

A Complete Guide to Romania

Natural Wonders & Cultural Treasures

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Introduction to Romania

Romania offers an extraordinary blend of natural wonders, medieval history, and authentic village life. From the mist-shrouded peaks of the Carpathians to the pristine beaches of the Black Sea, Romania rewards travellers with experiences that feel both timeless and undiscovered.

This guide will help you discover Romania's diverse attractions, from dramatic mountain landscapes and serene lakes to historical castles and vibrant cities. You will find that Romania combines Eastern and Western European influences into a unique cultural tapestry that has preserved traditions lost elsewhere in Europe.

Mountains & Natural Wonders

Carpathian Mountains

The backbone of Romania, covering about 37% of the country's territory.

Transylvanian Alps (Southern Carpathians)

Făgăraş Mountains - Highest range with peaks over 2,500m, including Moldoveanu Peak (2,544m), Romania's tallest mountain

Transfăgărăşan Highway - One of the world's most spectacular roads, crossing the mountains with hairpin turns and dramatic views

Bucegi Mountains - Famous for unusual rock formations like the Sphinx and Babele (The Old Women)

Piatra Craiului - Limestone ridge with dramatic 25km-long crest and rich biodiversity

Eastern Carpathians

Ceahlău Massif - Sacred mountain in Romanian folklore with panoramic views

Bicaz Gorge - Spectacular limestone canyon with 300m high walls

Red Lake (Lacul Roşu) - Natural dam lake formed after a landslide in 1837

Călimani Mountains - Volcanic mountains with the 12 Apostles rock formation

Western Carpathians (Apuseni)

The Apuseni Mountains offer some of Romania's most spectacular karst landscapes and cave systems.

Bihor Mountains - Known for impressive cave systems and waterfalls

Scărișoara Ice Cave - Holds one of the largest underground glaciers in Europe (26,000 cubic meters of ice)

Wind Cave - The longest cave in Romania with a total gallery length of 52 km

Padis Plateau - Karst plateau with sinkholes, caves, and gorges featuring spectacular formations

Turda Gorge - Limestone canyon with vertical walls up to 300m

Cetățile Ponorului (The Fortress of Ponor) - Massive cave entrance dubbed "The Gateway to the Underworld"

Bears' Cave (Peștera Urșilor) - Stunning cave with fossils of prehistoric cave bears

Vârtop Cave - Contains 62,000-year-old human footprint fossils

Glavoi Meadow - Alpine meadows with panoramic views and biodiversity

Varasau Waterfall - Multi-tiered waterfall in pristine forest setting

Danube Delta

UNESCO World Heritage Site and third-largest biodiversity in the world.

Letea Forest - The oldest natural reservation in Romania with subtropical vegetation and wild horses

Sulina - Easternmost point of Romania and once-thriving port town

Sfântu Gheorghe - Traditional fishing village where the Danube meets the Black Sea

Lake Razim - Large freshwater lake complex with excellent birdwatching

Chilia Branch - The northern tributary of the Danube, forming the border with Ukraine

Activities in the Delta

Birdwatching - Over 300 species including pelicans, herons, and eagles

Boat Tours - Traditional wooden boats (lotca) or modern cruises through channels

Fishing - Some of Europe's best freshwater fishing

Traditional Villages - Authentic settlements like Mila 23 and Crişan

Black Sea Coast

Romania's 275km coastline combines sandy beaches with ancient history.

Major Resort Areas

Mamaia - Narrow strip of land between Lake Siutghiol and the sea, with fine sand beaches

Constanţa - Romania's oldest continuously inhabited city and major port

Eforie - Split into Eforie Nord and Sud, known for therapeutic mud treatments

Vama Veche - Bohemian village at the Bulgarian border with a free-spirited atmosphere

