

A City Journey

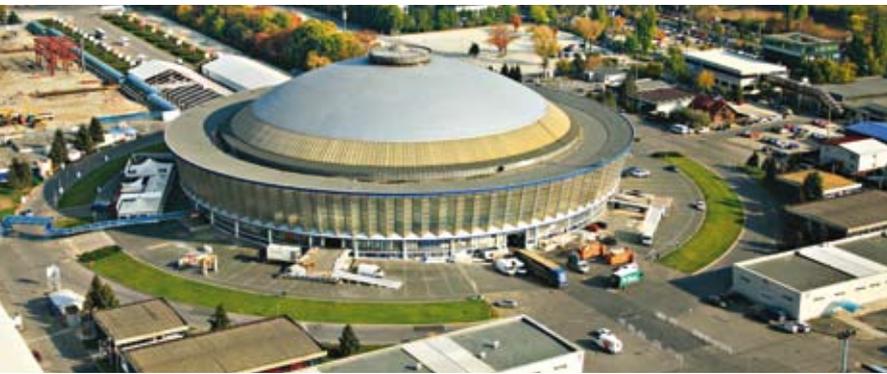



România
explore the Carpathian garden

Welcome to the Carpathian garden!



Welcome! We invite you to embark on a fascinating journey in a country rich in culture and heritage. Come and explore fortified medieval towns, stroll down streets steeped in history, open castle gates, and discover churches and cathedrals built by master craftsmen, breathe fresh mountain air or bask on sun-kissed beaches. Our capital, formerly known as 'Little Paris of the East', will delight you, but countless charms are also to be found further afield - in Transylvania and Banat, dominated by medieval towns and architectural monuments, in Moldavia, whose history resounds with tales of courage and heroism, and in Muntenia, renowned for its beautiful monasteries and royal palaces. And, don't forget the coastline where the sound of the waves will spirit away your troubles. Discover the stories of towns that have survived centuries of turbulent history - each with its own compelling characteristics. Whether you have a weekend or two weeks to explore our country, Romania is ready to reveal both little-known secrets and urban sophistication!



GENERAL INFORMATION

Geography: Romania is located in south-eastern Europe (2,900 km east of the Atlantic Ocean, and 900 km from the Mediterranean), where the 45° north latitude parallel meets the 25° east longitude meridian.

Accessibility: **By road** - European entrance/exit points into/from Romania: Borș, Nădlac, Petea, Turnu, Vârșand, Cenad (Hungary), Halmeu, Siret (Ukraine), Albița, Sculeni, Galați (Republic of Moldova), Negru Vodă, Giurgiu, Vama Veche (Bulgaria), Porțile de Fier I, Moravița (Serbia); **By plane** - main airports: Bucharest (Henri Coandă, Băneasa), Constanța (Mihail Kogălniceanu), Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș, Suceava, Sibiu, Tulcea, Bacău, Iași, Oradea, Arad; **By sea** - harbours: Constanța and Mangalia.

Area: 238,391 km²

Population: 21.5 mil. inhabitants (2008)

Religion: Orthodox (87%)

State flag: 

Official language: Romanian. Many Romanians also speak English, French or German
Capital: Bucharest, 1,944,000 inhabitants (2008)

Other principal cities: Constanța, Timișoara, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Brașov, Galați, Craiova, Ploiești, Brăila

Form of government: republic

Legal holidays: January 1st and 2nd; the first and second days of Easter; May 1st; the first and second days of Pentecost; Dormition of the Theotokos feast day; December 1st; the first and the second day of Christmas; two days for each of the three annual religious holidays, as designated by religions other than Christianity, for their devotees

Emergency services' telephone number: 112

Climate: varies between temperate and continental. During summer, the average temperature falls between 22°C and 24°C, but can reach 38°C. During winter, the average temperature falls to around -3°C, and can reach -30°C.

Romanian time zone: GMT + three hours during summer (from the last Sunday of March until the last Sunday of October), GMT + two hours for the rest of the year

Units of measurement: metric system (1 km = 0.62 miles)

National currency: LEU (1 leu = 100 bani)

Bank cards: large hotels, restaurants and shops accept credit cards including American Express, Master Card, Visa, Diners Club

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In the University Square area you can see the National Theatre, the Ministry of Agriculture, Colțea Hospital, the Museum of Bucharest Municipality (Șuțu Palace) and the University of Bucharest.

Bucharest – ‘Little Paris of the East’

The Romanian capital is a city of contrasts, where historic buildings stand side by side with skyscrapers of glass and metal.

Bucharest, located in the country’s south-east, is by far the largest Romanian city (with almost two million people) and it is the nation’s cultural, industrial and financial centre. According to local legend, the city was established by a shepherd named Bucur who tended his flocks on the bank of the River Dâmbovița. Although it was documented for the first time in official 15th-Century records, Bucharest only became the capital of Romania in the middle of the 19th Century.

The streets of Bucharest often reflect its nickname ‘Little Paris of the East’, given to the capital between the wars for its elegant architecture and thriving cultural life. Bucharest also bears the scars from four decades of a communist regime, which ordered the demolition of entire residential neighbourhoods to make way for wide boulevards and massive monumental buildings, and the rapid and sometimes chaotic development since 1989.



The River Dâmbovița flows through Bucharest, from north-west to south-east.



The Triumphal Arch was built between 1924 and 1922 to celebrate Romania's victory during World War I.



The remains of the old court were uncovered between 1967 and 1972 following archaeological research.

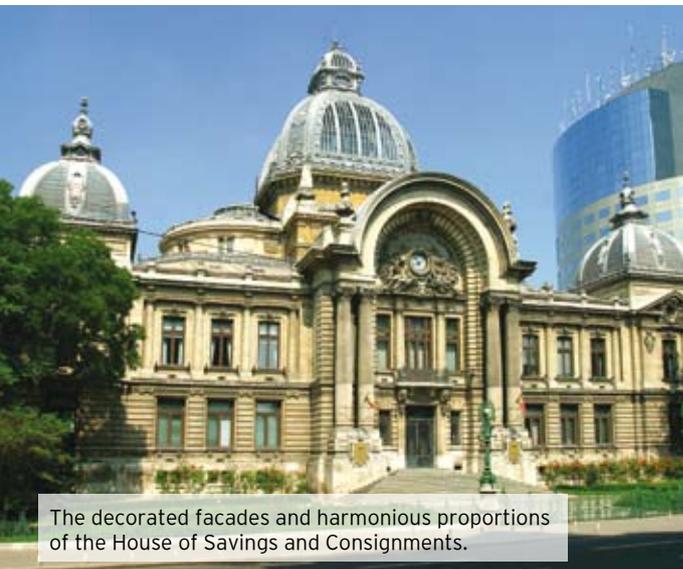
Curtea Veche Voivodal Palace

The first voivodal palace in Bucharest was constructed by order of Vlad Țepeș ('Vlad the Impaler'), the historical figure that provided inspiration for Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel of the same name. The palace, residence of Wallachia's rulers in the 15th Century, was replaced with a new court after a devastating earthquake and fire partially destroyed it in the first half of the 18th Century. The remains of the old court were uncovered between 1967 and 1972 following archaeological research. Fragments of the water supply system, the palace's Turkish bath, the original internal geometry together with some decorative architectural elements and murals survive and now constitute the Curtea Veche (Old Court) open-air museum in the centre of Bucharest.

Curtea Veche Museum, 25-31 Franceză Street; Opening hours: Monday-Sunday 09:00-17:00

The Historic Quarter

Bucharest's historic quarter has seen a renaissance in the last few years and has become one of the capital's most popular leisure districts. During summer, the local streets - Smârdan, Franceză, Șelari, Sfântul Dumitru, Gabroveni and Covaci - are packed with tables where you can enjoy a coffee, a cold beer or a salad or steak. In winter, the hustle and bustle adjourns inside the pubs and restaurants, where the most popular drink is hot mulled wine. Prices here accommodate every budget.



The decorated facades and harmonious proportions of the House of Savings and Consignments.

CEC Palace

The CEC Palace, one of the most impressive buildings in Bucharest, accommodates the House of Savings and Consignments (formerly the House of Deposits, Consignments and Savings and in short CEC, a state savings bank established in 1854). It stands on the famous Calea Victoriei, the city's most stylish thoroughfare, and was completed in 1900 in an eclectic style with distinctly French architectural elements.



The Ministry of Agriculture

The Palace of the Ministry of Agriculture is considered one of the most beautiful buildings in Bucharest. It stands near the University Square, and was designed in the Renaissance style by a French architect. It has housed the same institution since its completion in 1896. The U-shaped building comprises two symmetrical wings which enclose an elegant courtyard. It is remarkable for the bas-reliefs on its facade, the clock and the dome.

