

# GLOBETRENDER



## **Romania's Bethlen Estates project aims to preserve cultural heritage and promote sustainable tourism in Transylvania. Rose Dykins reports**

Set within unspoilt Romanian countryside – coined the “last great wilderness in Europe” – Bethlen Estates in Transylvania is a tourism attraction with a strong social purpose, set to launch in spring 2021.

Situated in the picturesque village of Cris, [Bethlen Estates](#) occupies a valley surrounded by woodland, alpine meadows and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Led by mother and son, Gladys and Nikolaus Bethlen, the project is interconnected with the local community and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Bethlen Estates was originally envisioned by the late Count Miklos Bethlen, around 800 years after his family first founded the village of Cris and built its Medieval castle.



Since the Middle Ages, the Bethlen family has played a central role in Transylvania's history. Throughout the rise in communism and nationalism in 1948, Count Bethlen was devoted to supporting local communities that remained. He donated supplies to those in need, and raised funds to protect the future of the region's historic buildings that were at risk.

Now, his descendants are transforming ancient ruins into modern accommodation while supporting local communities through employment, education and practical help. Having spent time journeying to Transylvania during the 1970s and 1980s, they feel connected to the region's history, environment and people, and want to continue to social legacy created by their ancestors.

In 2007, Gladys and Nikolaus Bethlen began acquiring crumbling buildings around Cris, including Saxon cottages, the castle's former caretaker house, a family manor house and an abandoned school.

The Bethlen Estates project grew from their desire to protect and preserve this corner of the Romania. The family's ultimate goal is to continue investing and sensitively restoring more and more buildings around the village, while boosting employment opportunities for locals.



In spring 2021, Bethlen Estates will welcome guests to its first three restored houses on the original estate, offering a private, stylish base for visitors to explore the surrounding environment.

Each building's façade has been carefully renovated, while interior designers Stefanie de Castelbajac and Melanie Etten-Ruppell have collaborated with local artisans to create chic twist on a traditional rural dwelling.







Light, calm-hued interiors are paired with antique kilim rugs, tiled stoves and original wooden beams. Local carpenters have crafted contemporary sculptural staircases, while other luxurious touches include Tom Dixon light fittings and sanariums (saunas with controlled humidity).





Guests can dine in whichever residence they are staying in, or take a seat at the table in the central Kitchen Barn. Here, a chef will prepare breakfasts, picnics and evening meals made entirely from locally sourced produce and organic fruit and vegetables from the Bethlen family's orchards, farmlands and forests.





The Kitchen Barn can seat up to 40 guests, and is a communal space for people to connect, or host a private dinner. Torch-lit Transylvanian wine tastings in the wine cellars of Count Janos Bethlen's manor house can also be arranged



Visitors can explore the breathtaking countryside around them by joining a guided hike, horseback tour, winery visit or cycle ride, or they can or they can travel along the beautiful Transfagarasan and Transalpina Roads. There's also bear spotting, fishing trips, bird watching and tours of nearby UNESCO-protected sites, such as the Medieval citadel of Sighisoara and Biertan.

In essence, the Bethlen Family hopes to elevate tourism in Transylvania, whilst contributing towards a more sustainable future for the region.

Rates at Bethlen Estates start from €250 per room per night, including breakfast, based on two people sharing.