most of the younger folk were wearing tee-shirts - apart from that you'd be hard pushed to tell that you hadn't somehow gone back in time. The villages were the same - most houses were old, very old, and didn't have running water using, instead, water drawn from wells in every garden accessed by the most simple of lifting gear (an upright post with a horizontal arm with a weight on one end and a bucket on the other), and there were very few power cables implying that most dwellings didn't have electricity. Kids, dogs, horses, cows and pigs wandered the dirt streets of the villages at will and made pot-hole dodging even more of a challenge as they just stood there in the middle of the track looking at you and, if it hadn't been for said tee-shirts and the occasional battered Dacia 1300 (a home-brewed version of the Renault 12), you'd be forgiven for wondering exactly where

you passed through the time portal, you really would!

At Viscri we were due to visit the famous church. Built just after the Tartar invasion of 1241, it's what they call a fortified church as it sits inside a walled enclosure, not unlike castle walls, and was intended as a refuge for the villagers when the invaders attacked - they could cluster inside with their sheep and cattle (but not pigs - the Tartars were Muslim and, forbidden by their culture to eat pork, they left them alone) until they'd gone. It sits high on a hill overlooking the surrounding countryside and from the top of the very high central tower (with its heart attack-inducing ladders and worryingly missing floors - well, it is several hundred years old!), the views around are quite amazing. It was actually built by Saxons, German speakers, and has remained used by their descendants - these days it only has a congregation of just 24 souls, all of them in their seventies and eighties, and with nary any electricity it closes at dusk to visitors, just adding to the medieval feel of the whole place. It's a melancholy place that's being used less and less these days, but a very moving one.

Back on the road (well, track), we headed for Sighisoara through rolling countryside baking in the unseasonal heat. The road improved - from dirt it went to what might've been tarmac a very long time ago, but was now mostly pot-hole, to actual tarmac with only a pot-hole the size of a Ford Fiesta every five feet, and then to tarmac proper that you could ride along without having to stand up and/or veer all over the road like a

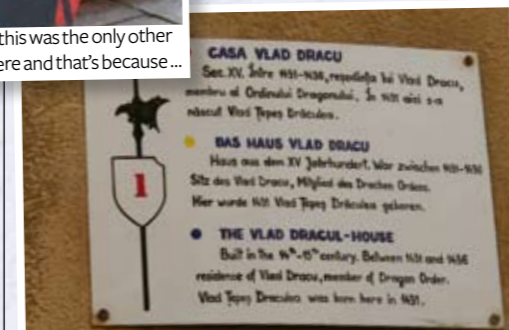
Amazing (very!) old Sighisoara street...



The main church in Sighisoara - just beautiful!



Apart from the 'Vampire Camping' this was the only other reference to vampires I saw anywhere and that's because...



... it was the house that Vlad Tepes was s'posed to have been born in...



... hence the dragon motifs on the walls outside.

## YOU'D BE FORGIVEN FOR WONDERING EXACTLY WHERE YOU PASSED THROUGH THE TIME PORTAL, YOU REALLY WOULD!



Clever house decoration...

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NEXT MONTH - the Borgo Pass and Dracula's Castle!

Scotsman on the way back from the pub. This was still rural Romania though - cows were lead through the streets of villages on bits of string (like crusties' dogs, but on a grander scale) and grazed on the verges of the highway, dogs chased after the bikes barking, and old men stood leaning on their pitchforks as we passed, taking off their caps to get a bit of air to their balding heads.

All too soon we were in Sighisoara and, after entering the high walled part of the city over the entrance way from hell (no actual road, just a sea of feckin' six inch white pebbles that were the foundation for the road surface - bit scary, I'm on a huge 1200GS and I've only got little legs ...), we arrived at the hotel - a suitably olde-worlde one compared with the previous night's faceless ex-Communist place. Beer, more beer, shower, beer, food, beer, sleep - good night. ☘