2 Mai - Quieter alternative to Vama Veche with pristine beaches

Neptun-Olimp - Resort complex built during communist era, now revitalized

Saturn, Venus, Jupiter - Chain of resorts named after planets

Unique Coastal Features

Corbu Beach - Wild, undeveloped beach with natural sand dunes

Cape Doloşman - Promontory with ruins of ancient Argamum fortress

Lake Techirghiol - Salt lake famous for therapeutic mud

Lakes & Water Features

Mountain Lakes

Bucura Lake (Retezat Mountains) - Romania's largest glacial lake at 8.9 hectares

Bâlea Lake - Glacial lake accessible by the Transfăgărășan Highway

Red Lake (Lacul Roșu) - Natural dam lake formed after a 1837 landslide

Sfânta Ana Lake - The only volcanic crater lake in Eastern Europe

Vidraru Lake - Stunning reservoir on the Argeș River with 42 km shoreline

Tarnița Lake - Popular recreational lake near Cluj-Napoca

Colibița Lake - Reservoir in the Călimani Mountains with emerald waters

Lowland Lakes

Lake Snagov - Where Vlad the Impaler is allegedly buried on the island monastery

Techirghiol Lake - Salt lake famous for therapeutic black mud

Amara Lake - Mineral lake with health resorts

Siutghiol Lake - Large freshwater lake adjacent to Mamaia resort

Razim-Sinoe Lagoon Complex - Second largest lake complex in Romania

Gorges & Canyons

Bicaz Gorge - Dramatic limestone canyon in Transylvania and Moldova

Turda Gorge - Spectacular limestone formation near the famous salt mine

Seven Ladders Canyon (Canionul Șapte Scări) - Equipped with metal ladders along waterfalls

Nera Gorges - Wild canyon with the clearest waters in Romania

Râmeț Gorge - Hidden gem in the Trascău Mountains

Waterfalls

Bigăr Waterfall - Once named one of the most unique in the world

Cailor Waterfall - Romania's highest waterfall at 90m

Văioaga Waterfall - Hidden in Nera Gorges-Beușnița National Park

Duruitoarea Waterfall - Located in the dramatic Bicz Gorge

Beușnița Waterfall - Series of cascades over moss-covered rocks

Historical Castles & Fortresses

Famous Castles

Peleș Castle (Sinaia) - Neo-Renaissance masterpiece, former royal residence with 160 opulently decorated rooms

Bran Castle (near Brașov) - Marketable as "Dracula's Castle," though Vlad Țepeș had limited connections to it

Corvin Castle (Hunedoara) - One of Europe's largest castles with Gothic-Renaissance architecture

Cantacuzino Castle (Bușteni) - Neo-Romanian style mansion with mountain backdrop

Sturdza Castle (Miclăușeni) - Neo-Gothic castle surrounded by forest

Fortified Churches & Saxon Heritage

Viscri - UNESCO-listed village with fortified church, championed by King Charles III

Biertan - Triple-walled church fortress with unique door lock mechanism

Prejmer - Europe's largest fortified church with 272 rooms built into its walls

Harman - Impressive church fortress with seven towers

Saschiz - Gothic church with distinctive blue tower

Citadels & Medieval Fortresses

Alba Carolina Citadel (Alba Iulia) - Star-shaped Vauban fortress

Râșnov Fortress - Peasant fortress overlooking Transylvanian plains

Poenari Citadel - Authentic ruins of Vlad the Impaler's fortress

Rupea Citadel - Recently restored fortress on basalt rock

Deva Fortress - Medieval fortress on volcanic hill

Enisala Fortress (Dobrogea) - Genoese fortress with views over lagoons

Cities & Urban Areas

Major Cities

Bucharest

Parliament Palace - World's second-largest administrative building

Old Town (Lipscani) - Revitalized historic quarter

Village Museum - Open-air ethnographic museum showcasing rural architecture

Cișmigiu Gardens and Herăstrău Park - Historic green spaces

Sibiu

Large Square and Small Square - Central plazas with merchant houses

Bridge of Lies - Ornate iron bridge with romantic legends

ASTRA Museum - One of Europe's largest open-air museums

Brașov

Council Square - Heart of the old town

Black Church - Largest Gothic church in Eastern Europe

Tampa Mountain - Cable car to panoramic views

Rope Street - One of Europe's narrowest streets

Sighișoara

Clock Tower - Symbol of the city with panoramic views

Birth House of Vlad Țepeș - Now a restaurant

Church on the Hill - Reached by covered wooden staircase

Timișoara

Union Square - Baroque plaza with vibrant café culture

Victory Square - Dominated by Orthodox Cathedral

Roses Park and Botanical Garden - Beautiful green spaces

Navigable Bega Canal - 114.5 kilometers, connecting with the Tisa-Danube navigation system on Serbian territory

Iași

Palace of Culture - Neo-Gothic landmark

Three Holy Hierarchs Monastery - Unique stone lacework exterior

Copou Park - Historic park with Mihai Eminescu's Linden Tree

Cluj-Napoca

Union Square - Central plaza with St. Michael's Church

Central Park - Urban green space with casino and lake

Botanical Garden - One of Romania's largest

Oradea

Union Square - Showcase of Secession architecture

Black Eagle Palace - Stunning passage with stained glass

Crișul Repede Riverfront - Recently revitalized area

Smaller Urban Gems

Târgu Mureș - City with Hungarian influences and Culture Palace

Mediaș - Medieval town with leaning tower

Târgu Jiu - Home to Constantin Brâncuși's sculptural ensemble

Suceava - Former capital of Moldavia with princely fortress

Alba Iulia - Site of the 1918 Unification of Romania

Traditional Villages & Rural Life

Maramureș Region

Săpânța - Famous for the Merry Cemetery with colorful tombstones

Breb - Traditional village championed by King Charles

Ieud - Home to the oldest wooden church in Maramureș

Wooden Churches of Maramureș - UNESCO heritage with tall spires and unique carpentry