Palace of Parliament

Considered by some a testament to Romanian builders' craftsmanship and by others an architectural monstrosity, the Palace of Parliament (also known as 'The People's House') is nonetheless a principal landmark of the Bucharest cityscape. The subject of three entries in the Guinness World Records, it is the largest and most expensive civic administration building in the world, at 270 metres long, 245 metres wide, and 86 metres high. It also extends some 82 metres deep below ground, and its footprint covers 66,000 square metres. One million cubic metres of marble, 1,000 tons of basalt, 900,000 cubic metres of wood, 3,500 tons of crystal, 2,800 chandeliers, 220,000 square metres of carpet and 3,500m² of leather were used in its construction among other materials. 200 architects and approximately 20,000 labourers worked on the building and its 1000 or so rooms. Construction began in 1980 following the demolition of seven square kilometres of the old city centre. Whole neighbourhoods were razed, while many valuable historic buildings were among those destroyed to clear the site. The project spearheaded the development of a new city centre that includes other buildings which still house a number of state institutions. Leading from the front of the Palace is the 4km long and 120m wide Unirii Boulevard (formerly the Boulevard of Socialist Victory), which is decorated with a number of large and small artesian fountains, with ornamental stone sculptures.

The Palace of Parliament is open to visitors via the entrance on Izvor Street. Daily guided tours are available in several international languages between 10:00 and 16:00.

The National Museum of Contemporary Art

Permanent and temporary exhibitions are shown in the Palace of Parliament between Wednesday and Sunday, from 10:00 to 18:00. The museum's entrance is on Calea 13 Septembrie.

www.mnac.ro



The Palace of Parliament is visible from many of Bucharest's districts.

Formerly the Boulevard of Socialist Victory, Unirii Boulevard has reshaped a whole area of Bucharest.





You can also take a rowing boat or ride a hydro-bicycle on Cișmigiu Lake.

Cișmigiu Gardens

Cișmigiu Gardens, the capital's oldest public park, lies opposite Bucharest City Hall, on Regina Elisabeta Boulevard. The park is a green oasis of 17 hectares in the heart of the city, with a lake at its centre. It was designed in the middle of the 19th Century by a landscape gardener previously responsible for the Vienna Imperial Gardens. Attractions include a circular outdoor gallery displaying busts of great Romanian writers, a marble monument in honour of the French heroes who died in World War I in Romania and, on a site called 'La Cetate', the ruins of a monastery built in the 18th century.

In summer the pond located in the north part of the park attracts ducks, geese and swans, while peacocks can be admired in a nearby enclosure. In winter, the lake becomes the largest open-air skating rink in the city.

Herăstrău Park

The largest park in Bucharest occupies an area of 187 hectares and was inaugurated in 1936. Developed in the north of the city around Herăstrău, one of the lakes formed by the Colentina River, the park is perfect for a relaxing stroll, a cycle ride, rollerblading or skateboarding, or a walk with friends to one of the local terraces. During the summer, you can take a pleasure boat across the lake, which has a surface of 70 hectares. The park also contains the fascinating

"Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum, one of the largest and oldest ethnographic museums in Europe, with 70 houses from all over the country, wooden churches, a water mill, a wind mill and many traditional tools.

The Village Museum No. 28-30 Kiseleff Road

Opening hours: Monday- Sunday: 09:00 -17:00. The access points are located on Kiseleff Road and in Herastru Park (only Saturday and Sunday). Audio-guides and guided tours in Romanian, English, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian are available at the museum.
www.muzeul-satului.ro





Căldărușani Monastery

Căldărușani stands on a peninsula in the lake of the same name 40km north-east of Bucharest, an area once covered by the dense Wallachian Forest. The monastery was raised during 1638-1639 from brick and river stones. Today's construction still preserves traces of the original architectural elements - the steeple, the basement arches, and the old throne hall of the Wallachian ruler Matei Basarab. The monastery has a rich collection of medieval art, old books, some early pictures of the famous Romanian painter Nicolae Grigorescu and an exhibition of old icons.

Cernica Monastery

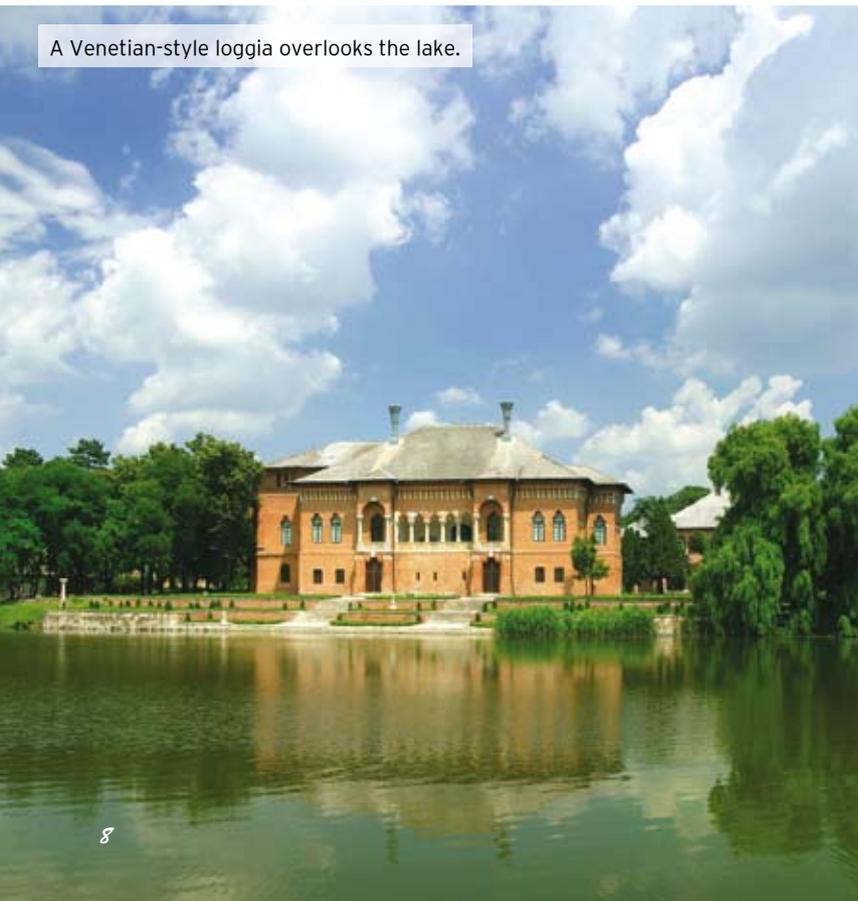
Cernica Monastery, located just 14 km from Bucharest, was built at the beginning of the 17th century in the middle of a lake surrounded by forests. Cernica is a pilgrimage destination for Romanians from all over the country. They come here attracted by Saint Calinic, the monastery abbot between 1818 and 1850, one of the most important religious figures of the 19th century. According to legend the abbot had the gift of reading people's souls and was known for his exorcisms, church services that are still practiced to this day at Cernica. The Cernica Monastery Museum hosts an important collection of valuable objects, manuscripts, charters, old icons, treasures and paintings. Modest accommodation is available at Cernica on request.

Access: From NR 3 (national road) take a right turn to Pantelimon town on CR (county road) 301 and drive on for 4 kilometres towards Cernica commune. The monastery offers accommodation services both free of charge, in modest conditions and for a price.

www.cernica.ro



A Venetian-style loggia overlooks the lake.



Mogoșoaia Palace

The beautiful, red brick palace of Mogoșoaia is 14km of Bucharest. Built at the beginning of the 18th century by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, it is regarded as a masterpiece of a style which combined Venetian and Ottoman elements and came to be known as "Brâncovenesc". The palace, which stands in the middle of an impressive courtyard, has a fine vaulted cellar and former royal residential rooms located on either side of a hallway on the upper floor. It also features a Venetian-style loggia overlooking a lake. Mogoșoaia hosts the Brâncoveanu's Palaces Cultural Centre, an institution which organizes ethnographic and contemporary art exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events.

Access: From NR7, take a left on Valea Parcului Street.

Opening hours: 1 May - 1 November: 10:00 -18:00 (Monday closed); 1 November - 1 May: 09:00 -17:00 (Monday closed)

www.palatebrancovenesti.ro



Hotels

Bucharest offers a wide selection of hotels ranging from two to five stars, many of which are part of prestigious hotel chains. Exclusive boutique hotels, providing exceptional levels of service and tastefully furnished, cater for the more discerning visitor, while budget travellers can choose from city hostels and apartment hotels.

Shopping

From designer labels to antiques, handicrafts and souvenirs to electrical goods or diamond rings, look no further than Bucharest.

Calea Dorobanți, Calea Victoriei and Magheru Boulevard, or on nearby tiny Ion Câmpineanu street are the places for luxury shopping. For a more varied selection of international and local brands check out one of the city's ten air-conditioned shopping malls and shop until you drop.

Afterwards you can take in a movie, or relax over a meal, or a coffee or an ice cream.

