

Crişana & Banat



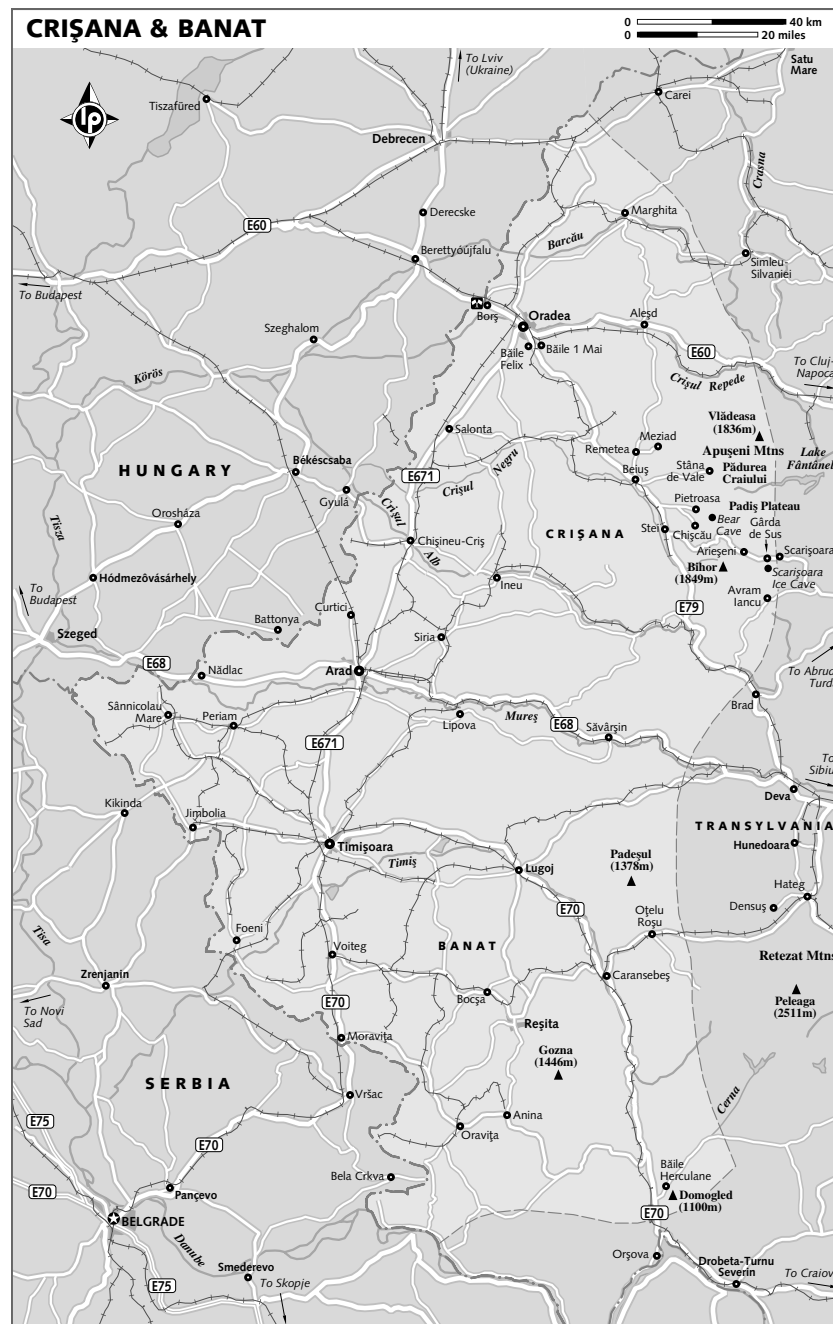
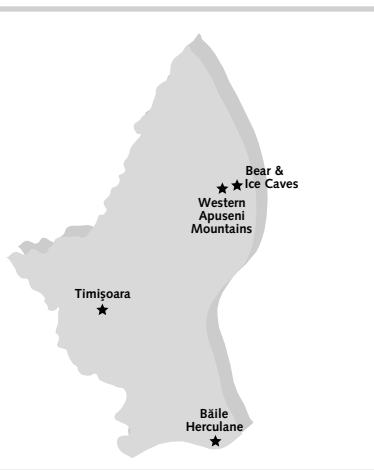
The areas of Crişana (north of the Mureş River) and Banat (to the south) have a lively, spiritual autonomy found nowhere else in Romania, driven by their sense of regional identity, ethnic diversity and tangible Habsburg influence. Oradea, Arad and Timişoara were once large military fortresses marking the southeastern extent of Austria-Hungary, while being culturally and politically married to Yugoslavia's Vojvodina and Hungary's Great Plain. Following WWI, Crişana and Banat were dealt out to Romania, despite their predominantly Hungarian populations, and even now they have more in common with Subotica (Serbia) and Szeged (Hungary) than with the rest of Romania.

It was in the stylish city of Timişoara that the seeds of the 1989 revolution were sown, a fact that has left these charming and proud people with a scarcely concealed grin. Hungarian and Yugoslav TV have given the region stronger links to the West, evidenced by cutting-edge restaurants, clubs and a forward-looking society.

While flaunting three of Romania's most 'European' cities, in both essence and crumbling Habsburg architecture, the regions are also sprinkled with tempting offerings such as the soaring Apuşeni Mountains, ski runs, deep caves, gorges, waterfalls and curative thermal waters. Zigzag from giddy excitement to recuperative leisure all within a few hours' drive.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stew in the soothing thermal waters of Băile Herculane's **Roman baths** (p221)
- Look at (but don't touch!) the ancient stalactites and stalagmites in the magnificent **Bear Cave** (p227) and the surreal **Scărişoara Ice Cave** (p227)
- Eavesdrop on a candle-lit service in Timişoara's beautiful **Metropolitan Cathedral** (p218)
- Ski, hike, cycle or gaze stupidly at the western **Apuşeni Mountains** (p226)
- Indulge in a lazy day in Timişoara, starting at the **outdoor pools** (p218), then clean up for an evening at the **opera** (p219) and finally take a nightcap in a **Piaţa Victoriei** (p216) bar



HISTORY

Historical Crișana and Banat are today divided between western Romania, eastern Hungary and northern Yugoslavia. First settled in the 6th century BC, by AD 106 the region was part of the Roman province of Dacia. From the end of the 9th century until the Ottoman conquest of Crișana and Banat in 1552 the region was under Hungarian rule.

In 1699 the Turks relinquished Hungary to Austria but held Crișana and Banat until their defeat by Habsburg prince Eugene of Savoy in 1716. In 1718 Crișana and Banat became part of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 split the territory among Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia, setting Crișana and Banat's current borders.

BANAT

TIMIȘOARA

☎ 256 / pop 321,930

Timișoara (tee-mee-*shwa*-ra) stunned the world and disrupted sleep for evil dictators everywhere when its incensed residents insti-

gated the 1989 revolution. Romania's fourth largest city is known by locals as Primul Oraș Liber (First Free Town), for it was here that anti-Ceaușescu protests first exceeded the Securitate's capacity for violent suppression, eventually punching Ceaușescu's ticket to Hell (see boxed text, below). Less courageous, but still noteworthy achievements include being the first city in Europe to have electric street lamps (1884) and the second to introduce horse-drawn trams (1867). With its charming Mediterranean air, regal Habsburg buildings and a cultural and sporting scene that's unequalled in Romania, it's a city that's loved by residents and tourists alike.

Timișoara, dubbed the 'city of flowers' after the ring of pretty parks that surrounds it, is one of the country's most developed and multicultural cities, comprising strong Hungarian, German and Serbian minorities. In recent years the city has been designated as 'Romania's economic showcase', spurring debate as to whether the 'Timișoara Model' can be applied to other cities.

In addition to being superior to Bucharest as a Romanian road/rail access point from

the west, Timișoara is the hub of Carpatair (p220), Romania's thriving semi-budget airline. 'Flashpackers' and people with an aversion to spine-jangling overnight train trips will want to make Timișoara their Romanian base of operations.

Orientation

Confusingly, the northern train station (Timișoara-Nord) is west of the city centre. From here, walk east along B-dul Regele Ferdinand (which becomes B-dul Republicii) to the Opera House and Piața Victoriei. To the north is Piața Libertății; Piața Unirii, the old town square, is two blocks further north. Timișoara's bus station is beside the Idsefin Market, three blocks from the northern train station. Take B-dul General Drăgălina south from the train station to the canal, cross the bridge and head west to the next bridge.

MAPS

Hotfoot it around Timișoara with Amco Press' *City Plan* (1:10,000; €3), sold in most bookshops. There is a tourist map in the bilingual city guide *What? When? Where? Timișoara*, available free all over the city. Be aware that many street names have changed but many maps and locals still use the old names.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Humanitas (Map p217; ☎ 433 180; Str F Mercy 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri) Sells some English-language books about Romania.

Librăria Mihai Eminescu (Map p217; ☎ 494 123; Piața Victoriei 2; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Stocks a less exhaustive range than Humanitas.

CULTURAL CENTRES

British Council (Map p217; ☎ 497 678; Str Paris 1; ☎ 1-7pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-3pm Wed & Fri)

French Cultural Centre (Central Cultural France; Map p217; ☎ 490 544, 201 453; B-dul CD Loga 46; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 2-7pm Tue & Thu, 10am-1pm Sat)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Café (Map p217; per hr €1; ☎ 9am-1am Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) It's located inside Cinema Timiș.

Internet Java (Map p217; ☎ 432 495; Str Pacha 6; per hr €1; ☎ 24hr) Inside the Java Coffee House.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacie Remedia (Map p217; B-dul Revoluției 1989; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat)

Sensi Blu Pharmacy (Map p217; ☎ 406 153; Piața Victoriei 7; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun)

MONEY

Currency exchange (☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Inside Hotel Continental.

HVB Bank (Map p217; ☎ 306 800; Piața Victoriei 2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Volksbank (Map p217; ☎ 406 101; Str Piatra Craiului 2)

POST & TELEPHONE

Central post office (Map p217; ☎ 491 999; B-dul Revoluției 2; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

Post office (Map p217; Str Macieșilor; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri) This branch near B-dul Revoluției is useful when the central PO's too busy.

