

The Lure of Carpathian Mountains: Top 10 Reasons to See Mysterious Mountains of Western Ukraine

Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains are one of the wonders of this beautiful country. Mysterious peaks and wide ridges divided by lengthwise hollows and delineated with deep picturesque valleys stretch from the north-east to the south-west of Ukraine. Being home to rich folklore and countless legends, today the Carpathian Mountains offer ski resorts during the winter and excellent hiking opportunities during spring, summer, and autumn. But there's more to the Carpathians than satisfying the average touristic goals. Cleanest air, luring mountain peaks, thick forests, majestic waterfalls, mineral springs, an abundance of natural reserves, impressive biodiversity and a special vibe inherent only to the Carpathians are just several reasons, why people are charmed by the magic of this region.

Ukraine Carpathian Mountains are divided into three landform regions: Subcarpathia, Carpathians, and Transcarpathia. Each region is characterized by its peculiarities and climate patterns. Subcarpathia is famous for its balneological health-resorts such as Truskavetz, Morshin, Nemirov, and others. In the Carpathians, the climate is harsher compared to Subcarpathia and Transcarpathia. Transcarpathia is the best place to observe the beauty of autumn and hike 'polonynas', montane meadows inherent to the Carpathian Mountains.

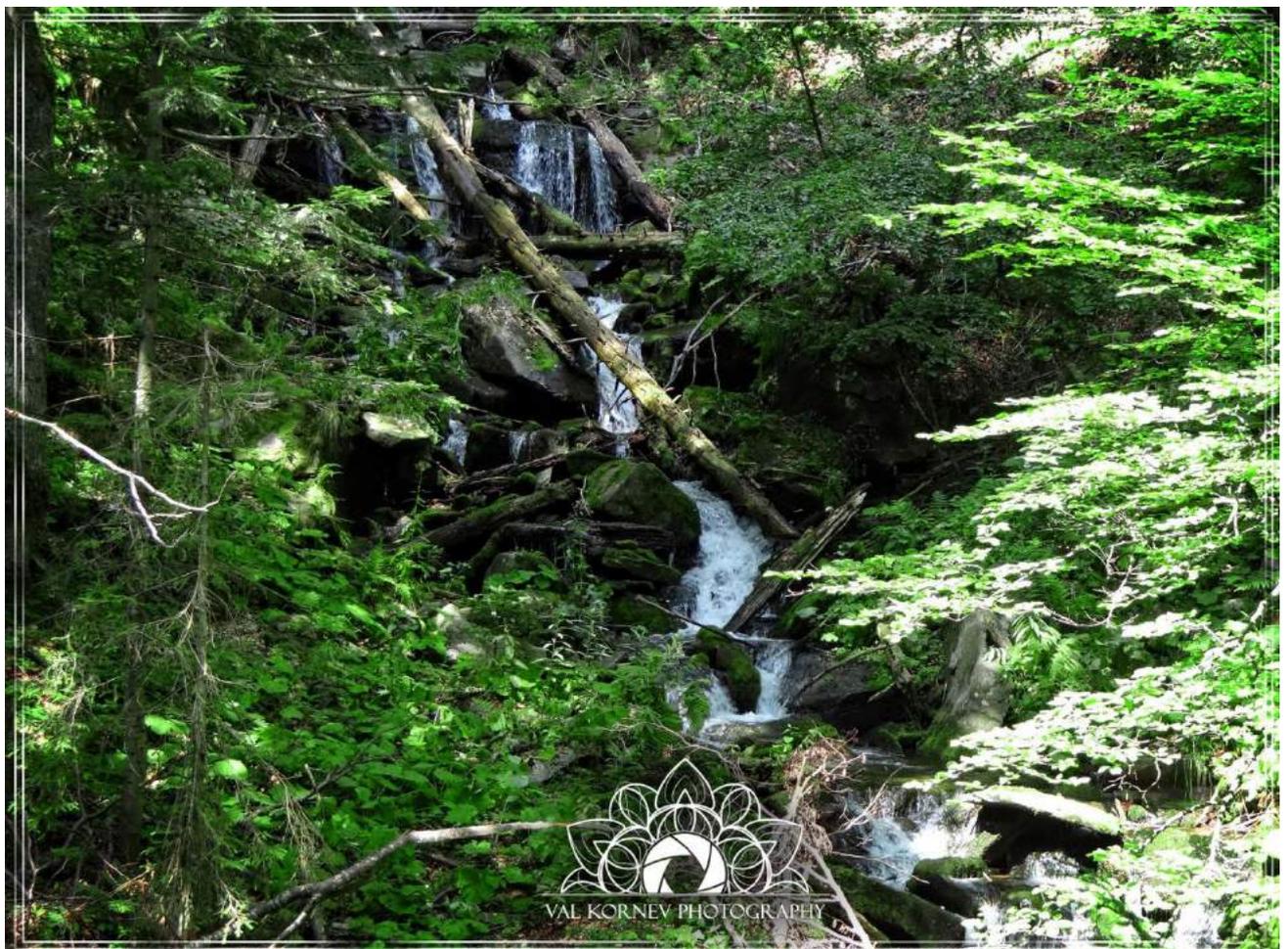
A thorough exploration of this region can take months, but before you go it's best to know what you want to see and, first and foremost, to understand, why are you going there. This article will inspire your wanderlust and give you ten reasons to include the Carpathian Mountains to your travel plans. You'll feel that mountains are calling and it's time to answer their call.