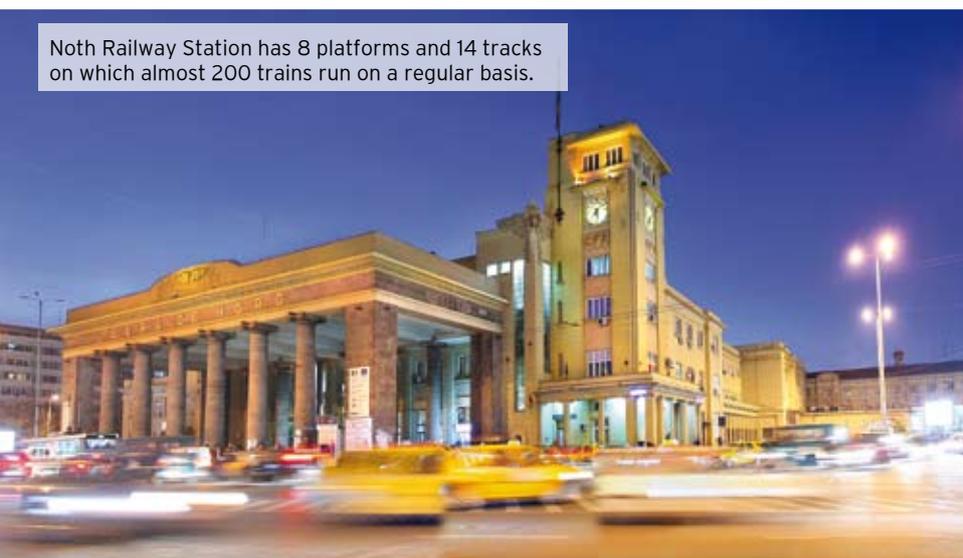
Food shopping has never been easier with numerous supermarkets and hypermarkets round the fringes of the city centre, and smaller grocery stores, delicatessen and specialist food stores in the central area.

Transport

Two international airports, Henri Coandă (Otopeni) and Aurel Vlaicu (Băneasa), both located north of the city centre connect Bucharest with the rest of the world, and provide domestic connections to many Romanian cities.

Direct international trains arrive daily at the main railway station, Gara de Nord, coming from cities as far afield as Vienna, Istanbul and Moscow, and with connections from all over Europe. Meanwhile, over 200 trains depart daily for destinations throughout the country.

Noth Railway Station has 8 platforms and 14 tracks on which almost 200 trains run on a regular basis.



650,000 people use the subway everyday in Bucharest.



The subway (Metro) is the easiest way to travel within Bucharest with over 650,000 people using it every day. Access is based on magnetic cards (approximately EUR 2 for 10 trips) and a journey from one end of the city to the other can take just only 20 minutes. Buses, trolleybuses and trams serve all parts of the city, including those areas not covered by the Metro (tickets are available at the station and they cost approximately EUR 0.3).



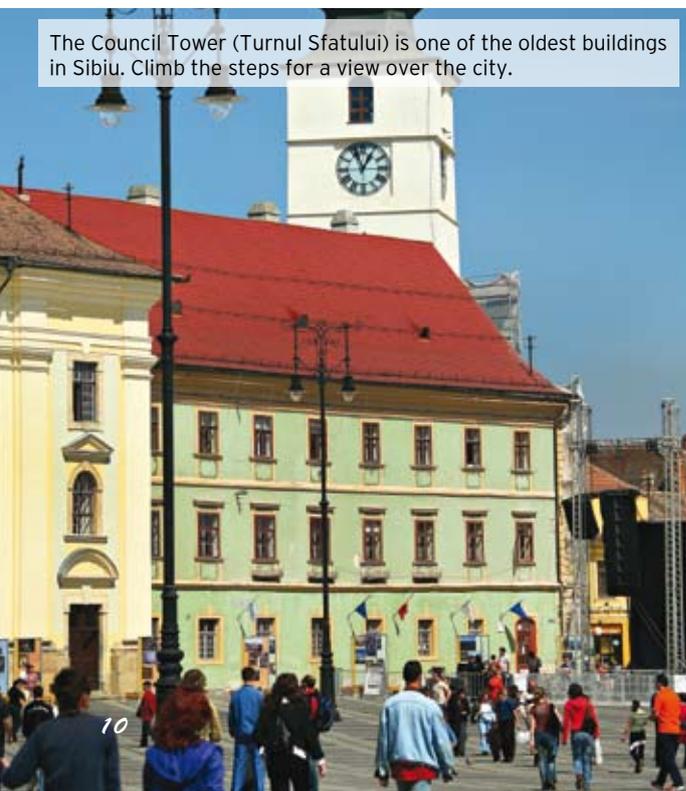
Sibiu – The European Capital of Culture

This beautiful Transylvanian city resembles the Western European main cities.

Designated as the European Capital of Culture in 2007, together with Luxembourg, Sibiu passed through several years of an extended restoration process and its historical centre is currently a small, but charming medieval city which you can cross on foot. Walking on pedestrian streets and squares surrounded by historic buildings. Also known under the German name Hermannstadt, Sibiu has always been an important

centre of the German community of Transylvania. In fact, the city was established in the 12th century by the German colonists, known here as Saxons and in the 17th century it was considered the most Eastern city of Europe. Home to a mixed Romanian, German and Hungarian population, Sibiu brings together the three cultures that also influenced the architectural style of the city.

The Council Tower (Turnul Sfatului) is one of the oldest buildings in Sibiu. Climb the steps for a view over the city.



The Big Square

Sibiu's Big Square, one of the largest in Transylvania, has always been the true symbol of the city. During the 15th century it was the main cereal market, and also a place for public meetings and executions. The historic mansions and buildings which surround the square exhibit elements of Gothic, Renaissance and baroque architecture. These include the Brukenthal Palace, and nearby the 'Roman Emperor' Hotel, and the 'Blue Star' Inn where the Austrian Emperor Josef II stayed in 1773.

In December 1989, the Big Square was the focal point of the revolution in Sibiu, a fact commemorated by a memorial plate set in the granite pavement. Every year, the square hosts ArtMania, one of the most important rock festivals in the country.

Brukenthal National Museum: 4-5, Big Square (Piața Mare Nr 4-5)

Opening hours: Tuesday - Sunday: 10:00 - 18:00. The ticket office closes at 17:15 in winter (between 21 October and 21 March). The museum is closed every Monday.

www.brukenthalmuseum.ro

The Small Square

Sibiu's Small Square, which was established between the 14th and 16th centuries, is the old commercial centre of the city and one of the cultural focus points of modern Sibiu. Located between the Big Square and the Huet Square, this area is characterized by arches and the loggias which the old merchants used to protect their goods, the unusual dormer windows, which the locals call "the eyes of the city" and the forged iron lamps suspended from various architectural elements. The buildings around the square include bars and restaurants which place tables outside in the summer. The Pharmacy History Museum is housed here in the former chemist's shop 'La Ursul Negru', where Samuel Hahnemann, the father of homeopathy worked for the best part of his life.



In spring, the Small Square becomes the main stage for the Sibiu Jazz Festival, one of the oldest jazz festivals in the world.



"Franz Binder" Universal Ethnography Museum

The Ethnography Museum, which is part of the Astra National Museum Complex, is situated in a Neo-gothic building in the Small Square. The permanent exhibition "Universal Art and Culture" was established during the last century with numerous art objects provided by many collectors (originating from North Africa, the Nile spring region, China, Japan, Oceania, Asia Minor, Brazil, Lapland, and Australia). Amongst the artefacts are an Egyptian mummy, and the gift collection of the former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Opening hours: Tuesday - Sunday, 10:00 - 18:00 (18 May - 1 October); 9:00 - 17:00 (1 October - 18 May). The museum offers free tour guides for organized groups that plan their visit in advance.
www.franzbinder.sibiu.ro

The Liar's Bridge

This is the most mythical place in Sibiu. The Liar's Bridge connects the two mediaeval neighbourhoods of Sibiu, the Lower Town and the Upper Town. Several legends are often recited about this bridge. One of them says that the bridge 'feels' every lie uttered by those who cross it and it starts to growl and creak in a threatening manner.

Other legends mention the lies of lovers or of the merchants selling their goods in the area. In reality, the name of the bridge seems to originate in misinterpretation as the bridge had no support pillars, it was called the Liegenbrücke in German - the 'lying bridge' - a homophone of the word Lügenbrücke - the 'liar's bridge'.



The Evangelical Cathedral

One of the most impressive buildings located in the historic centre of the city is the Evangelical Church in Huet Square which has the tallest steeple in Transylvania at over 73 metres. It can be seen from almost any part of the city. The church has a Baroque organ made by a Slovak craftsman in 1671 which replaced the first organ brought to Sibiu in the 16th century. In 1914 a large church organ was installed, the largest in South-Eastern Europe. It was completely refurbished in 1997 and organ recitals now take place from June to September. The impressive church building, built in the Gothic style with curved arches and tomb stones on the North wall was raised in the 16th century on the site of a Roman basilica dating from the 12th century. The statue of Bishop Georg Daniel Teutsch, erected in 1899, can be admired in front of the church.

In the summer season, every Wednesday from June to September, the evangelical church organizes organ concerts which attract many tourists.