Telephone office (Map p217; Str N Lenau 4; ☎ 7am-9pm) Has fax facilities.

TOURIST INFORMATION

City Centre Travel Agency (Map p217; ☎ 292 960; www.aerotravel.ro; B-dul Republicii 4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) A can-do kind of agency with people exclusively dedicated to all varieties of domestic tourism, car hire and flight bookings.

Qual Tours (Map p217; ☎ 294 411; office@qualtours.ro; Str Nicolaus Lenau 10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Staff speak excellent English and French, and can organise car hire, regional tours and guides.

Festivals

Like many cities in Romania, Timișoara hosts a raucous **beer festival** in October for the pure joy of public inebriation and live music.

Sights

PIAȚA UNIRII

In the heart of the old town, Piața Unirii (Map p217) is Timișoara's most picturesque square, featuring the imposing sight of the Catholic and Serbian churches facing each other. The eastern side of the square is dominated by the baroque **Roman Catholic Cathedral** (Catedrală Episcopală Romano-Catolică; ☎ 430 671; Piața Unirii 12), built in 1754. The main altar painting was completed by Michael Angelo Unterberger, director of the Fine Art Academy in Vienna. On the opposite side is the **Serbian Orthodox Church** (Biserica Ortodoxă Sărbă), built the same year as its Catholic counterpart; local Banat artist Constantin Daniel painted the interior.

The **Trinity Column**, in the square's centre, was erected by the people of Timișoara at the end of the 18th century in thanks to God for allowing them to survive the plague that hit

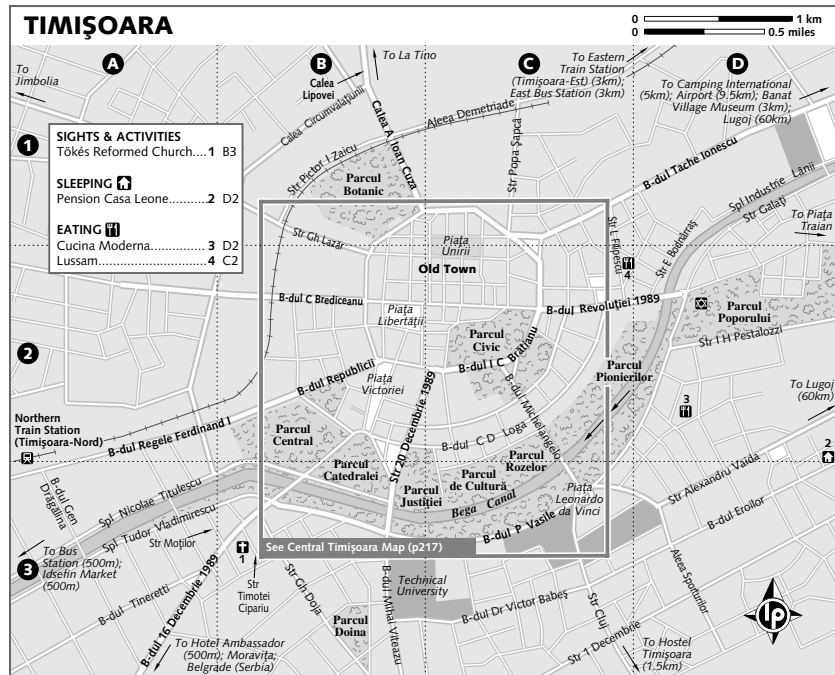
DON'T MESS WITH TIMIȘOARA

Even at the height of his power, Timișoara gave Ceaușescu the creeps. The dictator's visits to the city were few, brief and required surreptitious, dread-fuelled travel and sleeping arrangements to allay his assassination concerns. So, when the Securitate overplayed its hand in the already truculent city by trying to deport popular Hungarian pastor and outspoken Ceaușescu critic László Tőkés, the dictator should have sensed disaster looming. However, like most megalomaniacs, he didn't grasp the full scale of his folly until he was being shoved in front of a firing squad, looking genuinely stunned, 10 days later on Christmas Day 1989.

What started on 15 December 1989 as a human chain of Tőkés' parishioners protecting him from arrest mushroomed and lost all focus – many of the protesters that joined the initial rally mistakenly thought they were demonstrating for religious freedom, not for the defence of Tőkés – until it peaked as a full-scale, anti-communist revolt on 20 December. Overconfident Ceaușescu actually left Romania during this time for a visit to Iran, leaving his wife Elena and various subordinates to cope with the escalating protests.

When Ceaușescu returned a few days later, the situation was critical. Factory workers, armed with clubs brought in by Party officials to crush the demonstrations, spontaneously joined the protesters in Piața Operei (today Piața Victoriei), chanting antigovernment slogans and singing an old Romanian anthem ('Wake up, Romanians!') banned since the communists took power in 1947. The crowd, now over 100,000 strong, overpowered then commandeered some of the tanks that had previously fired on demonstrators. Protests ensued in Bucharest (see p28) and Ceaușescu's fate was sealed.

Despite the events in Timișoara leading to the revolt being confused and directionless, there's no denying that the people were primed for rebellion. While other cities are said to have mounted similar revolts in the weeks and months before, only to be hastily subdued by Securitate forces, it was the tenacious Timișoarans that first successfully defied their government, leading to the undignified downfall of their least favourite guest.



the town between 1738 and 1739. Overlooking the square is the baroque **Old Prefecture Palace** (Palatul Vechii Prefecturi; 1754), suffering through major renovations at the time of writing. When open, it houses an **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Artă; admission €0.75; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun).

From Piața Unirii, walk east along Str Palanca to the **Banat Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 491 339; Str Popa Șapcă 4; admission €0.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), housed in the oldest fortress in Timișoara, within the city's remaining 18th-century bastion. Allow an hour to drift through its 2000 exhibits, which include traditional costumes, 19th-century furniture, craft and 'spiritual culture' from the Banat region. Nearby is a landmark **fountain**, which has all the points of the compass round its circular design.

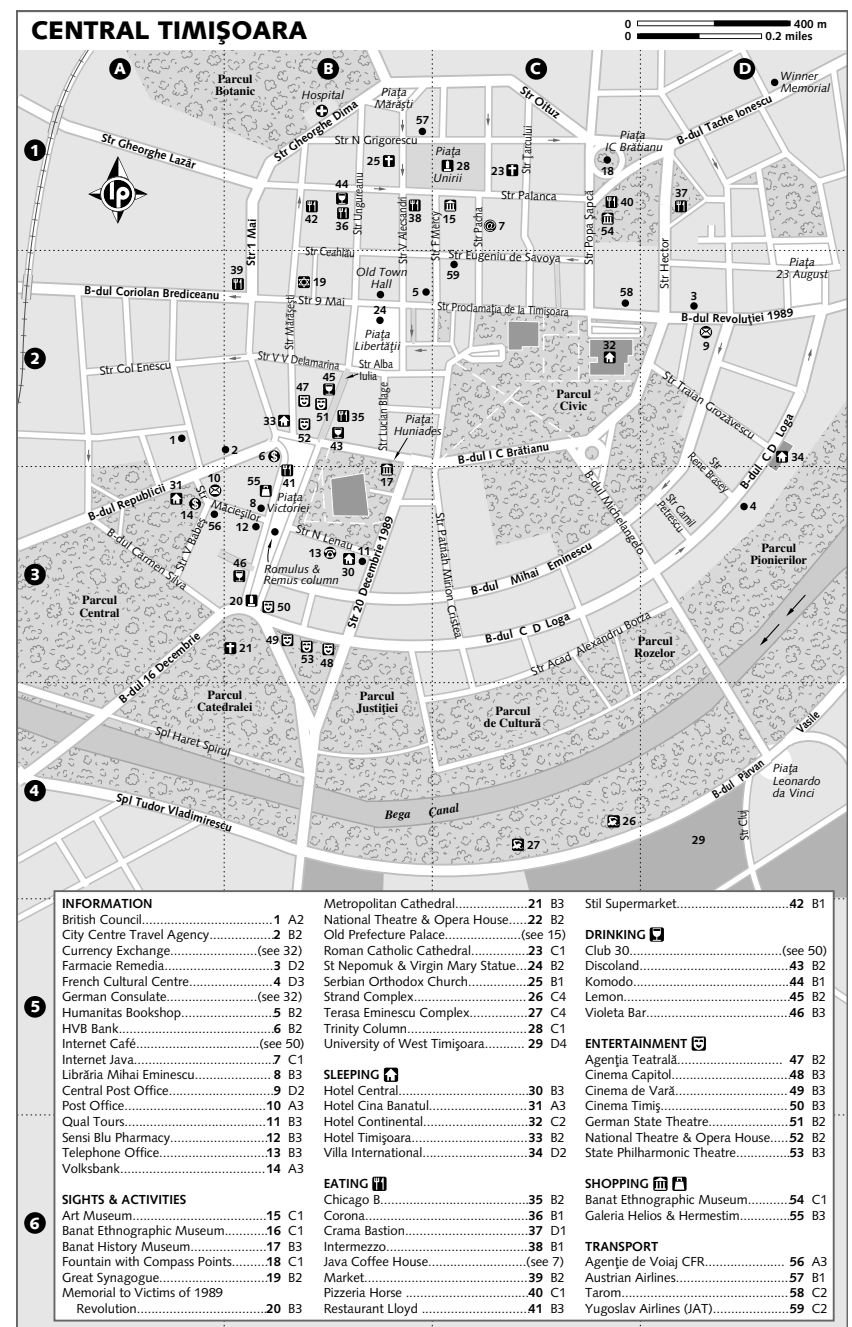
The **Great Synagogue** (Str Mărășești 6) was built in 1865 and is an important keynote in Jewish history. Jews in the Austro-Hungarian empire were fully emancipated in 1864 (they could finally own land and have a profession), the year when permission was given to build the synagogue. It once hosted concerts by the Philharmonic Orchestra, which refused to play music by Nazi sympathiser Richard Wagner.