Bârsana Monastery - Wooden monastery complex with tall spire

Bucovina Region

Ciocănești - Village where every house is painted with traditional motifs

Vama - Center for traditional egg painting

Marginea - Famous for unique black pottery

Moldovița - Village near the painted monastery of the same name

Transylvanian Villages

Rimetea/Torockó - White houses with dark trim against limestone mountains

Cârța - Village with Cistercian monastery ruins

Holbav - Mountain village with traditional architecture

Sibiel - Home to Romania's largest collection of icons on glass

Copsa Mare - Preserved Saxon village with fortified church

Unique Rural Areas

Biertan - UNESCO village with fortified church

Bucharest to Constanța train line - Views of the Romanian Plain and traditional villages

Hațeg Country - Rural region with Roman ruins and dinosaur fossils

Apuseni Mountains - Scattered mountain homesteads (locally known as "crânguri")

Monasteries & Religious Sites

Painted Monasteries of Bucovina

UNESCO World Heritage Sites with exterior frescoes.

Voroneț - Known as the "Sistine Chapel of the East" with distinctive blue

Moldovița - Fortress-like monastery with exterior paintings

Sucevița - Most well-preserved with complete exterior paintings

Humor - Known for its red-tone frescoes

Arbore - Simple church with valuable paintings

Wooden Churches

Wooden Churches of Maramureș - UNESCO sites with distinctive tall spires

Surdești - Once the tallest wooden building in Europe

Ieud - Contains the oldest known document in Romanian

Budești - Contains chain mail from crusades and a wooden helmet

Important Orthodox Monasteries

Putna - Burial place of Stephen the Great and important cultural center

Cozia - Medieval monastery on the Olt River with Byzantine architecture

Horezu - UNESCO site with important ceramic center nearby

Curtea de Argeș - Cathedral with unique twisted towers and royal tombs

Prislop - Popular pilgrimage site in Transylvania

Dervent - Known for its healing spring

Sâmbăta de Sus (Brâncoveanu) - "Cathedral of the Făgăraș Mountains"

Rohia - Mountain monastery with important library

Neamț Monastery - One of the oldest in Romania with important scriptorium

Other Religious Sites

Snagov Monastery - Island monastery said to contain Vlad Țepeș's tomb

Stavropoleos Church - Beautiful Brâncovenesc-style church (Bucharest)

Densus Church - Oldest active stone church in Romania with unusual architecture

Cârța Monastery - Cistercian ruins in Transylvania

Rock Churches of Buzău Mountains - Medieval hermitages carved into cliffs

Natural Parks & Protected Areas

Retezat National Park - Ancient landscapes with over 80 glacial lakes

Domogled-Valea Cernei - Diverse ecosystems with thermal springs

Cheile Nerei-Beușnița - Waterfalls and turquoise lakes

Cozia National Park - Steep mountains alongside the Olt River

Piatra Craiului National Park - Narrow limestone ridge with rich biodiversity

Călimani National Park - Volcanic landscapes with the 12 Apostles formation

Vânători-Neamț Natural Park - European bison reintroduction area

Măcin Mountains National Park - Ancient eroded mountains in Dobrogea

Apuseni Natural Park - Protecting the Western Carpathians' karst landscape

Seasonal & Cultural Experiences

Winter Activities

Poiana Brașov - Romania's premier ski resort

Sinaia - Historic ski resort with royal connections

Predeal - Highest town in Romania with multiple ski slopes

Straja - Family-friendly ski resort in the Western Carpathians

Christmas Markets - Sibiu, Cluj, Brașov, and Bucharest host atmospheric markets

Summer Festivals

Sighișoara Medieval Festival - Historic reenactments in the medieval citadel

Sibiu International Theatre Festival - One of the most important theatre and performing arts festivals in the world, and the third biggest after the Festival d'Avignon and the Edinburgh International Festival

Hora de la Prislop - Traditional dancing in Maramureș mountains

Sânziene/Midsummer - Celebrations on June 24 with flower crowns

Nedeile - Mountain festivals celebrating pastoral traditions

Sărbătoarea Teiului (Linden Tree Celebration) - Iași folk festival

Electric Castle - Electronic to rock music festival at the medieval Bánffy Castle in Transylvania