Top 10 Reasons to See Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains

- 1) Mountains and Forests.** You may have already asked yourself a question of why the Carpathian Mountains are called mysterious. The thing is that every mountain region has a special vibe. To give a simple example, the vibe of Himalayas is power, awe, and majesty, the vibe of the Sri Lankan mountains is fabulousness and hospitality and the vibe of Carpathians is mystery. The history of this region, an abundance of legends, and the uniqueness of nature make it a one-of-a-kind place, and to grasp this vibe, one has to experience it.



To get the best experience, it is advised to walk, at least a little bit, through pristine, non-touristic parts of forests and mountains. Of course, provided you have an experienced guide. For the exploration of mountains and forests, it's best to go to the Transcarpathia region, namely the areas around Mizgirya, Volovec, Svalyava and the region of Polonyna Runa. All of these places, except for the latter, can be reached by trains and buses. For Polonyna Runa, you need to take a car.



On the other hand, you can find beautiful mountains and forests in every part of the Carpathians. It all depends on what kind of forests and climate you prefer. As was already mentioned, Subcarpathia and Transcarpathia have a milder climate than the Carpathian region.

- 2) **Synevir Lake.** Synevir is the biggest lake in Western Ukraine. It was created as a result of a landslide about 10,000 years ago. It's located at the beginning of Transcarpathia, in Mizgyrskiy district, 1000 meters above the sea level.



Like many other famous places of Carpathians, there's a story behind the Synevir Lake. According to the legend, the lake was formed because of the tragic love between a girl from a rich family Syn and a poor herdsman Vir (hence the name 'Synevir'). Vir was killed following the order of Syn's father and the girl couldn't stop weeping for her beloved. She was so heartbroken that she cried a lake. Now, on a small island in the middle of the lake one can find wooden sculptures of Syn and Vir.