PIAȚA LIBERTĂȚII TO PIAȚA VICTORIEI

Walk south from Piața Unirii past the **town hall** (1734), built on the site of 17th-century Turkish baths, to **Piața Libertății** (Map p217). It was here that the leader of the 1514 peasant revolt, Gheorghe Doja, was tortured before being executed. Doja's peasant army, after an initial victory, was quickly quashed, captured and killed. Legend has it that, upon Doja's public execution, his followers were forced to eat parts of his body as an appetiser before their own executions. Look for the cannonball embedded in the wall of a building on Str Ungareanu, close to Piața Libertății.

The central **statue of Saint Nepomuk and the Virgin Mary** was made in 1756 in Vienna and brought to Romania in memory of plague victims. Mary holds a lily, the symbol of purity. Her gold star-studded halo was added during restoration in 2000.

Continue south along Str Lucian Blage to the 14th-century Huniades Palace. Built between 1307 and 1315 by the Hungarian king Carol Robert, Prince of Anjou, it was redesigned under the Habsburgs in the late 18th century. It houses the **Banat History Museum**



INFORMATION

British Council.....	1	A2
City Centre Travel Agency.....	2	B2
Currency Exchange.....	(see 32)	
Farmacie Remedia.....	3	D2
French Cultural Centre.....	4	D3
German Consulate.....	(see 32)	
Humanitas Bookshop.....	5	B2
HVB Bank.....	6	B2
Internet Café.....	(see 50)	
Internet Java.....	7	C1
Librăria Mihai Eminescu.....	8	B3
Central Post Office.....	9	D2
Post Office.....	10	A3
Qual Tours.....	11	B3
Seni Blu Pharmacy.....	12	B3
Telephone Office.....	13	B3
Volksbank.....	14	A3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Art Museum.....	15	C1
Banat Ethnographic Museum.....	16	C1
Banat History Museum.....	17	B3
Fountain with Compass Points.....	18	C1
Great Synagogue.....	19	B2
Memorial to Victims of 1989 Revolution.....	20	B3

Metropolitan Cathedral.....	21	B3
National Theatre & Opera House.....	22	B2
Old Prefecture Palace.....	(see 15)	
Roman Catholic Cathedral.....	23	C1
St Nepomuk & Virgin Mary Statue.....	24	B2
Serbian Orthodox Church.....	25	B1
Strand Complex.....	26	C4
Terasa Eminescu Complex.....	27	C4
Trinity Column.....	28	C1
University of West Timișoara.....	29	D4

SLEEPING

Hotel Central.....	30	B3
Hotel Cina Banatul.....	31	A3
Hotel Continental.....	32	C2
Hotel Timișoara.....	33	B2
International.....	34	D2

EATING

Chicago B.....	35	B2
Corona.....	36	B1
Crama Bastion.....	37	D1
Intermezzo.....	38	B1
Java Coffee House.....	(see 7)	
Market.....	39	B2
Pizzeria Horse.....	40	C1
Restaurant Lloyd.....	41	B3

Stil Supermarket.....	42	B1
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DRINKING

Club 30.....	(see 50)	
Discoland.....	43	B2
Komodo.....	44	B1
Lemon.....	45	B2
Violeta Bar.....	46	B3

ENTERTAINMENT

Agenția Teatrală.....	47	B2
Cinema Capitol.....	48	B3
Cinema de Vară.....	49	B3
Cinema Timiș.....	50	B3
German State Theatre.....	51	B2
National Theatre & Opera House.....	52	B2
State Philharmonic Theatre.....	53	B3

SHOPPING

Banat Ethnographic Museum.....	54	C1
Galeria Helios & Hermestim.....	55	B3

TRANSPORT

Agenție de Voiaj CFR.....	56	A3
Austrian Airlines.....	57	B1
Tarom.....	58	C2
Yugoslav Airlines (JAT).....	59	C2

(Muzeul Banatului; ☎ 491 339; Piața Huniades 1; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am-4.30pm), which is worth visiting for its enormous displays on natural history, geology, armour, weapons, archaeology, ceramics, tools, an authentic wooden fishing boat and scale-model countryside shelters. In nearby Piața Victoriei note the column topped with the classic scene of **Romulus and Remus** feeding from the mother wolf, a gift from the city of Rome.

Head west to the marble 18th-century **National Theatre & Opera House** (opposite). It was here that thousands of demonstrators gathered on 16 December 1989, following the siege on László Tóké's house (see boxed text, p214). A memorial plaque on the front of the Opera House reads: 'So you, who pass by this building, will dedicate a thought for free Romania.'

At the southern end of Piața Victoriei there are **memorials** to those who died during the revolution and the Orthodox **Metropolitan Cathedral**, built between 1936 and 1946. Unique to the church are its electrical bells cast from iron imported from Indonesia. A collection of 16th- to 19th-century icons is displayed in the basement.

SOUTH OF THE CENTRE

The 1989 revolution began at the **Tóké's Reformed Church** (Biserica Reformată Tóké; Map p216; ☎ 492 992; Str Timotei Cipariu 1), where Father László Tóké spoke out against the dictator. Today, Tóké's small apartment is privately inhabited. On the southern bank of the Bega Canal is the **University of West Timișoara** (UWT; Map p217; ☎ 490 009; B-dul Vasile Pârvan 4), established in 1944.

NORTH OF THE CENTRE

The **Banat Village Museum** (Muzeul Satului Banațean; ☎ 225 588; Str Al CFR 1; ☎ 1-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb), 6km northeast of the centre, exhibits more than 30 traditional peasant houses dating from the 19th century. The open-air display was created in 1917. Take tram 1 (black number) from the northern train station.

Activities

For swimming, the **Terasa Eminescu Complex** (Map p217; ☎ 229 212; admission €3; ☎ 10am-7pm) has loud pumping music and hordes of students, making this a social rather than sporty day-out. The **Strand Complex** (Map p217; ☎ 203 663; admission €3; ☎ 24hr) is just as popular for a quick dip.

Book boat trips on Bega Canal (which flows through the city) and on Mureș River through adventure company **Pepetour** (☎ 354 924; office@pepetour.ro; half-day/full-day tours per person €10/20). Extreme-sports lovers can get their thrills thanks to the tour agency **Latura Extremă** (www.latura.ro), which organises water sports, ballooning, paintballing, tandem paragliding and adventure trips.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Camping International (☎ 208 925; campinginternational@yahoo.com; Aleea Pădurea Verde 6; tent sites €2.50, chalets s/d/q €34/46/63) This excellent camping ground – and mildly expensive restaurant – is nestled in the Green Wood forest. The main entrance is on Calea Dorobanților. From the train station catch trolleybus 11 to the end of the line, 50m from the camping ground.

Hostel Timișoara (☎ 293 960; Baron Bldg, Str Arieș 19; dm €9) Two kilometres from the city centre, take tram 8 from the northern train station to this four-room, bare-bones, dorm-style hostel situated on the top floor of a university building.

Pension Casa Leone (Map p216; ☎ 292 621; www.casaleone.ro; B-dul Eroilor 67; d/tr €30/45) This lovely seven-room *pensione* offers exceptional service and individually decorated rooms. Take tram 8 from the train station or call ahead to arrange transport. Breakfast not included.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Cîna Banatul (Map p217; ☎ 491 903; B-dul Republicii 3-5; s/d €29/40) The best-value pad in Timișoara, this hotel has clean, ultramodern rooms and a good restaurant.

Hotel Central (Map p217; ☎ 490 091; www.hotel-central.ro; Str N Lenau 6; s/d €40/46) Recent renovations have left this place glistening, modern and comfortable.

Villa International (Map p217; ☎ 499 339; B-dul CD Loga 48; s/d €50/60) Part villa, part curiosity. The Ceaușescu only slept here for two nights, but their apartments still contain 'personal effects', free for guest use. The villa has an unusual faded glory, underscored by an eerie ambience. Rooms are achingly outmoded and bare, but clean. A sneak peak at the dated lobby is highly recommended.

Hotel Timișoara (Map p217; ☎ 498 852; Str 1 Mai 2; s/d €50/62) Inside this soaring Soviet delight are simple, zealously priced three-star rooms, though the location is superb.

Hotel Continental (Map p217; ☎ 494 144; www.hotelcontinental.ro; B-dul Revoluției 3; s/d €74/80; ☎) Hiding in this Soviet eyesore are clean, large four-star rooms. Synchronize watches with the functioning giant landscaped clock near the entrance.

TOP END

Hotel Ambassador (☎ 306 880/81/82; www.ambassador.ro; Str Mangalia 3; s/d €120/140; ☎ ☎) Book here when work is paying. This is a plush, opulently furnished business hotel, with a sauna, gym and outdoor terrace. While economy and standard rooms lack tangible luxury, business class and above boast large rooms, gold trim, paintings and bathtubs. A taxi to/from the centre should cost about €2.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Corona (Map p217; Str Ungureanu 7; mains €2-3) This cosy dark-wood restaurant is a good choice for pizza and Romanian favourites.

La Tino (☎ 226 455; Calea Aradului 14; mains €4) Classy Italian food and a wide choice of delicious pizzas are offered here.

Cucina Moderna (Map p216; ☎ 202 405; Str Socrates 12b; mains €4) International-style dishes with a Spanish twist using Romanian ingredients.

Intermezzo (Map p217; ☎ 432 429; Piața Unirii & Str V Alecsandri; mains €6; ☎ noon-midnight) This place has great pizzas and even better pastas. Dine on the terrace on Piața Unirii or in the cellar restaurant.

Crama Bastion (Map p217; ☎ 221 199; Str Hector 1; mains €6) Romanian dishes vie with the wine list for attention at this traditional restaurant housed in an 18th-century fortification.

Restaurant Lloyd (Map p217; ☎ 294 949; Piața Victoriei 2; mains €8-12) Dine here on exquisite international/Romanian dishes of shark, smoked salmon and spit-roast.

