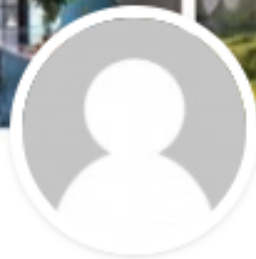


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# Heritage conservation in the wilds of Transylvania: Bethlen Estates to open its doors in Spring 2021

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In the heart of Transylvania, a world away from the tourist spots of Romania's Dracula trail, lies the picturesque village of Criş. Here, amidst an untouched valley flanked by wild woods and alpine meadows dotted with medieval citadels and fairy-tale castles, an inspired multi-generational restoration project is taking place.

Led by mother and son Gladys and Nikolaus Bethlen, but originally envisioned by the late Count Miklós Bethlen some 800 years after his family first founded the village and built its Medieval castle, [Bethlen Estates Transylvania](#) is a legacy project rooted in social purpose and the preservation of cultural heritage. The family aims to

transform ancient ruins into modern marvels while supporting local communities through employment, education and practical help to those in need.

Spring 2021 will see Bethlen Estates welcome guests into the first three immaculately restored houses, offering the perfect base for those wishing to explore the wild and untamed Transylvanian countryside in privacy and style.

## **Ancestral Roots**

The Bethlen family has played an integral role in life in Transylvania since the Middle Ages. Forced to flee to Austria during the rise of communism and nationalisation in 1948, the late Count Miklós Bethlen dedicated much of his life to supporting the communities that remained, taking supplies and fundraising to protect the future of the many historical buildings from crumbling into decay. His biggest goal however was to ensure this commitment to his ancestral roots continued into future generations. The experiences and memories gained on the regular grueling journeys the family made by car to Transylvania during Romania's turbulent 1970's and 80's forged a lifelong connection to their ancestral lands with its rich history, mystical countryside and open-hearted people.

## **Tourism as a channel for heritage conservation**

Continuing in Count Miklós' footsteps, since 2007 Nikolaus and Gladys Bethlen have slowly been acquiring tumbledown buildings of all shapes and sizes around their ancestral village of Criş; from charming Saxon cottages, the castle's former Caretaker's house, to a family manor house and abandoned school building. What began as a quiet family venture, has since evolved into a larger scale project that aims to channel funds raised through tourism to the preservation and protection of this idyllic corner of Transylvania. The ultimate goal being to continue investing and sensitively restoring additional properties in and around the village, whilst providing increased employment and opportunities for its community.

## Modern-day marvels

Spring 2021 will see the completion of the first three houses, which will accommodate up to 20 guests. Visitors can choose from three immaculately restored 300-year-old residences; the four-bedroom Caretaker's House and two-bedroom Depner House are available for exclusive use, while the four-bedroom Corner Barn is available to rent by the room. Each of these historic buildings has been exquisitely brought back to life via careful restoration of their façades to their original glory, while inside interior designers Stefanie de Castelbajac and Melanie Etten-Rüppell have worked hand-in-hand with local artisans to create a stylish, sophisticated take on rural living. The light and purposefully calming interiors are peppered with antique kilim rugs, warming tiled stoves and original wooden beams, as well as luxurious touches such as sanariums, Tom Dixon lighting and contemporary sculptural staircases crafted by local carpenters. Setting a new precedent for a destination with a strong tendency towards traditional interiors, the Bethlen Family hopes to raise the bar for tourism in Transylvania whilst contributing towards a more sustainable future.

## Hearty feasting

Meals can be taken in the privacy of each house, or in the central Kitchen Barn, where Tatiana the in-house chef whips up nourishing breakfasts, indulgent picnics and traditional evening meals made entirely from locally sourced produce and organic fruit and vegetables from the family's orchards, farmland and forests. Expect warming goulash or traditional pork *flecken* on a colder evening or fresh river trout on a sunny afternoon, with zingy blackberry cake to finish, all accompanied by local Transylvanian wines. With room for up to 40 guests, the Kitchen Barn will serve as a communal space for guests to connect, and equally as the perfect rustic countryside setting for a special occasion or private takeover. Atmospheric, torch-lit wine tasting sessions can also be arranged in the depths of the historic wine cellars at Count János Bethlen's Manor House.

## Explorations in the wild

While it may be tempting to simply sip an aperitif on the terrace and gaze at the far-reaching views, guests are encouraged to explore the wilds of the Transylvanian countryside. Guided hikes, horseback tours, winery visits and cycle rides can all be arranged, as well as bear spotting, fishing trips, bird watching and historical tours of nearby UNESCO-protected sites, such as the Medieval citadel of Sighisoara and Biertan, or an exhilarating journey along the breathtaking Transfagarasan and Transalpina Roads.

*Rates start from €250 per room per night including breakfast, based on two sharing.*  
*To book, visit [www.bethlenstates.com](http://www.bethlenstates.com)*