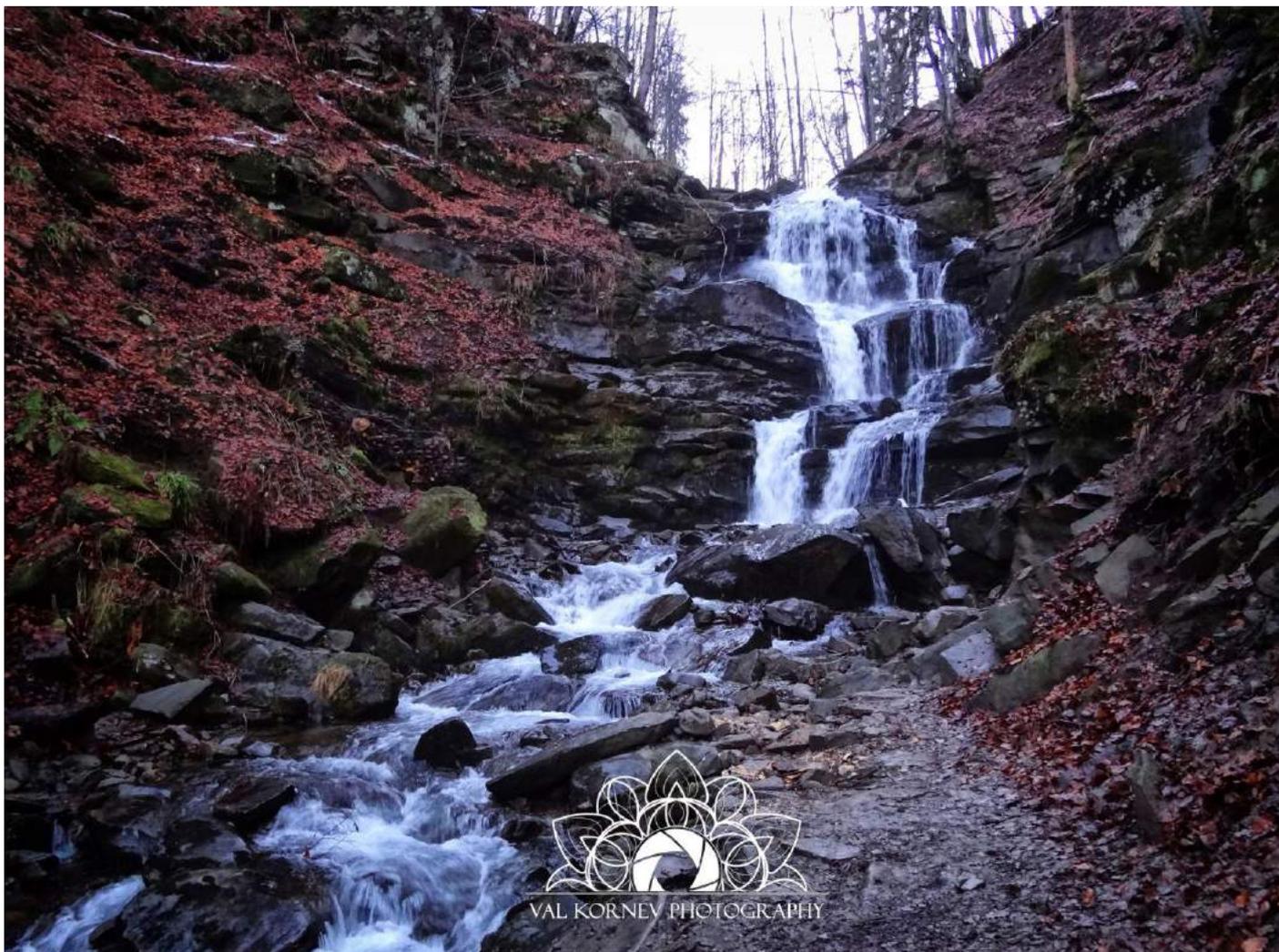
The lake is beautiful in any season. During the spring and summertime, you can hear the birds chirping and indulge in observing a beautiful play of sun and water. In autumn, golden colors are added to the palette, but not much because mostly evergreen trees grow there. If you are lucky enough to see the lake after a snowstorm in winter, that's a sight to remember for a lifetime.

- 3) Sunsets and Sunrises.** If you have ever woken up early on the mountain to see the clouds flowing underneath, you will probably want to experience it again and again. Because sunrises, as well as sunsets in the mountains, tend to induce the feeling of awe.