The Passage of the Stairs

One of the most picturesque parts of the Old Town is the Passage of the Stairs, also known as the 'Needle Wall'. It connects the Upper Town to the Lower Town by two flights of steps and arches which follow the fortified walls Evangelical Church. Built in the 13th century from stone and brick, the passage leads up to the Gate Tower, one of the oldest sections of the fortifications.



"Holy Trinity" Metropolitan Cathedral

This Orthodox Cathedral was built at the beginning of the 20th century on the site of a Greek church which used to serve as an Episcopal cathedral. Four icons from the old church, painted on wood, mounted in silver and set with precious stones have been preserved in the altar. The building, a replica of the St. Sophia Cathedral from Constantinople on a small scale has the characteristics of a Byzantine basilica and it is a small scale replica of Saint Sophia Cathedral of Constantinople. The central element is the dome surrounded by four small towers. The exterior is decorated with rows of yellow and red brick while the arch above the main entrance is adorned with five mosaic patterns which were manufactured in Munich.





The Old Church, a Baroque monument from the 18th century, built from stone and brick.

Dumbrava Forest

The Dumbrava forest covers an area of 1,000 hectares to the south-west of Sibiu. Researchers have been studying the varied flora of this natural park since the 17th century. More than half of the trees in the forest are over 100 years old, with some of the oaks more than 200 years old. The “Emperor’s Oak” was an impressive 700 years old when it was felled. You can still see the 10.3 m diameter stump. The forest is home for many deer, squirrels, wild boar and foxes, and a great variety of birds including finches, woodpeckers, jays, owls and ravens.

Today, the natural park Dumbrava Sibiului, encompasses several lakes originating in Valea Aurie creek, and is crossed by public footpaths. It also contains the excellent Astra open air museum, a zoo and a number of hotels and entertainment areas. The Museum of Traditional Folk Civilisation located in Dumbrava Sibiului is one of the largest, and most impressive, open air museums in Europe. It comprises over 300 rural dwellings, together with churches, inns and a host of working water wheels and wind mills representing rural technology from all over Romania.

The Astra open air museum

Calea Rășinari, 4 km from Sibiu in the Dumbrava Forest
 Opening hours: Monday- Sunday: 9:00 -17:00

The Zoo

The first zoo in Romania was founded in 1929 in Dumbrava Sibiului. Occupying a 6 hectare area, it currently has around 47 species of animals and birds, including monkeys, bears, white wolves, Carpathian wolves, foxes, tigers, lions, jaguars, pumas, wild boars, llamas, Carpathian stags, fallow deer, white buffaloes, ponies, one reticulated python, a crocodile (the largest in Romania - two metres long), pheasants, parrots, peacocks, and pigeons. The zoo can be visited daily between 9:00 - 17:00. The tourists can also ride a hydro-bicycle on the lake.

Rășinari

Passing the zoo, the road between Sibiu and Păltiniș mountain resort goes through Rășinari village, which is connected to the city by a 13 kilometre long tram line. The small, one-car tram which travels between Sibiu and Rășinari and back several times per day, and is sometimes the stage for theatre plays. In the village you can roam for hours on its charming lanes going up and down along the houses and courtyards surrounded by tall gates and walls.

Rășinari is the native village of several important Romanian cultural figures, such as the poet Octavian Goga and the famous philosopher Emil Cioran. The houses where they lived are open to visitors. Other tourist attractions include the Ethnographic Museum, Saint Paraschiva Old Church, Saint Elijah Church, the Hill Church, the old school and the ruins of an earth fortress dating from the 13th century.

Rășinari provides tourist accommodation in local guesthouses.



Braşov - The Heart of the Country

The city of Braşov retains keeps its medieval flavour due to its narrow streets, and old churches.

The city of Braşov lies in the crook of the Carpathians in the central part of Romania, 160km north of Bucharest. Founded in the 13th century by the Teutonic knights, it was first known under the name Kronstadt (the city of the crown). The old part of the city still retains its medieval flavour due to its narrow streets, ramparts and many old churches.

Braşov developed as a commercial and artisan centre during

the 14th century. It was protected by a 3 km long, 2 metre wide and 12 metre high wall.

Today only the North part of the wall and a series of gates and bulwarks are preserved, including the Weavers' Bulwark (the largest in the country). As in other Transylvanian cities, the architecture was influenced by the Romanian, German, Hungarian and Jewish population.



Council Square

The Council Square in the heart of the old city was the place for fairs during the Middle Ages. This was where merchants from the Romanian provinces, Hungary and beyond came together to trade their wares. The picturesque Council House (Casa Sfatului), built in 1420, initially served as a watch tower. It was reconstructed in its current form after several fires; in 1780 it was used as the town hall and from 1950 it housed the County History Museum. The Orthodox Cathedral "The Dormition of the Mother of God" attracts the tourist's eye among the buildings located around the square. Republicii Street, a pedestrian street full of shops, restaurants and terraces starts at the East corner of the square. The square stages open air concerts and events like the international pop music festival the Golden Stag.

The Black Church

The huge evangelical church in the centre of Braşov was built towards the end of the 14th century. Initially known as Saint Mary's Church, the building is the largest Gothic church in south-eastern Europe and it can hold up to 5,000 people. A huge fire broke out in 1689 which devastated the city. The walls of the church were blackened with smoke and ever since it has been called the Black Church. It is a Gothic structure comprising three equal height storeys. The arches destroyed during the 1689 fire were rebuilt in the Baroque style. Inside the church there is you can find the heaviest bell in Romania (six tons), mural paintings in the Italian Renaissance style and a 4000 tube organ. Organ concerts have been held here since 1953.

Şcheii District

The Şcheii District is an old Romanian neighbourhood, full of narrow, cobbled streets and red roof houses dating from the 17th century. The Romanian Orthodox Church "Saint Nicholas" founded in 1292 was built in stone in 1495 by the local people with the help of the Wallachian ruler Neagoe Basarab. The Romanian school built nearby was another important spiritual and cultural centre for the Romanian people living here. The importance of the centre was increased after the arrival of Coresi, a master printer who began to print church books in Romanian during the middle of the 16th century.

Poiana Braşov

Poiana Braşov, the largest ski resort in Romania, is just 12 kilometres from the centre of Braşov. The resort has been used for skiing since the 19th century and in 1906 the first ski contest was organized. Up to 1950 Poiana Braşov had no more than a few chalets. However, in 1951 the World University Winter Games were held here and on this occasion a hotel and the first cable railway, measuring over 2,000 metres, were commissioned. Poiana Braşov now has 12 ski slopes of various levels, sports grounds, a lake, clubs, pubs and restaurants. Tourists can stay in luxury hotels, boarding houses, villas or chalets. The resort is also popular for conferences.

www.poiana-braşov.com



The Black Church is a Gothic basilica comprising three equal height storeys. The arches destroyed during the 1689 fire were rebuilt in the Baroque style.





Cluj-Napoca – The Spiritual Centre of Transylvania

A city full of life and energy, Cluj is one of the major political, economic and university centres in Romania.

The Romans established Napoca as one of the key settlements of Roman Dacia during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, but Napoca fortress scaled back its growth after the Roman army withdrew from the current territory of Romania. The city flourished again in the Middle Ages following the arrival of German colonists in Transylvania. In the 15th century, the fortress became a major commercial centre which favoured the development of craft guilds.

Until the 17th century, most of the population was of German

origin, but subsequently the Hungarian speaking population that is nowadays the biggest minority began to expand. Hungarian and Austrian influence have shaped Cluj as the capital of an autonomous province, then as part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and more recently when Transylvania was united with Romania. During the half a century of communist rule new industries developed and residential areas full of blocks of flats spread out from the centre. However, Cluj preserved many of its beautiful old buildings in the city centre.



Avram Iancu Square

The Orthodox Cathedral in the square adjacent to the National Theatre is regarded as the current city centre. Built between 1921-1933, after the unification of Transylvania with Romania, the cathedral is 64 metres high and is visible from all the hills surrounding the city. Erected in the Byzantine style and featuring an impressive dome and four spires, the cathedral was inaugurated in 1933 in the presence of Romania's king, Carol the 2nd. An important religious centre of the country, this building is used for religious services by the archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj. The building serves as the Metropolitan Cathedral of Cluj, Alba, Crişana and Maramureş. The space in front of the cathedral was known in the course of time under several names. Nowadays the square is called Avram Iancu, the leader of the 1848 revolution in Transylvania. A statue of him was recently erected in front of the cathedral. The Faculty of Orthodox Theology, the beautiful art nouveau National Theatre, the Palace of Justice and the Prefecture are the main buildings in the vicinity of this square.

Saint Michael Cathedral

The Orthodox Cathedral serves as the spiritual centre of the city, but the Roman-Catholic Cathedral Saint Michael, is one of the most important Gothic constructions in the country. Construction began in the 14th century and during the Reformation the church became in turn Lutheran, then Calvinist and then for 150 years a Unitarian place of worship, until it was returned back to the Roman-Catholic community following the Counter-reformation. The church spire, initially built in the 16th century, was rebuilt in the Baroque style in 1744 and then demolished as a result of an earthquake. The current clock steeple built in 1837 in the Neo-gothic style is the highest spire in Romania. Next to the Roman-Catholic church, you will find a fine, equestrian statue of King Matei Corvin with his four generals, which was inaugurated in 1902. Matei Corvin, who was born in Cluj, was the King of Hungary from 1458 until 1490 during which time he granted a series of privileges to its native town.

