

# History

The name 'Romania' didn't refer to Wallachia or Moldavia until 1859, and Transylvania remained part of the Astro-Hungarian empire until 1918 – even 'Dracula' was actually a Magyar – so what is 'Romania'? It's a fair question, and one that frequently yields long, philosophical answers when travelling around the country – often without much of a clear answer at the end of it. Romania is a product of many incarnations – sometimes tied with Slavic neighbours, Greece, Turkey, Saxon Germany, the USSR or Hungary. But more often Romanians link their past with the Dacians or (more fashionably, at times) with the century the Romans hung out in the area. As one local said, 'We're a mix of both. The Romans mingled with Dacians – they didn't kill them all off, because the Dacian women were too beautiful.' Understanding the past is the best way to get a grip on this fascinatingly complex country.

The name 'Romania' supposedly comes from Romanus (Latin for 'Roman') but others argue it's also from *rumân* (dependent peasant).

## ANTIQUITY

Ancient Romania was inhabited by Thracian tribes. The Greeks called them the Getae, the Romans called them Dacians, but they were actually a single Geto-Dacian people. Their principal religion was the cult of Zalmoxis; when people died, they went to him. The Geto-Dacians communicated with their god through meditation, ritual sacrifice and shunning bodily desires.

From the 7th century BC the Greeks established trading colonies along the Black Sea at Callatis (Mangalia, p298), Tomis (Constanța, p287) and Histria (p300). In the 1st century BC, a strong Dacian state was established by King Burebista to counter the Roman threat. The last Dacian king, Decebal (r AD 87–106), consolidated this state but was unable to stave off attacks led by the Roman emperor Trajan in 101–2. Further attacks ensued in 105–6, leading to the Roman victory at the Dacian capital of Sarmizegetusa and the final Roman conquest of the region. Dacia thus became a province of the Roman Empire.

The Romans recorded their expansion north of the Danube (most of present Romania, including the Transylvanian plateau, came under their rule) on two famous monuments: Trajan's Column in Rome, and the 'Tropaeum Trajani' at Adamclisi, on the site of their victory in Dobrogea. The slave-owning Romans brought with them a superior civilisation and mixed with the conquered tribes to form a Daco-Roman people speaking Latin.

Faced with Goth attacks in AD 271, Emperor Aurelian (r 270–75) decided to withdraw the Roman legions south of the Danube, meaning that Rome governed the region for under 175 years. Romanised peasants remained in Dacia and mixed with the locals; hence the Roman heritage of contemporary Romanians.

Burebista ignited tension with Rome by meddling with internal rivalry between Pompey and Julius Caesar, who died the same year as Burebista (48 BC) – both by assassination.

## THE MIDDLE AGES

Waves of migrating peoples, including the Goths, Huns, Avars, Slavs, Bulgars and Magyars (Hungarians), swept across this territory from the 4th to the 10th centuries, each leaving their mark on the local culture, language and gene pool. Romanians survived in village communities and gradually

TIMELINE	650 BC	AD 106
	Dacians are first recorded in the area of present-day Transylvania from their trade with Greeks.	Dacia becomes a Roman province (until 271).

assimilated the Slavs and other peoples who settled there. By the 10th century a fragmented feudal system ruled by a military class appeared.

From the 10th century the Magyars expanded into Transylvania, north and west of the Carpathian Mountains, and by the 13th century all of Transylvania was an autonomous principality under the Hungarian crown.

Following devastating Tartar raids on Transylvania in 1241 and 1242, King Bela IV of Hungary persuaded German Saxons to settle in Transylvania with free land and tax incentives. He wanted to defend the crown's southeastern flank. He also granted the Székelys (p163) – a Hungarian ethnic group who had earlier migrated to the region with the Magyars – autonomy in return for their military support.

In the 14th century, Prince Basarab I (r 1310–52) united various political formations in the region south of the Carpathians to create the first Romanian principality – Wallachia, dubbed Țara Românească (Romanian Land). Its indigenous peasantry became known as Vlachs.

