

1. About Romania

Geographic Features and Attractions

Geographic Location

Romania is situated in the South-Eastern part of Central Europe, between Eastern Europe and the Balkan Peninsula. Its frontier of 3,185 km separates it from Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro (W & SW), Bulgaria (S), the Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (NE & E). Lying at the crossroads of the major routes between the Western and Eastern world, Romania has always played an important geopolitical role for the stability of the whole continent. With a surface area of 238,391 sq km (4.8% of Europe), Romania ranks 11th in continental Europe and 79th in the World.

Landscape

Romania's natural landscape is almost evenly distributed between mountains (31%), hills (33%), and plains (36%). These varied landforms spread rather symmetrically from the Carpathian Mountains, reaching over 2,400 m altitude (maximum altitude - the Moldoveanu Peak of 2,544 m), to the Danube Delta, which is just a few meters above sea level. The range of the Carpathians extends over 1,000 km through the centre of the country, covering an area of 70,000 sq. km. These mountains are of low to medium altitude and are no wider than 100 km. They are cut by deep valleys and crossed by several major rivers. Another distinguishing feature is represented by the many eroded platforms that provide tablelands at relatively high altitudes. There are permanent settlements here at above 1,200 m. Romania's Carpathians are differentiated into three segments: the Eastern Carpathians, the Southern Carpathians or the Transylvanian Alps, and the Western Carpathians. Enclosed within the great arch of the Carpathians lie the undulating plains and low hills of the Transylvanian Plateau - the largest tableland in the country and the heartland of Romania. This important agricultural region also contains large deposits of natural gas and salt. To the South and East of the Carpathians, the Carpathian foothills form a fringe of rolling terrain ranging from 396 to 1,006 m in altitude. The symmetry of Romania's landscape continues with the Getic Tableland to the South of the Carpathian foothills, the Moldavian Tableland in the East and the Dobrogea Tableland in the South-East between the Danube and the Black Sea. The Carpathian foothills and the tableland areas provide good conditions for human settlement and are important areas for fruit growing, viticulture, and other agricultural activities. They also contain large deposits of brown coal and natural gas. Beyond the Carpathian foothills and tablelands, the plains spread South and West. In the Southern parts of the country lies the Lower Danube Plain. Romania's lowest land is found on the Northern edge of the Dobrogea region, in the Danube Delta. The delta is a triangular swampy area of marshes, floating reed islands, and sandbanks, where the Danube ends its journey of almost 3,000 km. The Danube Delta provides a large part of the country's fish production, and its reed is used in the production of cellulose. In August 1990, UNESCO declared the Danube Delta a reservation of the biosphere. It includes the delta, the Razim-Sinoe complex of lagoons and the Danube valley up to Cotul Pisicii, covering an area of 591.200 ha. This represents 2.5% of Romania's territory.

Tourist attractions

Beside the beautiful mountain landscapes, there are some other tourist attractions that are worth mentioning:

●The Black Sea

Romania's main sea resorts are all located on 45 miles of fine sandy beaches and include Mamaia, Eforie, Neptun, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn and Mangalia.

The Black Sea coast has long been known for cures of arthritic, rheumatic, internal and nervous disorders.

●The Danube Delta

It's a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site. The waters of the Danube, which flow into the Black Sea, form the largest and best preserved of Europe's deltas - The Danube Delta (Delta Dunării). It is also the only delta in the world stretching from west to east instead of north south. The Danube Delta is home to more than 300 migratory and permanent bird species, to 160 kinds of fish that include caviar-bearing sturgeon, and to 800 plant families.

This wetland preserve covers more than 1,678,000 acres (2,622 sq. miles) with channels and canals widening into tree-fringed lakes, reed islands, numerous lakes and marshes, oak forests intertwined with lianas and creepers, dunes and traditional fishermen villages.

●Castles

Romania's numerous castles best illustrate the country's medieval heritage. Many castles and fortresses in Romania feature unique architectural elements and styles that reflect local traditions and customs. While castles built between the 14th and the 18th century are strong and austere fortresses meant mainly for defense against invaders, those erected beginning with the late 1800s are commanding and luxurious residences.

World literature found valuable sources of inspiration in some of Romania's castles, the most famous novels written about them being "The Castle from the Carpathians" by Jules Verne and "Dracula" by Bram Stoker.

Romania's best-known castles are:

●Peleş – The Ex- Royal Castle

Considered by many one of the most beautiful castles in all Europe, Peleş Castle is a masterpiece of German Neo-Renaissance architecture. Commissioned by King Carol I in 1873 and completed in 1883, Peleş' interiors are an opulent display of elegant design and historical artefacts. Its 160 rooms are adorned with the finest examples of European art, Murano crystal chandeliers, German stained-glass windows, walls covered with Cordoba leather, Meissen and Sevres porcelains, ebony and ivory sculptures. Almost adjacent to Peleş Castle is Pelişor ("Little Peleş"). King Ferdinand, who succeeded Carol I, intended to use Peleş Castle as a summer residence. Supposedly he found Peleş too big and overwhelming, so he commissioned the smaller, Art Nouveau style Pelişor Castle. Pelişor's 70 rooms feature a unique collection of turn-of-the century Viennese furniture and Tiffany and Lalique glassware. Peleş and Pelişor are located 3 miles northeast of downtown Sinaia.