Palaces

The Western influences turned Cluj into a stylish, and highly cultured city. The unmistakable legacy can be appreciated in its ample courtyards, the Renaissance and early modern basements which today host a number of pubs and restaurants, as well as the splendid Baroque, Neo-classical and Art Nouveau palaces and town houses of Hungarian nobles dotted around the city centre. Of special note is the Banffy Palace, an important building of the 18th century Cluj located in Piața Unirii and considered the most representative Baroque building in Transylvania. Currently the palace is home to the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum. Other examples include the eclectic Baboș Palace and Szeky Palace which are located on the bank of the Someș, near Mihai Viteazul Square.

Cluj-Napoca Art Museum 30, Unirii Square
Opening hours: Wednesday- Sunday: 10:00 -17:00

Protestant Churches

Cluj was an important centre of the Reformation during the 17th century, and has to this day several protestant churches. These include the Reformed-Calvin Church in the Lower city, also called the Two Speer Church. Built in the 19th century, it is one of the buildings that symbolises the city.



The eclectic Baboș Palace and Szeky Palace on the bank of the Someș, near Mihai Viteazul Square.

The Reformed-Calvin Church is located on 21 Decembrie Boulevard at no. 41.



The Unitarian Church was built at the end of the 18th century in the Baroque style.



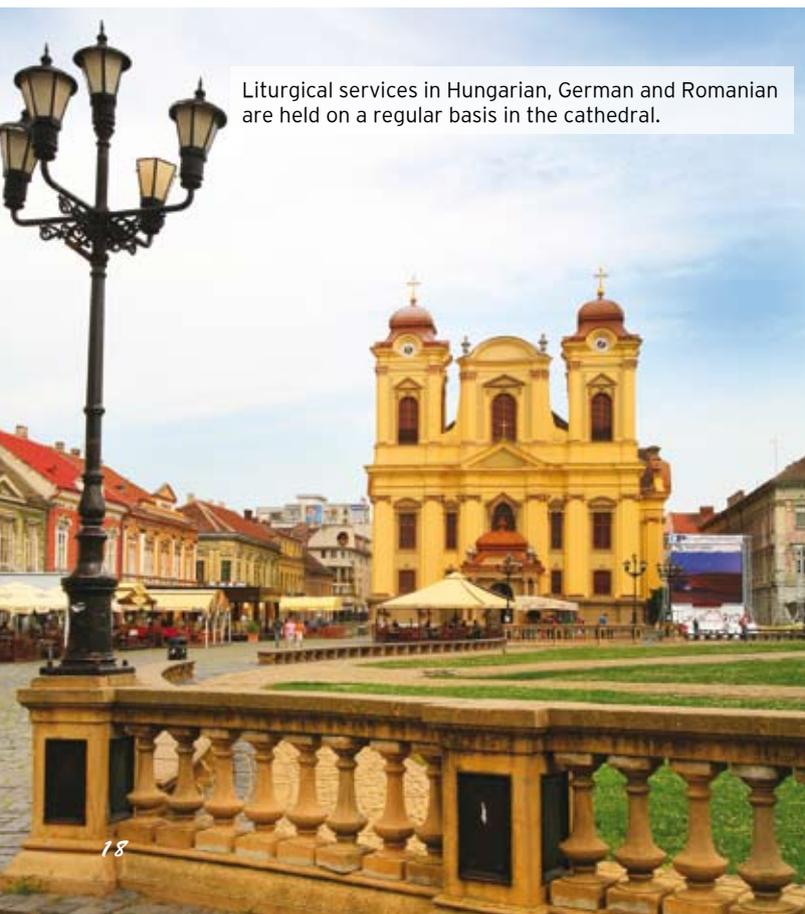


Timișoara – Banat's Capital

The first city to be free from communism, Timișoara is one of the most developed economic areas in Romania.

Timișoara, one of the largest cities in the country, became known all over the world as the place that triggered the Romanian Revolution in December 1989. The bloody clashes made Timișoara the first Romanian city free of communism. Timișoara was also the first city to introduce electric street lighting and electric trams, the first city to have a paved road and the first to organize a cinema projection.

The origin of the fortress goes back to the 13th century when Timiș county, whose centre was at Timișoara, was included in the Hungarian kingdom. Under Ottoman domination for 200 years and then under Austrian-Hungarian rule for another two centuries, Timișoara is one of the most intensely multicultural cities in Romania, with significant Hungarian, German and Serbian minorities.



Liturgical services in Hungarian, German and Romanian are held on a regular basis in the cathedral.

Unirii Square

The oldest city square, set out in the Baroque style, is surrounded by an array of beautiful, well-proportioned architecture: the Roman-Catholic cathedral of St George, the Baroque Palace (currently hosting the Museum of Art), the Episcopal Office, the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, and the Nikolaus Lenau Theoretical High School. At the centre of the square is a baroque trinity or plague column. In front of the chemist's shop near the Baroque Palace, among the cobbles of the square, can still be seen imprinted in stone the layout of the former Timișoara fortress, whose walls were pulled down in the 19th century. The Roman-Catholic Cathedral, the most important work of Baroque architecture in Timișoara was designed by the famous Austrian architect Fischer von Erlach and started in 1736. The main altar painting was made by a famous artist who studied at the Academy of Belle Arts in Vienna.

The Roman-Catholic Cathedral 12, Unirii Square
Due to its special acoustics, remarkable organ concerts can be enjoyed in the cathedral



Liberty Square

One of the oldest city squares, Liberty Square is the site where the old City Hall and Saint John of Nepomuk monument are located; the latter was built in 1756 by two Viennese sculptors to commemorate the victims of the plague epidemics of 1738-1739. The central figure of the monument is the Prague Saint John of Nepomuk, the patron of Banat Catholics, above which Saint Mary is represented wearing a star crown around her head.



The building hosting four different art institutions is unique in the world.

Victory Square

Victory Square, which witnessed the start of the 1989 Revolution, is Timișoara's cultural centre. The metropolitan cathedral, built in a Byzantine Moldavian style, with spires covered in enamelled tiles, dominates the south side of the square. At the opposite end you can see the theatre and opera, which was built at the end of the 19th century by two Viennese architects and which hosts no less than four important cultural institutions: the Romanian Opera, the National Theatre, the German Theatre and the Hungarian Theatre. A flower carpet and a fish fountain decorate the central part of the square. The pedestrian area hosts winter or 1st March fairs, concerts and other cultural events. The Huniade Castle, the oldest building in Timișoara, which is home to the Banat Museum, and the Bega Canal are quickly reached from Piața Victoriei.

The Metropolitan Cathedral of Timișoara is the largest religious building in the city.

The Romanian National Opera: 2, Mărășești Street
www.ort.ro

The Metropolitan Cathedral

One of the symbols of the city, the cathedral was built between 1936 and 1946. Its architectural style combines Byzantine and old Romanian Moldavian elements. The cathedral is 83 metres high and has 11 spires covered in coloured enamelled tiles displaying typical Romanian decorative patterns; the floor is covered in mosaic imitating the style of Banat carpets. The seven bells which weigh together eight tons, each matching a musical tone, were cast in a very rare material, brought from Sumatra and Borneo and tuned by a Romanian composer.



The Synagogue in Cetate

The Jewish worship house located in the Cetate neighbourhood of Timișoara was built between 1863 and 1865, based on a design by a Viennese architect. The synagogue, which has a capacity of approximately 3,000 people, was built in an eclectic manner, displaying features of the Moorish-style reminiscent of the old community of Spanish Jews of Timișoara. It was used for almost 100 years by the Neologue Jewish community, but deteriorated at the end of the communist period and to be was closed when most of the Jews still remaining in the city after World War II emigrated to Israel. The synagogue was renovated from 2000 to 2005, and then reopened after 20 years with a festive concert.



Sighișoara - the Medieval Citadel

The only inhabited medieval citadel in Eastern Europe is alleged to be the birthplace of the ruler that inspired the fictional Count Dracula.

The citadel of Sighișoara was established by German colonists in the 12th century. The town territory has been continuously occupied from ancient times, the vestiges of the Dacian fortress Sandava and the Roman castrum Stenarum having been discovered in the area. The construction of the fortress wall, which was to protect the citadel against Tatar and Ottoman raids, was begun in 1350 and lasted until the 17th century. The 950

metre wall was initially 4 metres high, but this was subsequently increased by another 3-4 metres. The citadel had 14 towers (each the responsibility of one of the craft guilds) and 4 bastions, of which 9 towers and 3 bastions still exist. In 1999, the citadel was registered in the UNESCO world cultural heritage. Vlad Țepeș (Vlad the Impaler), the Romanian ruler who inspired Bram Stoker's infamous Count Dracula, was allegedly born in Sighișoara in 1431.

