



The Danube Delta: Vilkovo – a floating settlement

In Vilkovo, a little town on the edge of the Danube Delta, there are only four streets. Instead of asphalt, think water: the rest of the settlement is served by hundreds of canals with a total length of more than 40 km. The Ukrainian segment of the Danube Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is situated in the immediate vicinity.

An excursion from Odessa to the Danube Delta lasts two days. The distance from Odessa to Vilkovo is 250 km. During the course of the trip you will become acquainted with the landscape of the Bessarabian Steppe.



In the mid-17th century Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov reformed the Orthodox Church. There were, however, a great many people in Muscovy who refused to accept the changes to the church rites. Branded Old Believers or Old Ritualists they were subject to persecution and were therefore forced to go abroad or flee to sparsely populated regions of the principality. One such region was the Danube Delta.

Hiding in the wetlands of the delta, the Lipovans (one of the groups of Old Believers in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania) went about creating land from water, literally. They chopped down reeds, dug out silt from the bottom and built little island neighbourhoods, separated by narrow channels. In this way a unique colony was founded in this unlikely setting. It came to be known as Lipovanskoe on account of the confession of its founders. Later it was renamed Vilkovo.

It is nothing less than remarkable that the old part of the floating settlement still exists to this day. Even now some people still retain the same way of life that could have been witnessed here three hundred years ago. Traditional cottage industries provide the main income sources, such as fishing and vegetable farming and local viticulture from a specialised type of grape called “Novak”, which can only be grown in the particular environment provided by a river delta.



Boats are still constructed according to the traditions of the forbears and founders of the settlement. These vessels are by necessity very narrow so they can navigate the “eriki”, the little channels between the islands. The people here are very friendly and are pleased to welcome guests visiting the street-canals of their “Little Venice”. – A unique place in Eastern Europe.

Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation

In February 1999 the UNESCO decided to create the “Danube Delta Reservation” – the only international, bilateral Romanian-Ukrainian biosphere reserve. It covers an area of 50,253 hectares. The region has an amazingly rich biodiversity on account of its relatively warm climate and low pollution levels. Almost 1600 species of plant can be found here. It also provides excellent feeding and nesting grounds for birds. It is one of the richest places in Europe in this regard and is known to host some 350 species of bird.

More information: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/588>