

## Trail #2 - Returning to the last Danube

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In the beginning was the Danube – thus begins this story, echoing the biblical account of the Creation. Water and nature have defined the landscape. But mankind has changed it, “cultivated” it, and, in the end, abused it. This is the scenario of this trail, which takes us from the triangle formed by the countries of Hungary, Croatia and Serbia to the grandiose estuary flowing into the Black Sea. It explores the fascination of the river landscape, but also the many problematic changes caused by human intervention – whether through power stations, urbanisation, or misuse and exploitation. The last section of the Danube forms the largest surviving natural wetland in Europe. Experiencing the Danube here means reconnecting with nature in its most primal form, and with our very selves. Here, the idea of border-crossing is a multidimensional one. Here, travel means winding down, coming to terms with the wilderness and with oneself. While cities are moving closer and closer to the river, people are becoming more emotionally alienated from nature than ever. In the balance between man and nature, commodity has elbowed its way to the forefront. The closer the Danube gets to its estuary, the better this balance. For this is where we sense most tangibly that man is part of nature. In this stretch of the Danube, nutrition, movement and traditions are still in harmony with the river. The actual destination of tourists experiencing this section of the Danube should be sensing this synergetic unity and discovering it individually for themselves: the Danube as a mirror of a new symbiosis between man and nature, a mirror of all the senses. Nature as lived here is a great symphony scored with all forms of expression available to human emotion. The Danube Delta presents nature as it once was, and in its most consummate form – the world before mankind, as it were. A vast area of water and reeds, a spectacular landscape, a world of tranquillity and mystery teeming with countless forms of life – a great symphonic finale echoing out from this European river.

Thus, the lower part of the Danube signals a new intimacy with the river, with nature; also, the urgent message that we should be cultivating a sensitive, respectful and caring tourism that cherishes the values of nature. The Danube is neither a zoo nor a static exhibition. It is Nature herself, in all her multifaceted beauty, vulnerability, wildness, and diversity, but also in all her demands and tribulations, which not only have to be overcome but also to be understood and accepted in their significance. Herein lies the fascination of the “last Danube”.