The Clock Tower

The main entrance to the citadel is below the Clock Tower, the key landmark of Sighișoara which dates back to 1280 and was once the Town Hall. The tower has a height of 64 metres and its solid walls are over 2 metres thick. The roof was destroyed several times and its current appearance dates from 1894, when the old roof was replaced with colourful ceramic tiles. At the beginning of the 17th century, a two-faced clock, was set at the top of the tower, with one dial facing the citadel and the other looking over the Lower City. The clock has a set of seven wooden figurines which face out over the Lower town. Each of them represents one of the pagan gods and appears on the appropriate day of the week - Diana, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and the Sun. The figures facing the citadel are Peace holding out an olive branch, Justice with a set of scales, and again wielding a sword, and two angels for night and day.

The Clock Tower is also home to the Sighișoara History Museum exhibiting collections of archaeology, folklore, pharmacy and medical instruments, furniture, Transylvanian ceramics, and clocks. There is also a torture room and an armoury. **Visiting hours:** 15 May - 15 September - Tuesday-Friday 09:00-18:30, Saturday-Sunday 10:00-17:30. From 16 September till 14 May - Tuesday-Friday: 9:00-15:30, Saturday-Sunday 10:00-15:30.

www.muzeusighisoara.com





Towers

The 19 craftsmen' guilds in Sighișoara had well-defined statutes ever since the 16th century that, for example, forbade the increase in the number of employees and planned the procurement of raw materials. The competition between the guilds was strong, while the competition between the guilds in different towns was even stronger. For example, if the locksmiths in Brașov brought inappropriate locks at to the Fair in Sighișoara, the locksmiths of Sighișoara had the right to confiscate them. After the establishment of the guilds, the craftsmen became wealthier and wealthier and they even had representative in the council of the citadel. Every tower hosted the headquarters of a guild during the Middle Ages. These are some of the towers still in existence: the Ropemakers' Tower - now home to the cemetery guardian, the Tailors Tower which dates back to the 14th century and was used to store gunpowder until it exploded during the 1676 fire, almost totally destroying it, and the Goldsmiths Tower, which was the key to the defence of the town, and was became a mortuary chapel in 1935.



The School on the Hill

One of the oldest schools in Transylvania, the School on the hill in Sighișoara was established at the beginning of the 17th century. A high-school still functions nowadays in the medieval building. The Covered Staircase, also called the Pupils' Staircase, was built in 1662 to ease the way to school for pupils during harsh winters. The longest staircase in Transylvania, the building initially had 300 stairs and was protected by a roof. Only 175 stairs are left following modifications made in 1849.



Sighișoara Mediaeval Festival

Every year, on the last week-end in July, the citadel hosts the Sighișoara Medieval Festival. The atmosphere of the Middle Ages is revived with kings and queens, princes, princesses and knights dressed in silk and lace mediaeval costumes, or with armour and swords. Every year the light and music show is reinvented as the organizers try to bring something new for the enthusiastic tourists.



Iași – The City on Seven Hills

Iași is the main city in north-eastern Romania and the cultural, economic and academic centre of Moldavia.

Iași is the second Romanian city, after Bucharest, in terms of population. Its history goes back to ancient times, when it was an important commercial centre. However, the first document mentioning the settlement was only drafted 600 years ago. During the 16th century Iași became the capital of Moldavia, then the capital of the United Romanian Principalities (in the 19th century, together with Bucharest) and the capital of Romania for two years during the First World War. The first

school in Romanian language was established here and the first book to be printed in Moldavia was printed in Iași. During the course of time, the city was burned down by the Tatars, the Ottomans and the Russians, and a big part of the historic centre of the city was destroyed in 1944, during the street fights in the Second World War. Iași developed economically during the second half of the last century, but it is best known especially as a cultural centre and university city.

The Palace of Culture

Built on the ruins of the medieval Voivodal Court of Moldavia, the Palace of Culture in Iași is seen as one of the last Romantic expressions of traditional architecture. This monumental edifice was built in Neo-Gothic style, inaugurated in 1925 by King Ferdinand, used as Palace of Justice. It was much admired at the time, both due to its architectural detail and modern utilities. The Gothic Room contains a mosaic representing mediaeval bestiary whilst the Voivodes' Room exhibits portraits of the Moldavian rulers and Romanian kings. The central tower is known for the clock with eight bells that play the hymn celebrating the union of Romanian Principalities. For more than 50 years the building has been hosting some of the most important cultural institutions of Iași, nowadays forming the "Moldova" National Museum Complex. The complex comprises the History Museum, the Ethnographic Museum, the Art Museum and the Science and Technical Museum.

The Palace of Culture: 1, Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt Square
www.palatulculturii.ro





Religious Monuments

The Saint Nicholas Church, built by Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) at the end of the 15th century, is the oldest surviving church in Iași. Situated close to the Princely Court, it served as a metropolitan cathedral. A new cathedral was erected in the 19th century, in a style inspired by the Italian Renaissance with four towers. It was dedicated in the presence of King Carol I and contains the coffin with the relics of Saint Parascheva, protector of Moldavia. The magnificent Trei Ierarhi (Three Hierarchs) Church, was built in the 17th century, in a Byzantine style. The design combines traditional elements with glitter embellishments, creating real embroidery in stone. The relics of Saint Parascheva were brought here from Constantinople, and then later moved to the Metropolitan Cathedral. The Great Synagogue, built more than 300 years ago, is placed in the city centre, being the oldest Mosaic religion edifice in Romania.



Copou Garden

Iași is built on seven hills. During the first part of the 19th century, the first park in the city was arranged on one of these hills. The oldest Romanian monument, the Obelisk of Lions, which stands in the middle of the park, was erected as a tribute to the European powers that recognised the independence of the Romanian Principalities. Mihai Eminescu, the most famous Romanian poet, drew inspiration from walking in this park or lying under an old lime tree that still exists today, near the museum dedicated to him.

The National Theatre

At the beginning of the 19th century, Iași witnessed the first theatrical performance in Romanian. The National Theatre building in Iași was designed by Viennese architects and built over 100 years ago. The great hall has 750 seats and Baroque and Rococo adornments. The theatre is lit by over 1,400 electrical lamps and a candelabra with 109 Venetian crystal bulbs. The electric plant of the theatre supplied the first public lighting in the city.

Vasile Alecsandri National Theatre:
18, Agatha Bârsescu Street
www.teatrulnationaliasi.ro



Suceava – The Voivodal Capital Fortress of Moldavia

The wealthiest period in Moldavia's history was when Suceava was its capital.

The city of Suceava lies in north-eastern, some 450 kilometres from Bucharest, near the border with Ukraine. The history stretches back to the Palaeolithic period when the first inhabitants settled here, The Dacians left vestiges of their culture, traditions and Roman influence during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, then, more than 600 years ago, the small settlement turns into a city, and becomes capital of Moldavia. For two centuries

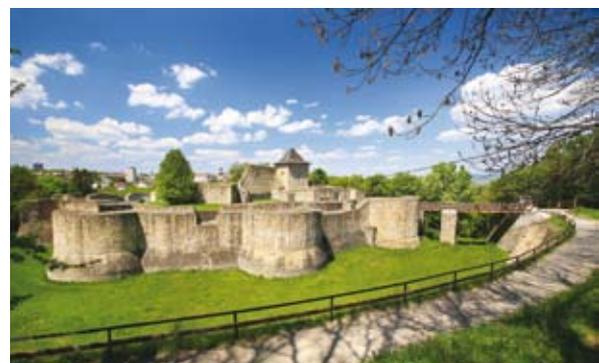
Suceava was the main commercial and political centre of the province. It peaked during the rule of Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great), a name closely associated with the glory period of the fortress. After a period of decline and Austrian occupation, the town became a Romanian territory again in 1918. After the Second World War the city was heavily industrialised while retaining its historical traditions and fame.

The Princely Court

The ruins of the princely residence, a complex built in the 14-15th centuries, can be seen in the centre of Suceava. The first wooden constructions were replaced by stone walls with cellars. Archaeological digs have unearthed materials that prove the luxurious adornment of the former royal palace, among them fragments of Gothic style stoves.

Suceava Fortress

The fortress at Suceava was built at the end of the 14th century and subsequently consolidated to counter enemy artillery. The 3 metre thick walls of the princely citadel were reinforced by bastions, and a deep moat which protected the fortress against infantry attacks. The council of the country would meet in a large room, but the other rooms were intended for the soldiers. The ruler and his family lived in the town, at Curtea Domnească (the Princely Court), and sought refuge in the fortress only in case of danger. The fortress was destroyed in during the 18th century and became a quarry for the city inhabitants. 100 years ago, the walls of the old monument were revealed again as a restoration work was carried out.





Churches

The religious heritage of Suceava is everywhere due to the historical churches that adorn the city, and the many monasteries in the surrounding countryside. The oldest is the Church of Saint George, which dates back to the 14th century. The church which stands near to the Princely Court was the metropolitan cathedral of Moldavia, where the ruler Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) was crowned. Armenian traders and craftsmen, who formed an important community in the city, erected the Saint Cross Church almost 600 years ago. A century later, the Romanians built the Saint Nicholas Church and the Cocoons' Church.