Untold Festival - One of the most important electronic music festivals in the world held in Cluj Napoca

Summer Well - Indie-centric music festival in the historic Domeniul Știrbey estate near Bucharest

Traditional Celebrations

Easter Painted Eggs - Especially in Bucovina region

Mărțișor - March 1st tradition with red and white symbolic threads

Călușarii - Ritual healing dance in Oltenia region (UNESCO heritage)

Jocul Caprelor (The Goat Dance) - Traditional ritual dating back to the 17th century

Winter Traditions - Bear dances, goat dances, and caroling in Moldova and Maramureș

Hiking Trails

Via Transilvanica - 1400 km hiking trail crossing Transylvania, Bucovina and Banat regions (10 counties, 400 communities and 8 UNESCO World Heritage sites)

Practical Information

Best Time to Visit

Spring (May-June) - Wildflowers in mountains, moderate temperatures

Summer (July-August) - Beach season, mountain hiking, but hot in cities

Autumn (September-October) - Beautiful foliage, wine harvest, fewer crowds

Winter (December-February) - Christmas markets, skiing, winter traditions

Each season in Romania offers distinct experiences. Spring brings lush green landscapes and Easter celebrations. Summer is ideal for Black Sea holidays and mountain trekking. Autumn offers golden forests and wine festivals. Winter transforms the mountain resorts into ski paradises while cities host magical Christmas markets.

Transportation

Rail - Extensive network but ageing infrastructure

Roads - Improving motorway system, but many mountain roads are slow

Domestic Flights - Connect major cities like Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara

River Transportation - Danube cruises and Delta boats

Accommodation Types

Rural Guesthouses (Pensiuni) - Authentic experiences with local food

Mountain Chalets (Cabane) - Basic accommodation in hiking areas

Agrotourism Farms - Working farms offering accommodation

International Hotel Chains - Present in major cities

Regional Romanian Cuisine

Transylvania - Hearty meat dishes, Hungarian influences

Moldova - Rich stews, poultry dishes, sweet breads

Maramureș - Horinca plum brandy, smoked meats, sheep cheeses

Dobrogea - Fish dishes, Turkish and Greek influences

Bucovina - Mushroom dishes, trout, sweet pastries

Banat - Central European influences, complex pastries

Oltenia - Spicier dishes, Turkish influences

Off the Beaten Path

Lesser-Known Destinations

Land of Hațeg - Dinosaur geopark with medieval churches

Țara Lăpușului - Traditional region between Cluj and Maramureș

Almăj Depression - Traditional area with beautiful countryside

Buzău Land - Geologically unique area with mud volcanoes and amber

Vrancea Mountains - Remote wilderness with unique traditions

Unique Natural Features

Focul Viu (Living Fire) - Natural eternal flame in Buzău county

Mud Volcanoes - Bubbling mud cones in Buzău county

Trovants (Growing Stones) - Unusual geological formations that appear to grow

Detunata - Basalt columns in Apuseni Mountains

Grădina Zmeilor (Dragon's Garden) - Unusual rock formations

Salt Mountains of Slănic - Eroded salt deposits creating unusual landscapes

Hidden Historical Gems

Dacian Fortresses of the Orăştie Mountains - UNESCO pre-Roman ruins

Rupescian Churches of Buzău - Cave churches and hermitages

Constanța Roman Mosaics - Extensive Roman mosaics by the Black Sea

Ada Kaleh - Submerged island fortress under Iron Gates Dam

Călugăreni Battlefield - Site of Wallachian victory against Ottoman forces

Planning Your Visit

Sample Itineraries

Classic Romania (10 Days): Bucharest - Sinaia - Braşov - Sighişoara - Sibiu - Cluj

Natural Wonders (14 Days): Bucegi - Făgăraş - Apuseni - Retezat - Danube Delta

Cultural Heritage (7 Days): Painted Monasteries - Maramureş - Saxon Fortified Churches

Black Sea Holiday (7 Days): Constanța - Mamaia - Vama Veche - Danube Delta day trips

Transportation Tips

Consider hiring a car for mountain areas

Trains connect major cities but can be slow ([Tickets](#))

Coaches - Intercity bus schedules, ticket prices, itineraries ([Tickets](#))

Shuttle services run between major tourist destinations

Local guides are invaluable in remote areas

Local Contacts

National Tourism Information Centres in major cities

Mountain Rescue (Salvamont): 0-SALVAMONT (+40 725 826 668)

Emergency Number: 112

Sustainable Tourism

Stay in locally owned accommodations

Support traditional craftspeople

Respect protected areas and wildlife

Consider carbon offsets for travel