CAFÉS & QUICK-EATS

There are plenty of lovely terrace cafés lining Piața Unirii and Piața Victoriei where you can kill time or plot the next revolution.

Chicago B (Map p217; Str Alba Iulia 1; ☎ 10am-11pm) This Austrian-style café serves coffees, including lattes and cappuccinos.

Lussam (Map p216; ☎ 496 872; B-dul Tache Ionescu 55; ☎ 24hr) This is an infamous after-bar pizzeria.

Java Coffee House (Map p217; ☎ 432 495; Str Pacha 6; ☎ 24hr) Gulp caffeine with one hand, check email with the other.

Pizzeria Horse (Map p217; ☎ 229 666; Str Popa Șapcă 4; mains €3) Come here for slabs of mouth-watering pizza starting at €1!

SELF-CATERING

Timișoara has a colourful central produce **market** (Map p217; Str Brediceanu Coriolan) near Str 1 Mai. There is also the well-stocked **Stil Supermarket** (Map p217; Str Mărășești 10; ☎ 24hr).

Drinking

Meet sociable locals at the terrace café-bars on Piața Victoriei, downing bottles of the local Timișoreana Pils beer for around €1 a bottle. Violeta Bar, at the southern end of the square, is particularly popular.

Lemon (Map p217; Str Alba Iulia 2; ☎ from 10pm) This club in the cellar of a piano bar has hip-hop and house DJs.

Club 30 (Map p217; ☎ 201 115; ☎ 6pm-3am Fri & Sat) Cruise to the blues in this jazz joint inside Cinema Timiș.

Komodo (Map p217; Str Ungureanu 9) So trendy it hurts, this large, colourfully lit eclectic bar has techno/house DJs on weekends.

Discoland (Map p217; ☎ 490 008; Piața lanca Huniade 1; ☎ 11pm-5am) Dance in, stagger out. This is where partying professionals test their stamina. It also has salsa nights. It's next to the sign that says 'Firestage'.

Entertainment

CINEMAS

Timișoarans are devoted film-lovers and there are plenty of screens in town. Films are shown in their original language at these cinemas (tickets cost €2 to €3): **Cinema Timiș** (Map p217; ☎ 491 290; Piața Victoriei 7); **Cinema Capitol** (Map p217; ☎ 493 396; B-dul CD Loga 2); and the brilliant outdoor **Cinema de Vară** (Map p217; B-dul CD Loga 2).

THEATRE & CLASSICAL MUSIC

The **National Theatre & Opera House** (Teatrul Național și Opera Română; Map p217; ☎ 201 284; Str Mărășești 2) is highly regarded. Buy tickets in the nearby **Agencia Teatrală** (Map p217; ☎ 499 908; tickets from €1.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue-Sun).

Close by is the **German State Theatre** (Teatrul German de Stat; Map p217; ☎ 201 291; Str Mărășești 2). Get tickets at its **box office** (☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun), at the Str Alba Iulia entrance.

Classical concerts are held most evenings at the **State Philharmonic Theatre** (Filharmonia de Stat Banatul; Map p217; ☎ 492 521; B-dul CD Loga 2). Tickets (from €1.50) can be bought at the box office

inside the Philharmonic Theatre or from the Agenția Teatrală.

Event details are generally advertised in the local press and on posters around town.

Shopping

Galeria Helios and **Hermestim** (Piața Victoriei; ☎ noon–6pm Mon–Fri, 1–3pm Sat) are adjacent shops, selling artwork (from €15), jewellery (from €30), handcrafts and ceramics (from €12).

Banat Ethnographic Museum (p216) offers handmade crafts, costumes and carvings.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tarom (Map p217; ☎ 200 003; B-dul Revoluției 3–5; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 7am–1pm Sat) has four daily flights to Bucharest (US\$75 plus tax US\$5; Tarom does not accept euros) from Timișoara, as well as international flights weekly to European cities, and a daily flight to Milan.

Carpatair (☎ 300 900; www.carpatair.com) strangely doesn't have an office in its hub city, only out at the airport. It serves nine Romanian cities and a growing list of international destinations.

Austrian Airlines (Map p217; ☎ 490 320; all-tsr-to@ua.com; Piața Unirii 6) has daily flights to Vienna for about €200.

Yugoslav Airlines (JAT; Map p217; ☎ 495 747; Str Eugeniu de Savoya 7) runs daily international flights to Europe, Turkey and Ukraine.

BUS

The small, shabby **bus station** (autogară; ☎ 493 471; B-dul Maniu Iuliu 54; ☎ 6am–8pm Mon–Fri) has six platforms from where slow state buses run daily to Campeni, Arad, Sibiu and Rimnicu Valcea. Maxitaxis run daily to Oradea, Arad, Deva and Campeni.

International buses leave from the **east bus station** (autogară est), which is merely a few kiosks cluttered outside the eastern train station. **Atlasib** (☎ 226 486) goes to Italy, Spain and even Sweden. **Eurolines** (☎ 288 132; Timișoara.ag@eurolines.ro) goes to Budapest, Greece, Switzerland and Portugal, among other destinations. Call **Murat** (☎ 0744-144 326) – no English spoken – for bus tickets to Istanbul (€100).

TRAIN

All major train services depart from the **northern train station** (Gară Timișoara-Nord; Map p216; ☎ 491 696; Str Gării 2). You can purchase tickets in advance from the **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (Map p217; ☎ 491 889; cnr Str Măcișilor & Str V Babeș; ☎ 8am–

8pm Mon–Fri, international tickets 9am–7pm Mon–Fri). The station's **left-luggage office** (☎ 24hr) is in the underground passageway to the tracks.

Daily fast trains include eight to Bucharest (€22.50), one to Cluj-Napoca (€11.50), five to Băile Herculane (€8.40), one to Baia Mare via Arad (€12.60) and three sadiistically slow runs to Iași (16 hours), aka 'the Horror Train'. Additionally, three go to Budapest (€38) and one to Belgrade (€14), which leaves from Timișoara at 5.08am.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Timișoara **airport** (☎ 491 637; Calea Lugojului) is 12.5km northeast of the centre. Bus 26, which stops outside Hotel Continental, also goes to the airport.

CAR

Avis (☎ 203 234) has an office at Timișoara airport. Cars can also be hired at Qual Tours and City Centre Travel Agency (p215).

TRAM, TROLLEYBUS & BUS

All public transport runs between 4.45am and 11.15pm. Tickets (€0.30) are sold at kiosks next to tram and bus stops. Tram 1 runs from the northern train station (Gară Timișoara-Nord) to Piața Libertății, Hotel Continental and the eastern train/bus station (Gară Timișoara-Est). Tram 4 runs from Hotel Continental to Piața Traian (Piața Romanilor). Trolleybus 11 and 14 travel from the northern train station east down B-dul Regele Ferdinand I, then turn north on Str 1 Mai.

BĂILE HERCULANE

☎ 255

Take your train-beaten body to this spa resort for some pampering and fresh mountain air. Legend has it that Hercules himself bathed in the natural springs that still flow today in Băile Herculane. The first baths were built by Roman legions following their invasion of Dacia. Inspired by the incredible healing powers of the springs, they named the resort Ad Aquas Herculi Sacras, meaning 'the Holy Water of Hercules'.

The waters here are said to cure eye disorders (conjunctivitis), stomach disorders (gastritis) and rheumatism, among other ailments. You should avoid these baths if you have glaucoma, ulcers or heart conditions. Hotels have physicians on staff for consultations.

During the early 19th century, Băile Herculane developed as a fashionable resort, attracting royal visitors such as Habsburg emperor Franz Josef. Sadly, most of the grand hotels and baths now stand empty and neglected. Renovation work is under way, but still several years from completion. Meanwhile, a collection of dilapidated Soviet-era monstrosities and new yet unpretentious budget hotels are filling the void.

Mt Domogled (1100m) towers over Băile Herculane to the west, dominating the Cerna Valley in which the resort lies. This forest reservation, which has been protected since 1932, includes rare trees, turtles and butterflies.

Orientation

Băile Herculane lies on either side of a road that follows the Cerna River. The train station is at the junction of the main Drobeta-Turnu Severin–Timișoara highway and the Băile Herculane turn-off.

The resort is split into three parts: the residential area is at the western end of the resort on Str Trandafirilor; the concrete blocks of the newer satellite resort are 2km east of the residential area; and the oval-shaped historic centre is at the resort's easternmost end (8km from the train station).

Information

There's no tourist office in Băile Herculane. Try the **Agenția de Turism** (☎ 560 454) inside Hotel Hercules, where some of the staff speak English.

Banca Comercială Română (Str Castanilor 13c; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri) is across from Dacia Hotel. There's also a **currency exchange office** (☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Fri) on the 3rd floor of Hotel Roman (p222).

The central post office is next to the **CFR office** (Piața Hercules 1; ☎ 7am–8pm Mon–Fri) and has the same opening hours.

Sights

All sights lie in the historic centre. Many Roman baths were destroyed during the Turkish and Austrian-Hungarian occupations, but a few stand well preserved in the **Roman Bath Museum** (admission €0.30) inside Hotel Roman. Feel the heat from the natural 54°C water running under the hotel. One of the exhibits is a 2500-year-old carving of Hercules. People have broken off parts and chewed them (his genitals are notably damaged as men have

chewed these chunks for sexual potency!). The 2000-year-old baths are still used – the water is cooled down to 37°C and masseurs line the small marble baths.

Next to the hotel flows the **Hercules II spring** (Izvorul Hercules), one of several springs from which drinking water flows – believed to be good for stomach problems – throughout the historic centre.

The resort's **central pavilion** (Str Cernei 14) was built during the 1800s by the Habsburgs as a casino and restaurant. Today it houses a few small shops and a small **History Museum** (Muzeul de Istorie; admission €0.30; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sun). Beside the steps leading up to the museum entrance stands a 200-year-old **Wellingtoniă Gigantea tree**, famed for its enormous size. On the opposite side of the river stand the derelict **Austrian baths**. Despite their decaying appearance, the grand hotels are certainly worth the energy it takes to stroll past them.