Museums

The history of Northern Moldavia, from the oldest times up to the Second World War, is shown in the 27 rooms of the History Museum. Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great) and his courtiers are presented in an illustration of the Throne Room, and the most precious objects discovered in the region are exhibited in the Treasury Room, which also has displays of coins, jewellery, weapons, medals and clothing accessories. The History Museum is part of the Bucovina Museum Complex which also contains, among others, the Hanul Domnesc Ethnographic Museum, the Bucovina Village Museum, the Museum of Natural Sciences, a planetarium and memorial houses of the cultural personalities who lived in the city.

The History Museum: 33 Ștefan cel Mare Street
The museum is open from Tuesday to Sunday, 10:00 to 18:00 in summer and 9:00 to 17:00 in winter.



A City Walk

A walk on the streets in Suceava provides an opportunity to discover statues of Moldavian rulers, the central park and the historic buildings. Of special note are Burdujeni Railway Station, built at the beginning of the 20th century on the border between Romania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Art High-school and Ștefan cel Mare High-school, both in Baroque style, the Palace of Justice, and the Polish House, where the first cinema projection devices in the city were installed.

Sinaia – The Pearl of the Carpathians

The most beautiful mountain resort in Romania has attractions for all the seasons.

Sinaia is a relatively new settlement, situated 100 km north of Bucharest in the Carpathians. The first construction was Sinaia Monastery, constructed in the 17th century. A settlement began to develop here once the Austrians built the road along the Prahova valley so they could cross the mountains from Transylvania to attack the Ottomans in Wallachia. The inns were established at the same time as traders' chariots arrived there and the region got populated. The interest in Sinaia increased during the second half of the 19th century, after the first king of Romania, Carol I, visited the little mountain village and, charmed by the landscape, decided to build a royal residence there. Peleş Castle was completed in 1883, after 10 years, and Sinaia found itself growing in popular as place to spend the summer as a consequence. Stâna Regală (the Royal Sheepfold), a glade neighbored by the Franz Joseph Stone, where a secret meeting is said to have taken place between the Austrian emperor and King Ferdinand of Romania, is located a few kilometres away from Sinaia. The place where the Stone lays offers a splendid overview on the entire region.



Peleş and Pelişor

King Carol I bought the Sinaia domain from his personal funds. Peleş Castle was used as a royal summer residence, and also as a venue for several important political events, such as the Crown Council in 1914 that decided the initial neutrality of Romania in the First World War. The Royal Family welcomed important guests at Peleş, including Emperor Franz Josef, who was enchanted by the castle.

The exterior of the castle is German Neo-renaissance style, while the about 160 rooms are finished in a variety of different styles, including German, Italian and English Renaissance, German Baroque, French Rococo etc.). The Council Room, the Florentin Room, the Moorish Salon, the Armories, the Playhouse, the Concert Hall, The Turkish Parlor and others, are all sumptuously decorated, and are among the most spectacular in the castle.

The smaller Pelişor Castle, completed in 1903 as the residence of the royal heirs, is situated a few hundred metres from Peleş. The communist regime confiscated all the royal properties in 1948, and Peleş Castle became a museum five years later. However, in the last years of the regime, the whole area was closed off to the public and the properties reserved for use by Ceauşescu. After 1990, Peleş and Pelişor Castles were reopened to visitors.



Sinaia Monastery

The resort of Sinaia ultimately developed around a religious settlement founded by a boyar after his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. Initially, it held twelve monks (a reflection of the twelve apostles of Christ), but their number increased as years passed. In the middle of the 19th century, a new church with more cells was built near the old Brâncovenesc-style church (a style characteristic to the architecture of Wallachia). The monastery bell was brought from Bucharest and it weights 1,700 kilograms. The Complex also contains the first religious museum in Romania, inaugurated in 1895, to celebrate the bicentennial of the monastery.



The Casino

The Casino, which is one of Sinaia's best known landmarks, was commissioned almost a century ago and built within one year. Prominent personalities of the time attended its inauguration, among them the Royal Family and the composer George Enescu. The composer subsequently bought a house in Sinaia which is now a museum. The Casino is situated on the site of Sinaia's first villa, just north of the town centre. Gambling and elegance made the Casino one of the irresistible attractions of Sinaia with as many as 800 visitors each day during the glory days. The elegant Casino now includes an international conference centre.

Sinaia Casino: 2, Carol I Boulevard
www.casino-sinaia.ro



Seasonal attractions

Sinaia is a lively year round resort. During winter it functions as a popular ski resort providing good slopes and facilities for skiers and snowboarders. The beautiful mountain scenery, woodlands and forest trails, and a selection of decent hotels and restaurants also make Sinaia attractive as a holiday destination in spring, summer and autumn. It also caters for climbers and mountain hiking with good hiking routes of various levels, and easy access by cable railways up to Cota 2000 (2000 metres altitude) from where you can reach the Bucegi plateau in few hours of hiking.

Curtea de Argeş - The Royal Necropolis

The voivodes and kings of Romania rest peacefully in a town that preserves its old glory.

Curtea de Argeş was the first capital of Wallachia, the territory that extended from the Carpathian ridges to the north down to the Danube and the Bărăgan Plain. The voivodes established their residence in the 'court' on the Argeş River during the 14th century. Many international relations in the South-East Europe of the 15th century were negotiated here. The first Mint and the first metropolis in the country were established here while the Church of Argeş Monastery, which was also constructed during this period, is one of the most valuable religious constructions in the area. Curtea de Argeş lost of its influence in during the Middle Ages as successive Princes moves the capital to Târgovişte and subsequently to Bucharest, At the end of the 19th century, Carol I built the Episcopal Palace, then, selected the Church of Argeş Monastery as the burial place for the Royal Family.



Argeş Monastery

The Church of Argeş Monastery, built at the beginning of the 15th century, during the rule of Neagoe Basarab stands in a French style park, in front of the Episcopal Palace. The exterior of the church is decorated in an Oriental style. The interior is dominated by twelve columns with floral decorations and the crypts of two medieval rulers and two royal couples. According to legend during the construction of the church the walls erected during the day unexplainably fell down every night. To break the curse, the church builder, Manole, is said to have immured Ana, his wife, into the walls of the church. Then, when the monastery was completed, Neagoe Basarab ordered that the scaffolding was pulled down so trapping Manole on the roof so that he could not build another church more beautiful than this monastery. Manole tried to jump off the roof, but he fell to his death and a spring of clear water appeared where he landed. Manole's well can still be visited.

Legend has it that the Fountain of Manole, a spring of clear water, appeared in the place where the head of the builders fell to the ground.

Curtea de Argeş Monastery: 1, Basarabilor Boulevard
The monastery can be visited from 8:00 to 20:00 in summer, and from 8:00 to 17:00 in winter.

Historical churches

The place of the former Princely Court is dominated by one of the most representative monuments of medieval Romanian architecture, Biserica Domnească (the Princely Church), built in the mid-14th century. While the exterior part is dominated by simple masonry, of river stones and bricks, the Byzantine interior part has an inestimable artistic value. The original painting is very well preserved, with more than 300 frescos representing biblical scenes. Biserica Domnească became a royal necropolis and metropolitan centre, enjoying a respected position in the spiritual life of the country, until the beginning of the 15th century, when the capital was moved to Târgoviște. A religious service is performed on Saint Nicholas' day, the day of patron of the church. The ruins of the 700-year old San Nicoară Church can be seen opposite to Biserica Domnească. Its high tower was a fire tower and observation point, but was also used to communicate by torches with Poienari Fortress, the castle of Vlad Țepeș, 25 kilometres up the Argeș Valley.

Biserica Domnească:
Strada Negru Vodă, nr. 2



Transfăgărașan Highway

Curtea de Argeș is situated close to Transfăgărașan Highway, one of the most spectacular roads in Europe. 20 kilometres north of the town, the road begins to wind up through thick forests, to the dam and lake Vidraru, then onwards corkscrewing round hairpin bends towards the Făgăraș ridge. It then passes through a kilometre long tunnel, climbs to a height of more than 2,000 metres, then abruptly descends down the other side of the Carpathian Mountains, into Transylvania. The Transfăgărașan Highway was opened in 1974, at a high cost both financially and as human effort. The road closes with the first snows, often as early as October and can stay closed until June or July. The ruin of Poienari Fortress is perched high above the Argeș Gorge on a crag overlooking the Curtea de Argeș end of the road. 1,500 steps lead steeply up through the trees to this small castle, the refuge of Vlad Țepeș (Dracula) who escaped here from the Ottoman Turks. The fortress was the last refuge of Wallachian rulers against the attackers.