●Bran – The Dracula's Castle

This fortified medieval castle, often referred to as Dracula's Castle, was built in 1377 by the Teutonic Knights to protect nearby Braşov from invaders. It also served as a customs point. The castle's rooms and towers surround an inner courtyard. Some rooms are connected through underground passages to the inner courtyard. In 1920, the people of Braşov who

owned the castle offered it as a gift to Queen Maria of Romania, and the castle soon became her favorite residence.

Bran is home to a rich collection of Romanian and foreign furniture and art produced between 14th and the 19th century. The castle sits atop a 200 ft. high rock overlooking the picturesque village of Bran. On the grounds below there is an open-air ethnographic museum of old village buildings exhibiting furniture, household objects and costumes.

● **Hunedoara - The Castle of the Corvinus family**

Built in the 14th century, on the place of an old fortification, on a rock at whose bottom flows a little river the castle is a commanding building, with high and diversely colored roofs, towers, windows and balconies adorned with stone carvings.

Being one of the most important properties of John Hunyadi, the castle was transformed during his rule. It became a sumptuous home, not only a stronghold. With the passing of the years, the masters of the castle modified its look, adding towers, halls and guest rooms. In the wing of the castle called the Mantle we find a painting regarding the legend of the raven which gave the name of the descendants of John Hunyadi: Corvini (Latin for raven "corb") The castle was restored and transformed into a museum.

● **The Painted Monasteries**

Among the most picturesque treasures of Romania are the painted churches located in Bukovina, many of which are protected by UNESCO as part of the world heritage. These richly decorated houses of worship are feature exterior paintings that have survived the elements since the 15th century.

The Voroneț Monastery in Bucovina, founded in 1488 by Stephen the Great, is widely known throughout Europe as "the Sistine Chapel of the East," because of its interior and exterior wall paintings, frescoes featuring a color that has come to be known as Voroneț blue. The frescoes of this church and of many other painted churches in the Bucovina region illustrate biblical scenes, prayers, and episodes of sacred hymns and themes such as The Last Judgment and The Ladder of St. John, with the colorful and detailed rich representations of apostles, evangelists, philosophers, martyrs, angels and demons. Beside their vivid frescoes, the painted monasteries are famous for the original way of depicting beliefs or events: Sucevița Monastery with its unique "Ladder of Virtue"; Gura Humorului, featuring the devil amusingly depicted as a woman, and Moldovița, where a monumental scene of the Siege of Constantinople is displayed. Easily accessible from the cities of Suceava or Câmpulung Moldovenesc the "painted" monasteries' area is also known for its traditional villages, its spectacular scenery and for the nearby vineyards of Cotnari.

● **The Maramureș Region**

Quiet villages and gentle, welcoming people may be the words that best describe the Maramureș region, situated in northwestern Romania. Centuries-old traditions are still alive in the rural areas of Maramureș. In late afternoon, old women sit outside their gates coaxing coarse wool onto spindles.

Many still favour the traditional dress, white flounced blouses and striped woven aprons covering full black skirts, headscarves and "opinci", a sort of leather ballet slipper from which heavy yarn criss-crosses over thick socks. On Sundays, even little girls wear this garb.

Winter Sports Resorts and Facilities

Close to Bucharest (around 125-135 km away), in Prahova County, three famous resorts are located. Sinaia is the most important, with ski slopes up to 2,000 m altitude for both advanced

and beginners; Azuga has two ski slopes opened in the recent years; Buşteni is already becoming a classic destination for snow-lovers, having one of the oldest slopes in Romania. Recently, work has begun on a new slope. All these resorts are located between altitudes of 800 and 950 m, while the slopes reach even 2,000 m in length. There are many hiking tracks starting from these resorts, leading to famous natural monuments like "Babele" and the "Sphinx".

Păltiniş, a resort located at an altitude of 1,400 m, in Sibiu County, in the north of Cindrel Mountains, offers the best conditions for skiing and snowboarding, as well as hikes in the environs.

Vatra Dornei (Suceava County) gained fame as one of the best tourist resorts in the north of the country, being also well known as a spa.

Beside these resorts, skiing facilities are to be found in different corners of the country: Aries Valley or Băişoara Mountains in Apuseni Mountains; Bran in Bucegi Mountains, Sugas near Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna County), Harghita, Mădăraş and Izvoru Mureşului in Harghita County, etc.

The national education system in Romania

As an EU country, Romania currently applies the Bologna system, especially in high education, which means that the study period is structured as three years for bachelor's degree, two years for master's degree and three years for Phd studies.