Activities

THERMAL POOLS

Wallowing in a thermal pool or being pummelled into oblivion by a masseur is all part and parcel of a stay in Băile Herculane.

Hotel Roman (p222) has a thermal **swimming pool** (admission €2), which is open to non-guests. Hotel Cerna (p222) also has a **thermal pool** (adult/child €0.60/0.30) and treatment centre.

The Seven Springs (Izvoare 7) thermal pool and camping ground is 4km to the north of Hotel Roman, from where you catch a maxitaxi (€0.25). Seven Springs is a summer-only attraction, and tends to be crowded and noisy.

DAY TRIPS

Day trips to **Hobița**, to see Brâncuși's memorial house, **Tismana Monastery** and other sites leave from Hotel Cerna (p222) at 9am on Sunday (returning at 6pm). The trips cost €8 per person; ask at reception for information.

HIKING & CLIMBING

Directly behind Hotel Roman stands **Brigands' Cave** (Peștera Haiducilor), named after the thieves who would hide in the cave, waiting for their prey to roll by. A path leads up to the cave from the hotel. A second path (2.5km), marked with blue stripes, leads to the **Grotta Aburi Cave**. A trail (3km) marked with red stripes, starting from the centre of Băile Herculane at the **Brasserie Central** (Str Izvorul 1), leads

to the **Munk natural spring** (Izvorul Munk), east of the Grotta cu Aburi Cave.

Southeast of the resort, the **White Cross** (Crucea Albă) is a popular hiking trail (marked with yellow stripes). It starts from Str 1 Mai next to Hotel Cerna.

The rock face behind Hotel Roman is a favourite for climbers in summer.

Sleeping

Most hotels in Băile Herculane have costly short-stay rates (one to three days) and cheaper long-stay rates (three to 21 days). All prices listed are short-stay rates. If you plan to stay longer, negotiate! Top hotels fill up in July and August, and the resort is very quiet from mid-September to mid-May.

BUDGET

Popas Flora camping ground (☎ 560 929; Str Castanilor 25; bungalows per person €4; ☹ May-Oct) Located between the old and new resorts, this place has two- and four-bed bungalows overlooking the Cerna River. Communal showers and toilets.

Hotel Cerna (☎ 560 436; Str 1 Mai 1; s/d without bathroom €9/12, d with bathroom €15) This yellow ornate building has old-fashioned but reasonable rooms.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Geta (☎ 560 043; Str Trandafirilor 40; s/d/ste €23/29/43) Opened in late 2005, this is the best value for this price range. The bright rooms have balconies with river and mountain views. Breakfast isn't included, but a reasonably priced restaurant is on-site.

Hotel Hercules (☎ 560 880; Str Izvorului 7; s/d €28/41) Average, clean rooms await you at this dated complex with a sauna.

Hotel Roman (☎ 560 390; argirom.tour@rdsnet.ro; Str Română 1; s/d €35/49) Built into the side of the mountain on the site of a natural spring, this concrete vision is long overdue for renovations. Amenities include massage and sauna, the ancient baths and a reasonable restaurant.

Hotel Ferdinand (☎ 561 131; office@hotel-ferdinand.ro; Piața Hercules; s/d/ste €44/60/103) This is the resort's newest and best hotel – classy luxury, good prices and the most charming mountain-side wooden terraces, which are candlelit at night.

Eating

Băile Herculane has few restaurants beyond those inside its hotels. The in-house restaurants of Hotel Ferdinand (main course €7)

and Hotel Roman (mains €2 to €4) serve the best food.

Entertainment

Next to the minimarket is the popular Bar Cezar, but the hottest nightspot in town is **Club 69** (Str Izvorului).

Youngsters also hang out at the *discotecă* in the basement of the old **Central Pavilion** (Str Cemei 14).

Getting There & Away

BUS
Maxitaxis run daily, except Sunday, between Craiova, Băile Herculane and Drobeta-Turnu Severin from outside the post office in Piața Hercules. The timetable is posted to a tree. The Drobeta-Turnu Severin service leaves daily at 2.30pm (€1).

TRAIN

The train station is 5km southwest of the satellite resort. The **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 560 538; Piața Hercules 1) is in the historic centre.

Băile Herculane is on the main Timișoara–Bucharest line and has many daily fast services, including seven to Bucharest and Timișoara, one to Budapest (3.33am), one to Constanța and two local trains to Orșova.

Getting Around

Maxitaxis run all day to/from the train station, along the 8km length of Băile Herculane to the centre, stopping at the residential area and satellite resort (€0.30).

CRIȘANA

ORADEA

☎ 259 / pop 209,571

Elegant Oradea, the capital of Crișana, lies a few kilometres east of the Hungarian border, at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains. Inhabited since the Bronze Age, the area has been an important commercial, trade and communications point since the 11th century.

In the 18th century, Viennese engineer Franz Anton Hillebrandt planned the city in baroque style, leading to the construction of many contemporary landmarks such as the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace (now the Museum of the Land of the Criș Rivers). The river Crișul Repede runs



through the city centre, accentuating the architectural beauty of the area.

Of all the cities of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Oradea has best retained its 19th-century romantic style. It was ceded to Romania in 1920 and has since taken on an air of arresting but faded grandeur.

Orientation

The train station is a couple of kilometres north of the centre; tram 1 and 4 run south from Piața București (outside the train station) to Piața Unirii, Oradea's main square. Tram 4 also stops at the northern end of Calea Republicii – a five-minute walk south to the centre.

The main square north of the river is Piața Republicii (AKA Piața Regele Ferdinand I).

Information

The Romanian tourist information office deficiency continues here. Panda Tours has English-speaking staff. Some hotels have city maps.

24-Hour Pharmacy (☎ 418 242; Str Libertății) At the junction with Piața Ferdinand.

Euro Bank (☎ 210 023; Piața Independenței 35; ☹ 9am–4pm Mon-Fri)

Game Star Internet Café (Str Mihai Eminescu 4; per hr €0.40; ☹ 24hr)

HVB Bank (☎ 406 700; Piața Unirii 24; ☹ 9am–4pm Mon-Fri)

Panda Tours (☎ 477 222; Str Iosif Vulcan 6; ☹ 9am–7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

Post Office (☎ 136 420; Str Roman Giorogariu 12; ☹ 7am–7.30pm Mon-Fri)

Telephone Office (Calea Republicii 5; ☹ 8am–8pm)

Sights

Oradea's most imposing sights are on its two central squares, Piața Unirii and Piața Republicii. The **Orthodox Moon Church** (Biserica cu Lună; Piața Unirii), built in 1784, has an unusual lunar mechanism on its tower that changes position in accordance with the moon's movement.

In the centre of Piața Unirii stands an equestrian **statue of Mihai Viteazul**, the prince of Wallachia (r 1593–1601), who is said to have rested in Oradea in 1600. East of the statue, overlooking the Crișul Repede River, is the **Vulturul Negru** (Black Vulture; 1908) hotel and shopping centre. The mall, with its fantastic stained-glass ceiling, links Piața Unirii with Str Independenței and Str Vasile Alecsandri. A **statue of Mihai Eminescu**, the 19th-century poet, sits on the river's southern bank.

In Central Park (Parcul Central) is the **Culture House** in front of which is a large **monument** to soldiers who fought for Romanian independence during WWI.

Across the bridge from Piața Unirii the neoclassical **State Theatre** (Teatrul de Stat), designed by Viennese architects Fellner and Hellmer in 1900, dominates Piața Republicii. Nearby, in the centre of Traian Park, stands a small **museum** dedicated to the Hungarian poet Endre Ady (1877–1919), who lived for four years in Oradea before dying of syphilis.

The **Roman Catholic cathedral** (Str Stadionului), 1.4km from north of the centre, was built between 1752 and 1780 and is the largest in Romania. Organ concerts are occasionally held here.

The adjacent **Bishop's Palace** (Episcopia Ortodoxă Română; 1770) boasts 100 fresco-adorned rooms and 365 windows, and houses the **Museum of the Land of the Criș Rivers** (Muzeul Țării Crișurilor; ☎ 412 725; B-dul Dacia 1-3; admission €0.60; ☞ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), with history and art exhibitions relevant to the region. Immediately outside the museum entrance, busts of Romania's leading statesmen and kings stand on parade. To the right are busts of Wallachia's princes.

Note **Canon's Corridor** nearby, a series of archways along Str Stadionului that dates back to the 18th century.

The **citadel**, south of the river, built in the 13th century, now serves as government offices.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Camping Venus (☎ 318 266; tents & 2-3 bed bungalows per person €10) This camping ground is only 500m from Strandul cu Voluti. Take a southbound

tram 4 (black number) from the train station or an eastbound tram 4 (red number) from Piața Unirii to the end of the line, then catch bus 15 to the last stop.

Hotel Parc (☎ 411 699; Calea Republicii 5-7; s/d €14/23) Ignore the crumbling façade – the large rooms here are worn, but reasonably clean. It's the best (and now only) budget hotel in town. Singles have shared toilet.

Strandul cu Voluti (cabins/tent sites per person €14.50/3; ☞ May–mid-Sep) In Băile 1 Mai, this place is 9km southeast of Oradea.

Pension Gobe (☎ 414 845; Str Dobrogeanu Gherea 26; s/d €30/40) This family owned *pensiune* has several charming rooms, a small restaurant and a bar.

MIDRANGE

our pick Hotel Atlantic (☎ 426 911; www.hotelatlantic.ro; Str Iosif Vulcan 9; s/d/ste €45/50/60) Looking for a special place to stage a party or romantic weekend? Call off the search. These spacious, classy, contemporary rooms sport *huge* marble bathrooms, some with spas, and your own private bar! No, not 'minibar' (though they have those too); this is a full-on bar, complete with tools and stools! Not impressed? Did we mention that the Blue Suite has a bed the size of a trampoline? Standard rooms are also notably large and bar-equipped. Bring ample booze.