Târgoviște - The Historic Capital of Wallachia

The former voivodal residence influenced the medieval and modern destiny of Romania

80 kilometres from Bucharest, in a region where the hills meet the plain, Târgoviște has a historical century-old inheritance. For more than three centuries, the city was the main economic, political, military and cultural centre of Wallachia. The ruins of Curtea Domnească (the Princely Court) give proof of the importance of the city at that time. Târgoviște was the Princely residence and capital for almost the whole period from the

15th to the 18th centuries, Târgoviște is the place where the ruler Mihai Viteazul (Michal the Brave) planned and pursued the first union of the Romanian Principalities. At the end of the 19th century, the city was modernized by the introduction of public lighting, the construction of the railway to Bucharest and the establishment of the first industrial enterprises.

The Princely Court

The Princely Court was the Residence of Wallachian rulers in Târgoviște. It comprised a complex of buildings where the family, courtiers and servants of high officials lived which is now a ruin with the foundations of rooms preserved. The complex still keeps the traces of the delimitations in areas of interest: the residential area, the area of military fortifications, royal gardens etc.

On either side of the Princely Court ruins there are two interesting churches - the 400 year old Mare Domnească Church, which has a large gallery comprising the portraits of local rulers, and Sfânta Vineri Church, the only architecture monument in Wallachia dating from the middle of the 15th century and kept in its original form up to these days.

The Court is situated near Chindia Tower, founded by Vlad Țepeș (Dracula) in the middle of the 15th century as a watchtower, fire tower and shelter for the treasury. The Chindia Tower contains an exhibition of documents, weapons and objects relating to the ruler Vlad Țepeș



Curtea Domnească Museum Complex: 181, Calea Domnească.
www.muzeu-dambovitene.ro

Târgu Jiu - The City of Brâncuși

Constantin Brâncuși was born in village of Hobița, near to Targu Jiu. Several of his most important works such as the Endless Column and the Table of Silence can be seen in a park in the town.

Târgu Jiu, which lies just to the south of the Carpathian Mountains, is built on the foundations of a Dacian village, surrounded by wild forests. Târgu Jiu is situated at the intersection of roads from the Danube, Transylvania and Banat. The Roman army passed during the wars to conquer Dacia. Later on, during the Middle Ages, it became a main commercial centre. The city takes its name from the Jiu River, which flows through it between the Carpathians and the Danube. Târgu Jiu has Romanian style architecture with Oriental, and French and German Renaissance influences.

Constantin Brâncuși was one of the most important sculptors of the 20th century. His works updated the plastic expression of sculpture and are displayed in museums all over the world. Brâncuși designed and built an open-air monumental ensemble in the centre of Târgu Jiu in 1938.

Three monumental sculptures - the Table of Silence, the Gate of the Kiss and the Endless Column - can be seen on Calea Eroilor (the Heroes' Street), an alley of more than one kilometre. The Table of Silence symbolises the meeting of the future heroes before the battle, and the 12 chairs around it are in form of clepsydras. The Gate of the Kiss moves you through to another life, but the sculpture is also a symbol of marriage. The most important piece of the ensemble is the Endless Column, almost 30 meters high, which is a tribute to the Romanians that died fighting in the 1st World War, and is a representation of the funeral pillars used in Southern Romania. The Calea Eroilor Monumental Ensemble in Târgu Jiu was included in the European Patrimony in 2003.

The memorial-house where Constantin Brâncuși was born can be visited in Hobița village, 24 kilometres from Târgu Jiu.





Constanța – The Magic of the Sea

One of the biggest cities in Romania combines the heritage of the past with modern amenities.

Constanța is the biggest Romanian port on the Black Sea and one of the main ports in Europe. Its history starts in the 7th century B.C., when its name was Tomis, which makes Constanța the oldest attested city on the Romanian territory. The importance of Tomis increased after it became part of the Roman Empire, especially during the reign of Constantine the Great from whose name the current name of the city derives.

Besides Romanians, the population of Constanța also includes Turkish, Tatars, Lipovans, Greeks and other minorities. The mixture of architectonic styles, due to the long cohabitation of minorities, makes Constanța one of the most charming cities of Romania.

The northern part of Constanța, Mamaia resort, is the largest beach resort along the Romanian Black Sea Coast.



The Casino

The symbolic image of Constanța is the white silhouette of the Casino over the blue of the sea. Placed on the promenade, the imposing Art Nouveau building was designed by a French architect and opened in 1910, in the presence of Prince Ferdinand, the future king of Romania. Shortly after, the casino became one of the most visited in Europe and attracted people passionate about gambling all over the world. During the war, the casino became the target of bombardments, but it suffered only little damages. It was transformed into a campaign hospital during the war period, but afterwards it turned back to its activity and continued to give rise to intense passions among the lovers of luxury.



The Archaeology Museum

At the end of the 19th century, the town extension works led to the discovery of significant archaeological remains from the time of ancient Tomis. To keep them within the national patrimony, the authorities of that time founded the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța, an institution hosting over 430,000 exhibits, among which a very valuable collection of coins. An impressive 4th century Roman mosaic is also on display. The three terraces of the edifice connected the town and the ancient port, and important part of the original polychrome mosaic can also be seen nowadays.



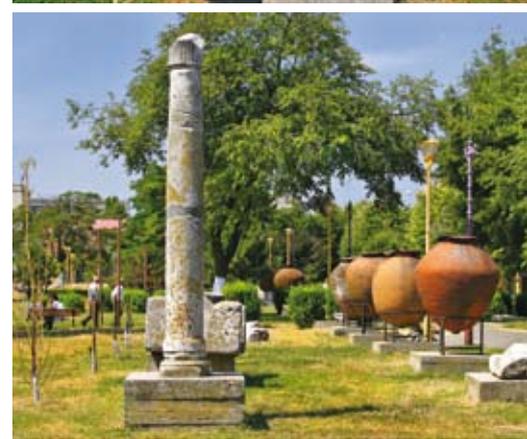
The Port

The history of Constanța, can be traced back to the Ancient times, and is closely linked to the activity of the Port. The large port of Constanța is situated at the crossing of important commercial roads and is one of the key distribution centres serving Central and Eastern Europe. There is also a popular yachting Marina below the old town.



Dolphinarium

The Natural Sciences Complex in the northern part of the city near Mamaia includes a Dolphinarium where dolphins and sea lions are trained, a planetarium, and observatory and a mini-zoo. Spectacular trainings of dolphins and sea lions, exotic birds, a planetarium, an astronomic observer and a mini-zoo - all these are part of the Natural Sciences Museum Complex, situated in the Northern part of the city, close to Mamaia resort. The Dolphinarium was inaugurated in 1972 and it is the first one in the South-Eastern Europe. The two - covered and open-air pools were recently upgraded modernized in the last years, and three dolphins were brought here from China in 2010. The Complex also includes a public Aquarium (inaugurated in 1958), situated on the promenade, close to the Casino. Visitors can see over 120 species of aquatic creatures in its 57 display water tanks.



Aqua Magic

An aquatic entertainment complex is placed at the entrance of Mamaia resort. Both the mood for adventure and the desire for relaxation are catered for at Aqua Magic, the biggest aquatic park in Romania. You can get tanned sitting on a chaise-longue and drinking a cocktail or you can float on a swim belt carried by the lazy artificial river, but if you are looking for hard sensations, there are tortuous toboggans you pass through at full speed. 2 of the 14 park attractions are exclusively intended for children. The pools, waterfalls and basins totalize an active water surface equal to that of a football field.



Mangalia - The Southern Star

The oldest resort of the Romanian Black Sea Coast can trace its history back to the 6th century BC.

Close to the Bulgarian border, Mangalia is situated on the place of the old citadel of Callatis, a Greek colony established on the Black Sea coast in the 6th century B.C. The name of Mangalia came from the Tatars who invaded the citadel in the Middle Age and who still form one of the main ethnic minorities in the town. The sulphurous waters known ever since the Ancient times made Mangalia the first balneo-climateric resort in Romania. The annual temperature average is the highest in the country, and many Romanian artists of the last century used to come here attracted by the Mediterranean-like climate and the fine sand of large beaches, bathed by the waves of the Black Sea. After taking a sea bath or the balnear treatment sessions, you can pass by the "Esmahan Sultan" mosque, the oldest mosque in Romania, built in the 16th century. For those interested in antiquities, the Callatis Archaeology Museum exhibits a rich collection of prehistoric and Greek-Roman objects, while those with technical interests can visit the Marine Museum and its collection of naval and anti-aircraft artillery.

Another key attraction is the Mangalia Stud Farm, the biggest one in South-Eastern Europe, situated between the road to Constanța and the shore of the Black Sea, only three kilometres from the town. Visitors can admire the gorgeous Arab horses, and they can also take a horseback or a horse-drawn carriage ride along the promenade.

Vama Veche, situated twelve kilometres to the South, right on the border with Bulgaria, draws non-conformist tourists of all ages. A former village of fishermen, Vama Veche is famous for its concerts and clubs on the beach, where you can dance directly on the sand, but also for the rich gastronomic offer.



Photo: Sorin Toma, www.sorintoma.ro; Agerpres, foto.agerpres.ro;
Archive of ASTRA Sibiu National Museum Complex

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