Even though we have sunsets and sunrises every day, usually we don't notice them. It becomes a totally different thing in such places as mountains, seas, and oceans where these everyday happenings become inspiring and significant to us. There are a lot of places to observe the beauty of the rising and setting sun in the Carpathian Mountains. Without a doubt, one of the best ways to do it is to go on a three-day trek with tents. This way you will be able to grasp the spirit of the mountains and allow your breath to be taken away by the surrounding beauty.

- 4) Waterfalls.** There are dozens of beautiful waterfalls in the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains. One of the most beautiful ones is Shipot in Transcarpathia. It's located six kilometers from Pilipetz village. You can get to the waterfall from Pilipetz on a daily bus, or from Volovec which is only 10 kilometers away from Shipot. 'Shipot' means 'Whisper'. The waterfall got its name from the sound effect that water creates when it falls on different levels of the waterfall. If you carefully listen to it from afar, it sounds like a whisper.



Other notable waterfalls of Carpathian Mountains include:

- Prutskiy Waterfall – a beautiful cascade waterfall which is located not far from the highest mountain of Ukraine, Goverla. The route to Goverla starts with Prutskiy Waterfall so in case you decide to climb it you will also see this waterfall.
- Zeneckiy Guk Waterfall – located in a beautiful Gorganskiy mountain range. There's a good asphalt 3-kilometer road that leads to it making the journey comfortable. You can even ride on a horse slay offered by the locals to get there.
- Manyavskiy Waterfall – one of the highest waterfalls in Ukraine. Its height is 20 meters and the road leading to it is of indescribable beauty.
- Voyevodin Waterfall – its name literally means 'the roar of water'. Located in Transcarpathia. The route from Zdenievo to the waterfall is not easy and you need to be an experienced hiker if you decide to see it.



5) **Villages.** This is a very hospitable region and it is recommended to experience the local life from its very heart – from villages. And there are two ways to do it. Either make a day visit to the village or live there for several days. There are numerous wonderful accommodation options throughout Ukrainian Carpathians, and you will find out about them at the end of the article, but living in an authentic village is a completely different thing.



In almost every village with more than 100 inhabitants, it is possible to find a room for rent in one of the local houses. This way you can get to know the people, see their way of life, taste authentic food and take a deep dive into the local culture.



Another reason not just to visit villages but live there are folklore and legends. People have a lot of stories to tell.

- 6) **Legends.** The only legend most people know which is related to the Carpathian Mountains is the legend of Count Dracula of Transylvanian Carpathians. However, there's much more to Carpathian folklore than the famous vampire:

- **Molfares are the wizards of Carpathians.** In ancient times, people called them ‘earthly gods’ or ‘conjurers of heavens’. It is believed that molfares can dissolve clouds, summon thunder, speak to animals and even levitate. They usually live in high mountains so that no one can see them. There’s a museum of ‘hutsul magic’ in the Verkhovina region (hutsuls are the ethnic group living in certain parts of Western Ukraine) that demonstrates the items that once belonged to real molfares.



- **Chugaister, or the Woodman.** When Chugaister meets someone in the forests, he invites that person to dance. Chugaister dances like a whirlwind and loves to sing. When herdsmen cook food, they always leave a little bit for Chugaister because they believe that he will defend them. It is believed that Chugaister can be met in Carpathian wilds even today.
- **Neistovoe, or Frantic Lake** is believed to be an evil place. It is believed that at the bottom of this lake lies a frozen dark-blue mirror that breeds storms and strong winds and attacks surrounding fields and grasslands, breaks the roofs of houses, and brings the chilling cold of the underworld. According to the legends of highlanders, the souls of sinners travel to the bottom of that lake.

These are just several stories. There’s much more to explore.

- 7) **Winter Fairytales.** Winter is a wonderful time of the year. Winter in the mountains is 5 times more wonderful (provided you aren’t trapped in an ice cave). Ukraine Carpathian Mountains have a lot to offer for all who like it cold and snowy.