Hotel Vulturul Negru (Black Vulture; ☎ 450 000; www.vulturulnegru.ro; Str Independenței 1; s/d/ste €63/85/140) This former backpackers' institution has been reborn into a fashionable four-star hotel. Every nook of the 1908 Art Nouveau building has been beautified with stained-glass windows, crystal chandeliers and Italian décor. Guest or not, the glass-ceilinged day bar should be visited for a cup of coffee and 30 minutes of sheer elegance.

TOP END

Hotel Continental (☎ 418 655; www.continentalhotels.ro; Aleea Ștrandului 1; s/d €76/90; ♿) This is a nine-storey business hotel with masseur, thermal pool, nightclub and – dare we say it – horrendously outdated blue interiors à la motorway service station. In-room internet extra.

Eating & Drinking

Calea Republicii is a stroller's paradise, lined with cheerful eateries and cafés. Most of Oradea's terrace cafés and restaurants double as bars in the evening.

Restaurant Vegetarian Çris (☎ 441 593; George Enescu 30; mains €1.50; ☞ 9am–9pm Sun–Thu, to 4pm Fri, closed Sat) This is the one and only vegetarian restaurant in Romania. Choose from a tantalizingly affordable menu featuring hearty soups, stuffed peppers, minced pumpkin balls, lentils, macaroni and cabbage, celery schnitzel, mushroom haggis, and soy, soy, soy!

Hotel Atlantic Restaurant (☎ 414 953; Str Iosif Vulcan 9; meals €5) This elegant restaurant offers the best menu in town, with hearty goulash, Mexican chicken and speciality steak dishes.

Capitolium (☎ 420 551; Str Avram Iancu 8; mains €5; ☞ 8am–12am) Bask in dotting service and huge portions at this Romanian restaurant.

Lion Café (Str Independenței 1; ☞ 7am–1am) This place is trendy by day, packed by night.

Irish Kelly's Pub (☎ 413 419; Calea Republicii 2) This pub hosts a rowdy crowd on its outside terrace.

Entertainment

Tickets for performances at the recently renovated **State Philharmonic** (Filarmonica de Stat; ☎ 430 853; Str Moscovei 5; tickets €2) can be purchased from its **ticket office** (☞ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri) inside the **State Theatre** (Teatrul de Stat; ☎ 130 885; Piața Republicii 4-6; tickets €3–12; ☞ 10–11am & 5–7pm).

Kids big and little will enjoy the shows at Oradea's **Puppet Theatre** (Teatrul de Păpuși; ☎ 433 398; Str Vasile Alecsandri 8).

Shopping

Lotus Mall, 2km southeast of the centre on Str Nufărului, has a modern cinema, bowling alley, supermarket and a number of boutiques.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tarom (☎ 131 918; Piața Republicii 2; ☞ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat) operates three flights a week to Baia Mare, two flights to Satu Mare and daily flights to Bucharest from Oradea **airport** (☎ 416 082; Calea Aradului). Fares are US\$75/112 one-way/return, plus taxes (Tarom does not accept euros).

BUS

From Oradea **bus station** (autogară; ☎ 418 998; Str Râzboieni 81), there are daily services to Beiuș, Deva, Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara, via Arad. Maxitaxis run throughout the day to/from Băile Felix. Four daily go to Baia Mare, via Satu Mare (€4.50, four hours).

There are daily services to Budapest leaving from outside the train station: a state bus (€17, 10 hours) – pay the driver – and maxitaxis (€20).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The border crossing into Hungary for motorists at Borș, 16km west of Oradea, is open 24 hours.

TRAIN

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 130 578; Calea Republicii 2; ☞ 7am–7pm Mon–Fri) sells advance tickets for internal and international train trips.

Daily fast trains from Oradea include three to Budapest (€28), two to Bucharest (€22), five to Băile Felix, three to Cluj-Napoca (€11), one to Brașov and three to Timișoara (€7).

Getting Around

Oradea **airport** (☎ 416 082) is 6km west of the centre on the Oradea–Arad road. Transport between the airport and town is limited to taxis.

BĂILE FELIX

☎ 259

Băile Felix, 5km southeast of Oradea, is a famous year-round spa resort where city dwellers flock to splash in thermal pools. It has a rowdy package-holiday feel so forget napping in the sun. There's a large open-air thermal swimming pool and several smaller pools covered by the rare *Nymphaea lotus thermalis*, a giant white water lily.

The waters here are said to ease rheumatism, head trauma, some paralysis and stomach illnesses. People with certain medical conditions should not partake in the treatments – each hotel has a doctor for consultations.

The most popular public pools are **Strand Apollo** and **Strand Felix** (admission €2; ☞ 8am–7pm, closed Nov–Apr), by the Stația Băile Felix bus stop, which have the same opening hours.

Sleeping

The nearest official camping grounds are 3km away at Băile 1 Mai (see opposite), but many camp in the resort's main car park.

Hotel Muncel (☎ 318 460; €20) This hotel has a pool and treatment centre, as well as a travel agency, Turism Felix (☎ 318 321).

Pensiunea Veronica (☎ 318 481; Str Băile Felix 9; s/d €23/43; ♿) This recently renovated, pink chalet, off the main drag, has the best rooms in the resort. Breakfast not included.

Thermal Hotel (☎ 318 214; s/d €55/73, 📶) This drab building hides a modern and comfortable spa resort. The rooms reek of cleanliness, with firm beds and balconies (request a forest view).

Eating

Club Art Pizzeria (mains €5; 🕒 noon-5am) At the town's only intersection, this place has a central dance floor with nightly DJs (summer only).

Restaurant Union (mains €4; 🕒 8am-midnight) Across the road from Club Art Pizzeria, feast on a full menu with Romanian and Italian food on the summer terrace here.

Getting There & Away

Maxitaxis run every 15 minutes or when full between Oradea and Băile Felix (€2). Local trains also run daily from Oradea, stopping first at Stația Băile Felix, then at the major hotels.

BEIUȘ & MEZIAD CAVE

Sixty-three kilometres southeast of Oradea, approaching the western fringe of the Apușeni Mountains, is the small market town of Beiuș, from where you can visit the **Meziad Cave** (Peștera Meziad; adult/child €0.85/0.30; 🕒 9-11am & 2-4pm), discovered in 1859. The cave features an enormous opening and entrance tunnel, which has equally enormous stalactites with a curved shape. Bring a torch as there's no electric light in the cave. If you arrive outside visiting hours, the massive entrance hall (25m high, 40m wide) is open and satisfactorily illuminated by natural light. The guide is required to enter the *real* cave, which is split into three levels, the main passage being the middle. Good shoes are recommended for the slippery climbs and descents.

From Beiuș's town centre, follow the signs for Peștera Meziad for 11km. When you get to the village of Remetea, bear right at the fork next to the Cămin Cultural building and continue for 9km until you reach Meziad. Turn left at the first fork, then cross the small white bridge to a gravel road. The main office for the cave is 4km along this road. The cave entrance is a further 1.5km and not accessible by car.

Sleeping

Wild camping is permitted around the cave. Alternatively, you could hike on from the cave for three hours (path not accessible by car) to Coadă Lacului (Tale of the Lake) where camping is permitted by the lake.

One kilometre from Beiuș is **Motel Desira** (☎ 259-322 420; d €29), which has five clean rooms and offers currency exchange.

Getting There & Away

Beiuș' train and bus stations adjoin each other on the southern edge of town. Its scant train services include daily local trains to Ploiești (€8), Arad (€3), Cluj-Napoca (€4), Bucharest (€8) and Oradea (€2, three daily).

From Oradea there are two daily buses to Stâna de Vale via Beiuș. Services are greatly reduced on weekends.

STÂNA DE VALE

Scenic Stâna de Vale is a small alpine resort (1300m) in the Pădurea Craiului Mountains 27km east of Beiuș in the Bihor Massif. A delightfully quiet summer hiking and health resort, it is transformed into a bustling ski centre between December and February. The 550m slope is rather tame, best suited for beginner to intermediate skiers. It's worth a night's stay to breathe in the pine-scented air and amble through wooded glades.

The **ski lift** is next to the camping ground, where it's possible to hire skis and have lessons. A couple of **hiking trails** lead into the Apușeni Mountains (maps are available in the hotels). One of the trails (six hours), marked with red stripes, takes you to **Cabana Padiș** in the heavily karstic Padiș Plateau. The blue-cross trail leads to Devil's Mill Waterfall (Cascada Moara Dracului; six hours), which is cinematically blanketed in violet crocuses in the springtime. Another more challenging trail marked with blue triangles leads past the Saritoarea Bohodei Waterfall (Cascada Saritoarea Bohodeiului; eight hours return), the highest waterfall in Romania (100m). This trail loops back to Stâna de Vale on a different path, a route that is strongly recommended as the blue triangles are difficult to spot if you double back the way you came. Alternatively, this trail continues on and terminates at the **Meziad Cave** (left), six hours from Stâna de Vale. Don't attempt this hike in bad weather or in winter. Nearby is the source of Romania's Wonder Spring (Izvorul Minunilor), a popular brand of bottled water.

Sleeping & Eating

In summer it's best to bring your own tent and pitch it in the **camping ground** (cabins per person €12) at the western end of the resort.

Those seeking total immersion can submit to one of the nearby shepherds offering a meal of *plăcintă* (baked pie with cheese or jam) and a room in their **huts** (per person €1.50), which have pit toilets in the garden.

Both Cabana Padiș and **Cabana Cetatile Ponorului** (www.padis.ro; d €9) have clean accommodation in dorms with between two and 10 beds, and a restaurant.

The resort's main hotel is **Hotel Iadolina** (☎ 0744-599 334; d 2-star €35, 3-star €40, 4-star villa €85); breakfast is not included. Cerbul Vila & Restaurant, opposite Hotel Iadolina, is open in winter only. The **ICCR Beiuș Restaurant** (mains €2) has a simple menu but good, fresh food.

Getting There & Away

The dusty train and bus stations are huddled together at the southern end of the resort. There are two daily buses between Oradea and Stâna de Vale via Beiuș (€2). Otherwise, hitch or hike. Local trains link Băile Felix to Beiuș, from where you can get to Stâna de Vale and surrounding villages.

BEAR CAVE

Named after skeletons of the extinct cave bear (*Ursus spelaeus*) found by quarry workers in 1975, the **Bear Cave** (Peștera Urșilor; tour adult/child €1.50/1; 🕒 around 10am-5pm) is one of Romania's finest. It's well worth a day trip from Oradea, 82km northwest.

The magnificent galleries of the cave (482m) extend over 1000m on two levels. Stupendous stalactites and stalagmites loom, creating uncanny shapes in the half-darkness. The stalactites, many of which are believed to be 22,000 to 55,000 years old, grow 1cm every 20 years.

Compulsory guided tours allow you to spend an hour or so exploring the cold (a constant 10°C) stalactite-filled chambers of the cave. Note that the formations are delicate and must not be touched.

The idyllic camping ground **La Fluturi** (☎ 259-329 085; cabins €11), in the town of Chișcău, sits near a bubbling stream and has six wooden cabins. Breakfast not included.

At the foot of the Bear Cave, **Pensiunea Daniadis** (☎ 0722-699 847; d €14) is a wooden chalet with seven rooms, each with shared bathroom, and a charming restaurant. Breakfast not included.

Without private transport the region around the cave is tricky to navigate. There's

one daily bus running between Beiuș, Chișcău and Stei. From Oradea by car, head south through Beiuș, follow Hwy E79 for a further 8km along the Crișul Negru River, then turn left at the turn-off for Pietroasa and Chișcău. Continue 4km along this road; the cave is signposted on the right.

Hotel Muncel (p225) in Băile Felix runs day tours to the Bear Cave.

SCĂRIȘOARA ICE CAVE

Cave buffs should head straight to this fantastic **ice cave** (Peștera Ghețarul de la Scărișoara; adult/child €1.50/1; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun).

The cave was first documented in 1863 by Austrian geographer Arnold Schmidt. This enabled the Romanian scientist and speleologist Emil Racovița (1868-1947) to pursue further explorations between 1921 and 1923. Believed to be one of only 10 of this kind in Europe, the cave is filled with 7500 cu metres of ice. The ice, at an altitude of 1150m, dates back to the Ice Age when the Apușeni Mountains were covered in glaciers.

The maximum temperature inside the cave in summer is 1°C; in winter it drops to -7°C. Safety precautions inside the cave are not up to Western standards, and lighting is nonexistent. Bring your own torch or ask the keeper for an oil/carbon lamp (*lampă cu carbid*).

To get there from Beiuș, head south to Ștei. Two kilometres further south turn left, following the signs for Arieșeni and Gârda de Sus. From Gârda de Sus a rough gravel track leads to the ice cave. The track is impassable by car after 6km, so you must hike the remaining 13km in the Arieș Valley. It's impossible to access the cave from Scărișoara village.

GÂRDA DE SUS & AROUND

The village of Gârda de Sus lies in the Arieș River valley in the Apușeni Mountains. Until 1932 it was classified as part of Scărișoara village. Traditional folk costumes, resembling those worn by early Dacian tribes, are still worn in the village for festivals.

Arieșeni, about 8km away, is a village renowned for its traditional folk customs and wooden church. Two kilometres west of Arieșeni, on the border of the Bihor and Alba counties, is a 753m-long **ski slope** (🕒 9am-6pm Dec-May), signposted 'Teleschi Vârtoap'.

About 20km south of Gârda de Sus is the village of **Avram Iancu**, formerly known as Vidra de Sus.

The nearby **Roșia Montană Eurogold mine** (☎ 254-233 680), the biggest gold reserve in Europe (a Canadian joint venture), has attracted fierce criticism from scientists, geologists and environmental campaigners for polluting the local water sources with chemicals and deposits. On the other hand, people in nearby Gârda de Sus rely on the mine for employment and are just as fiercely opposed to shutting down the site.

Sleeping

The Belgian charity Opération Villages Roumains has helped Gârda de Sus establish its own *agrotourism* scheme whereby tourists can stay in villagers' homes. The local representative in Gârda de Sus is **Ioan Stefanuț** (☎ 258-778 065, 0744-700 871; ☎ 9am-5pm) at house 31. In Arieșeni, ask for **Marta Maghiar** (☎ 0744-278 219) at house 13. If a house has a sign reading 'Rețea Turistica' in the window it means it has rooms to rent.

Mama Uța (☎ 258-778 008; cabins/tent sites €20/1) This popular summer spot, at the western end of Gârda de Sus, has 14 wooden cabins and a noisy bar and grill.

Hotel Apușeni (☎ 258-779 023, 0744-187 256; www.hotelapușeni.net.tf; Bubești 87a; d/apt €23/40) This friendly hotel, about 3km east along the road to Arieșeni, has fantastic views, gorgeous rooms and a sun terrace with hill views.

Cabana Vârtop (☎ 0744-560 427, 0745-776 541; d €29) Amid rolling hills in Arieșeni, this chalet has amazing views and its own ski run.

Casa Noastră (☎ 258-779 122, 0744-322 215; r €35; ☎) This luxury chalet has a trout farm and swimming pool.

Getting There & Away

From Gârda de Sus, hikers can head north to the Padiș Plateau. A trail marked by blue stripes (five to six hours) leads from the village to Cabana Padiș.

ARAD

☎ 257 / pop 172,269

The gateway to Hungary, Arad is situated in lush winemaking country on the banks of the Mureș River, which loops around the city. Arad developed as a major trading centre during Turkish occupation of the city between 1551 and 1687. Much of the centre boasts elegant late-19th-century architecture, the charming legacy of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Arad's tourist attractions will only fill

half a day, but idle strolling and an evening show are strongly recommended.

Orientation

The train station is a few kilometres north of the centre, with the international bus station two blocks west of B-dul Revoluției on Str Corneliu Coposu. To reach town, take tram 1, 2 or 3 south down B-dul Revoluției (known simply as 'the boulevard').

Information

There is an ATM outside Supermarket Zirdava.

Banca Commercială Română (☎ 254 460; B-dul Revoluției 72; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Banca Tiriac (☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Club Pro Net (☎ 270 533; pronet@pro-net.ro; B-dul Revoluției 67; internet per hr €0.90)

Info Tour Arad (☎ 270 277; turism@primariaarad.ro; B-dul Revoluției 84-86; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat)

The wonderful staff here veritably bury you in free city maps, brochures and contacts with *agrotourism* homestay organisation Antrec.

Internet Café (Str Tribunal Dobra 8; per hr €0.70; ☎ 9.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 10am-midnight Sat & Sun)

Post office (☎ 232 222; B-dul Revoluției 46-48; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri)

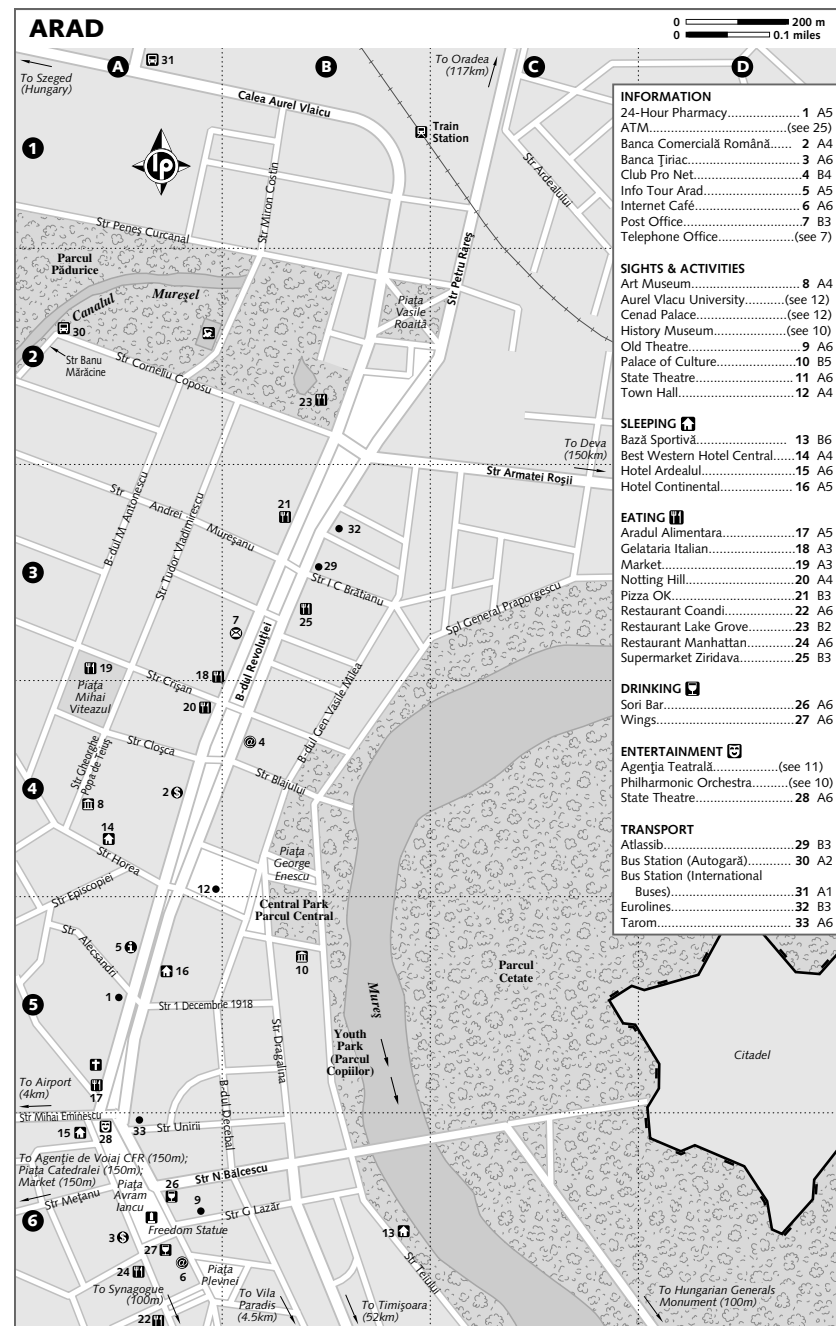
Telephone office (B-dul Revoluției 44; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Sights

Arad's large, star-shaped **citadel** was built under the orders of the Habsburg empress Maria Theresa between 1763 and 1783. The Austrian architect and general Filip Ferdinand Harsch was commissioned to design the Vauban-style six-pointed star. It stands on the site of an old fortress built in 1551 by the Turks. Today the citadel houses a military base and is closed to the public.