Whether it's skiing, snowboarding, hiking, walking, playing snowballs, or just having fun in the snow, you can indulge in any of these activities. In terms of skiing and snowboarding, it is best to go to Dragobrat, Kosiv, Verkhovina, Vorohta, Pilipetz, Bukovel, Krasia, Yablonitsa, Slavskoe, and Migovo. You can choose from a number of options depending on how extreme you are. All of these ski resorts are easily reachable with trains and buses.



If you just like walking and contemplating the beauty of the winter nature, then you can choose any part of the Carpathian Mountains. If you find it difficult to make a decision, go to Synevir Lake.

- 8) **Hutsul Food.** National cuisine is an indispensable part of any ethnos. After a long day of hiking, you will find many things to explore in a local 'kolyba' or eatery.



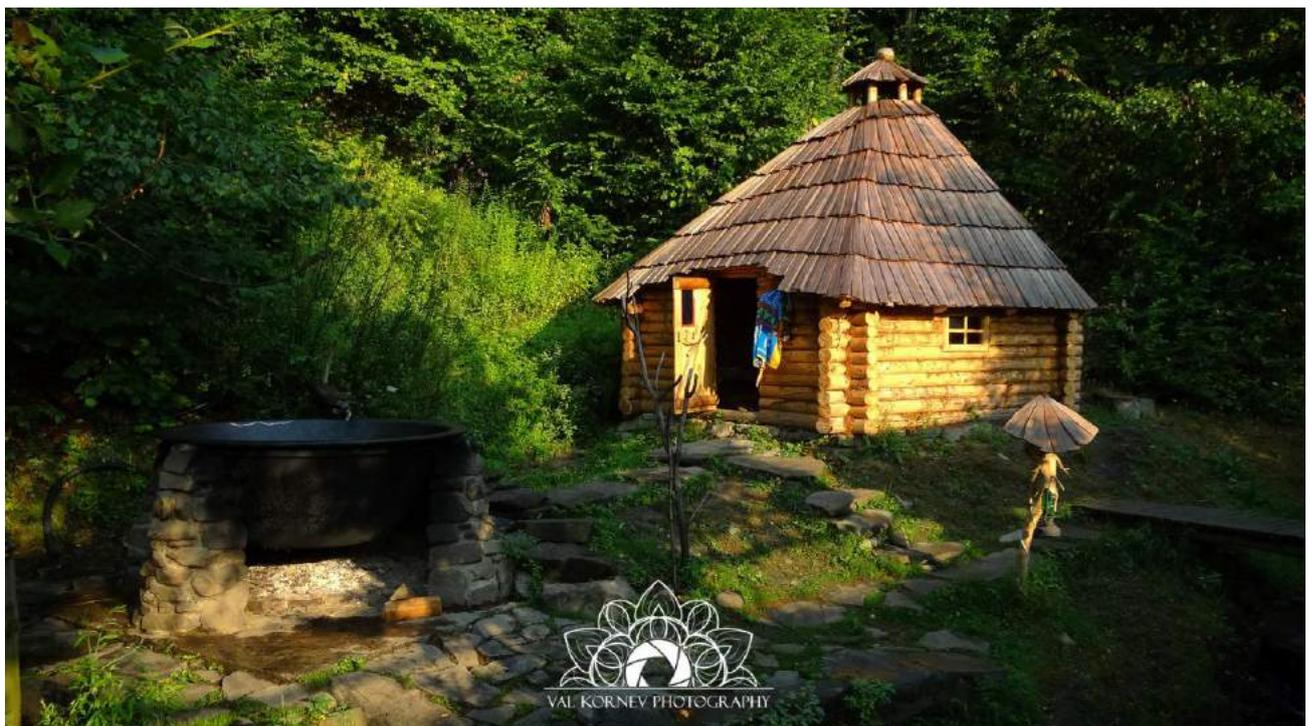
Some of the things you need to try are:

- **Banosh** is a dish made of corn cereal, cream or sour cream and ‘bryndza’, special cheese manufactured in this region. It’s a very substantial meal that can give you energy and keep you going for the whole day. And a tasty one, too!
- **Dishes from porcini mushrooms.** This mushroom isn’t called a ‘king mushroom’ by accident. In Ukrainian, it’s ‘bilyi grib’ or ‘white mushroom’. It has such a rich taste that it’s impossible to forget it after you try it. The best dishes to try from porcini mushrooms are porcini mushroom soup, pickled mushrooms and porcini mushrooms in sour cream.
- **Hutsul Borsch.** Hutsul borsch is different from borsch in other parts of Ukraine because it’s made with the addition of smoked ham and fried beetroot. Different regions of the Carpathian Mountains slightly vary the recipe, but it always has a rich color and taste. It’s being served with sour cream and garlic donuts.
- **Potato pancakes with porcini mushrooms.** No matter how strange it may sound, but potato pancakes are tasteful. And if you add porcini mushrooms with sour cream, the dish becomes too good to be true.

And many other delicious foods to try!



9) ‘Chans’. It has nothing to do with Jackie Chan. A ‘chan’ is a giant cast-iron vessel that was invented in Lumshori village in Transcarpathia. You can see this vessel on the left side of the picture below:



It is used to heat mineral water with herbs to 34-45 degrees Celsius, so that people can take a bath in it. Usually, it can fit from 4 to 8 people. At first, there were only a couple of such ‘chans’ in Lumshori village,

but as they started to become more and more popular, the trend spread all over Ukrainian Carpathians. Taking a ‘chan’ is similar to being in the sauna. It differs in terms of experience, being more exotic, but it’s very similar in terms of positive effects on your health. You can take a ‘chan’ with pine-needle essence, Carpathian herbs, rose petals, forest berries, milk, or wine.



Although there are many places that offer ‘chans’, if you want to have an authentic experience, better go to the village of their origin – Lumshori. It’s located in a picturesque region with lots of waterfalls and beautiful forests.

10) Connection with Your True Self. Nature heals and because of our hectic lives, we need this healing too often. If you need time to relax, connect with your true self and taste the vibrancy of life once again, Carpathians are an excellent place to do it. Waking up to the bird chirping, living in a company of forests, rivers, waterfalls, and mountains is sometimes what we need most. Here’s a list of recommended places to stay:

- **Chervona Ryta**. This complex is situated in a small, but very cozy Shayan village. It offers accommodation in authentic hutsul homes made from timber blocking.



There are outdoor pools, a spa-complex, tasty food, and a beautifully governed territory. Shayan itself is popular for its healing springs. To get to Shayan, you need to take a train to Mukachevo and then take a bus or taxi.

- **Kamyanka**. This hotel is located on the top of the Synevir passage, one of the most picturesque places of the Carpathian Mountains. The view from the windows of all rooms is priceless.



You can see this view from the terrace of the restaurant every day. To get to Kamyanka, you need to take a train to Volovec and then take a transfer directly to the hotel.

- **Arnika**. This is the closest hotel to Synevir Lake. It's so close that you can actually walk to the lake on foot. They have different accommodation options, from small rooms to separate

apartments. If you choose to stay in Arnika, it's best to select bigger apartments in a wooden complex to enjoy both authenticity and comfort.

- **Eco Resort Izki**. This resort is located in an excellent place with minimum disturbance and noise pollution. It's aimed at relaxation and recreation and offers spa-procedures, yoga, horseback riding, skiing, and apiotherapy. The cottages are made from timber blocking and the restaurant serves excellent food. To get to Izki, go to Volovec by train and then take a taxi.
- **Chalet Kukavica**. An outstanding holiday house nestled in a beautiful Carpathian mountain region. It can accommodate up to 6 people, so it's a great option for travel companies. The area is close to ski/spa resorts and the chalet itself is a real gem. It offers a large open sitting area with a fireplace, dining area, kitchen, snooker, and roofed terrace with incredible mountain views. Getting there is similar to previous accommodation options. First, you get to Volovec by train and then take a transfer to the chalet.

Why are we lured by the magic of mountains? No one knows for sure, but perhaps John Muir was right when he said that 'You are not in the mountains. The mountains are in you.'