After crushing the liberal revolution of 1848, the Habsburgs hanged 13 Hungarian generals outside the citadel. A **monument** to these men stands outside the southern walls of the citadel.

The U-shaped, neoclassical **town hall** (B-dul Revoluției) is Arad's most impressive building. The clock ticking on the tower atop the 1876 building was purchased in Switzerland in 1878. Framing the town hall is the steepled **Cenad Palace** (Palatul Cenad), constructed by the Arad Cenad Railway Company at the end of the 19th century, and the **Aurel Vlaicu University** building, decorated in Viennese rococo



INFORMATION	
24-Hour Pharmacy.....	1 A5
ATM.....	(see 25)
Banca Commercială Română.....	2 A4
Banca Tiriac.....	3 A6
Club Pro Net.....	4 B4
Info Tour Arad.....	5 A5
Internet Café.....	6 A6
Post Office.....	7 B3
Telephone Office.....	(see 7)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Art Museum.....	8 A4
Aurel Vlaicu University.....	(see 12)
Cenad Palace.....	(see 12)
History Museum.....	(see 10)
Old Theatre.....	9 A6
Palace of Culture.....	10 B5
State Theatre.....	11 A6
Town Hall.....	12 A4

SLEEPING	
Bază Sportivă.....	13 B6
Best Western Hotel Central.....	14 A4
Hotel Ardealul.....	15 A6
Hotel Continental.....	16 A5

EATING	
Aradul Alimentara.....	17 A5
Gelateria Italian.....	18 A3
Market.....	19 A3
Notting Hill.....	20 A4
Pizza OK.....	21 B3
Restaurant Coandi.....	22 A6
Restaurant Lake Grove.....	23 B2
Restaurant Manhatta.....	24 A6
Supermarket Zirdava.....	25 B3

DRINKING	
Sorti Bar.....	26 A6
Wings.....	27 A6

ENTERTAINMENT	
Agentia Teatrală.....	(see 11)
Philharmonic Orchestra.....	(see 10)
State Theatre.....	28 A6

TRANSPORT	
Atlaslib.....	29 B3
Bus Station (Autogară).....	30 A2
Bus Station (International)	
Buses.....	31 A1
Eurolines.....	32 B3
Tarom.....	33 A6

motifs and built to house the local administration's treasury.

Near the town hall, in front of Central Park (Parcul Central), is the local **History Museum** (Muzeul de istorie; ☎ 281 847; Piața George Enescu 1; admission €0.60; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), which has some interesting photos and artefacts from Arad county. It is based inside the **Palace of Culture** (built between 1911 and 1913), also home to Arad's Philharmonic Orchestra (opposite). Busts outside the building pay homage to leading literary figures, including Romanian poet George Coșbuc (1866-1918) and post-romantic historian Alexandru Xenopol (1847-1920).

To the east of the museum, along the Mureș River, lies **Youth Park** (Parcul Copiilor). At the southern end of B-dul Revoluției is the 1874 neoclassical **State Theatre** (opposite). Across Piața Avram Iancu is the ailing but still kicking **Old Theatre** (Teatrului Vechi; ☎ 211 918; www.culturaarad.ro; Str George Lazar 1-3, tickets €3-10), built in 1817, where poet Mihei Eminescu worked alongside famous actors of the time. Lengthy renovations have not slowed the show one bit. Productions are popular, particularly the annual Underground Festival in May, attended by independent theatre companies from the US, Hungary, Poland and France, among others. South of the theatre is the Jewish community's **synagogue** (Str Dobra 10). It was built between 1827 and 1834 in typically Moorish style. Enter via Str Cozia.

The **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Arte; ☎ 257 503; Str Gheorghe Popa de Teiuș 24; admission €0.60; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) has paintings and photos by Romanian and Hungarian artists.

Sleeping

Antec arranges rooms in private homes in and around Arad for about €15 to €20, including breakfast. Book through Info Tour Arad (p228).

Bază Sportivă (☎ 251 059; Str Teiului 1; r €6) These rooms above the sports club are cheap-as-chips and basic but clean. If full, try the alternative Bază Sportivă further north along the river, by Restaurant Perla. No English spoken.

Hotel Ardealul (☎ 280 840; B-dul Revoluției 98; s/d unrenovated €21/27, renovated €30/39) This lovely converted concert hall, dating from 1841, has a music room where Brahms, Liszt and Strauss once performed.

Vila Paradis (☎ 287 377; Str Molitului 5; s/d €25) Five kilometres south of the centre, this is a good choice with simple, clean and comfy rooms. Breakfast not included.

Best Western Hotel Central (☎ 256 636; central@inext.ro; Str Horea 8; s/d €60/80) This five-storey hotel has all the mod-cons and a lovely terrace café overlooking its summer garden.

Hotel Continental (☎ 281 700; fax 281 832; www.continentalhotels.ro; B-dul Revoluției 79-81; s/d €72/89; 📺 📶) Arad's upmarket choice has international standards of accommodation and service. In-room internet extra.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Pizza OK (B-dul Revoluției 26-38; mains €3; 🕒 10am-2am) This standard pizza joint serves up 28 varieties.

Restaurant Lake Grove (☎ 254 366; Pădurice Park; meal €4; 🕒 10am-3am) Set in a nice spot on a lake in the park, with leafy, decked gardens, this restaurant is popular with tour groups; the menu has everything from pasta to pudding. Live music on Saturdays.

Restaurant Manhattan (Piața Avram Iancu 9; mains €4-10; 🕒 10am-midnight) This splurge-worthy wood-lined restaurant was conceived by enthusiastic foodies, sommeliers and tourism professionals.

Restaurant Coandi (☎ 214 999; Piața Avram Iancu 11; mains €7) This is a popular Romanian eatery with large tables, so expect to be seated with people of all nationalities for a noisy, fun feed. Portions are huge.

CAFÉS

B-dul Revoluției is lined with cafés and bars.

Notting Hill (cnr B-dul Revoluției & Str Crișana; 🕒 11am-11pm) Offers standard Romanian meals.

Gelateria Italian (B-dul Revoluției) This spot has 20 different flavours of *bella* Italian ice cream, including bubblegum and cola.

SELF-CATERING

Arad has two open-air **markets**, one on Piața Mihai Viteazul and another on Piața Catedralei, at the western end of Str Meșanu. For groceries, go to the large Western-style **Supermarket Ziridava** (B-dul Revoluției; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) or the well-stocked **Aradul Alimentara** (🕒 24hr), at the southern end of B-dul Revoluției.

Entertainment

BARS

Piața Avram Iancu is the place to head for terrace café-bars. One of these is the bikers' joint, Wings, at the southern end of the square.

Sori Bar (☎ 281 478; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 2) This is a popular drinking spot, with a small terrace and some café-style meals (€4).

THEATRE & CLASSICAL MUSIC

The Municipal House of Culture web site (www.culturaarad.ro) is wondrously complete, though some Romanian will be needed to decipher the schedules. Alternatively, ask for assistance at Info Tour Arad.

The **Philharmonic Orchestra** (tickets from €2), inside the Palace of Culture (opposite), holds concerts on weeknights at 7pm. Tickets are sold at the **box office** (☎ 280 519) two hours before performances begin. Arad's **Agentia Teatrală** (🕒 11am-1pm Tue-Sun), which sells tickets to local theatre performances, is at the back of the **State Theatre** (Teatrul de Stat; ☎ 280 018; B-dul Revoluției 103).

Getting There & Away

AIR

At the time of writing, the only airline serving forlorn Arad Airport, 4km west of the centre, was budget airline **Blue Air** (www.blueair-web.com), with twice-weekly services to both Verona, Italy and Valencia, Spain.

Tarom (☎ 211 777; www.tarom.ro; Str Unirii 1; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) has three flights a week to Bucharest out of Timișoara airport (US\$75/107 one-way/return, plus taxes; note that Tarom does not accept euros), about 64km away.

BUS

Arad has two bus stations, one for **international buses** (Str 6 Vânători 2) and the domestic **autogară** (☎ 273 323; Str Banu Mărăcine), two blocks west of the train station.

Daily internal buses from the *autogară* include two to Timișoara (€3), one to Bucharest

(€12) and one to Craiova. State buses go to Szeged (€10) and Budapest (€15).

Private companies selling tickets for international buses to (for example) Hungary, France and Spain line B-dul Revoluției. These buses are considerably more comfortable than the state buses, with air-con, clean seats and free tea and coffee; prices are obviously higher. Try **Atlissib** (☎ 270 562; B-dul Revoluției 35), which has express coaches running twice-weekly to Germany and Austria, or **Eurolines** (☎ 250 397; arad@eurolines.ro; B-dul Revoluției 31), which has buses to nearly everywhere.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The border crossing into Hungary is 52km west of Arad, in Nădlac. This is the major road crossing from Romania into Hungary, so it can get congested. It's open 24 hours a day.

TRAIN

Tickets for trains to Hungary and Austria have to be bought in advance from the **Agentia de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 280 713; Str Meșanu 16; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri).

Arad train station (☎ 230 633; Piața Gării 8-9) is a major railway junction. Daily fast services include five to Budapest (€26), five to Vienna (€57), five to Bucharest (€27), five to Timișoara (€11), one to Constanța (€21) and one to Cluj-Napoca (€14).

To get to Hunedoara from Arad, you have to get a train to Deva and then take a bus from there to Hunedoara.

Getting Around

Currently, the only way to Arad airport is by taxi (about €3).

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