Peasants dominated the populations of these medieval principalities. In Wallachia and Moldavia peasants were subjugated as serfs to the landed aristocracy (*boyars*), a hereditary class. There were some free, land-owning peasants (*moșneni*) too. The two principalities were ruled by a prince who was also the military leader. Most noblemen were Hungarian; the peasants were Romanians. After a 1437 peasant uprising in Transylvania, Magyar nobles formed a political alliance with the Székely and Saxon leaders. This Union of the Three Nations became the constitutional basis for government in Transylvania in the 16th century.

## OTTOMAN EXPANSION

Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries Wallachia and Moldavia offered strong resistance to the Ottoman's northward expansion. Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Old; r 1386–1418), Vlad Țepeș ('The Impaler'; r 1448, 1456–62, 1476), and Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great; r 1457–1504) were legendary figures in this struggle.

When the Turks conquered Hungary in the 16th century, Transylvania became a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, retaining its autonomy by paying tribute to the sultan. Catholicism and Protestantism were recognised as official state religions; the Orthodox faith of many Romanians remained an unofficial religion. Later, attempts were made to force them to convert to Catholicism.

After the Ottoman victory in Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia also paid tribute to the Turks but maintained their autonomy (this indirect control explains why the only Ottoman buildings seen in Romania today are in Northern Dobrogea).

In 1600 Wallachia and Moldavia were briefly united with Transylvania under Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave; r 1593–1601) at Alba Iulia. In order to fight Ottoman rule, he joined forces in 1594 with the ruling princes of Moldavia and Transylvania against the Turks, attacking strongholds and massacring Turks. In 1595 the Turks called a truce with Viteazul.

The Transylvanian prince, Andrew Báthory, subsequently turned against the Wallachian prince and, on 28 October 1599, Mihai Viteazul defeated and killed Báthory's troops near Sibiu. Viteazul declared himself the new prince of Transylvania, then in spring 1600 invaded Moldavia, where he

Let the debates begin: when the Magyars expanded into Transylvania in the 10th century, it's argued (by Hungarians) that the Daco-Romanians were gone, having migrated south of the Danube; while some (ie the Romanians) say that Daco-Romanians never left the area.

For a Hungarian perspective on Transylvanian history, check <http://members.fortunecity.com/magyarhun/magyar/id3.html>.

## THE DRACULA MYTH

Fifteenth-century Wallachian prince Vlad Țepeș is all too often credited with being Dracula, the vampire-count featured in the classic Gothic horror story *Dracula* (1897) written by Anglo-Irish novelist Bram Stoker.

The madcap association of these two diabolical figures – one historical, the other fictitious – is nothing more than a product of the popular imagination. But while Romanians increasingly reap the tourist reward of this confusion, many are concerned that the identity of a significant figure in their history has been overshadowed by that of an immortal literary vampire.

The 'real' Dracula, Vlad Țepeș, a Wallachian born in 1431 in Sighișoara (p143), ruled Wallachia in 1448, 1456–1462 and 1476. He was outrageously bloodthirsty and killed heaps of people but he did not eat people or drink blood. His princely father, Vlad III, was called Vlad Dracul (from the Latin 'draco', meaning 'dragon') after the chivalric Order of the Dragon accredited to him by Sigismund of Luxembourg in 1431. The Romanian name Drăculea – literally 'son of Dracul' – was bestowed on Vlad Țepeș by his father, and was used as a term of honour. Another meaning of 'draco', however, was 'devil' and this was the meaning that Stoker's novel popularised.

Little Vlad had an unhappy childhood. He spent many of his youthful years in a Turkish prison, where he was allegedly raped by members of the Turkish court.

While Vlad Țepeș was undoubtedly a strong ruler and is seen by some Romanians as a national hero and brave defender of his principality, his practices were ruthless and cruel. Notorious for his brutal punishment methods, ranging from decapitation to boiling and burying alive, he gained the name 'Țepeș' ('impaler') after his favourite form of punishing his enemies. A wooden stake was carefully driven through the victim's anus, to emerge from the body just below the shoulder in such a way as to not pierce any vital organs. This ensured at least 48 hours of unimaginable suffering before death. Țepeș had a habit of eating a full meal (rare, one presumes) while outside watching his Turkish and Greek prisoners writhing on stakes in front of him.

Vlad was truly a man of his time; this torture was not unusual in medieval Europe. Țepeș' first cousin, Ștefan cel Mare, is said to have 'impaled by the navel, diagonally, one on top of each other' 2300 Turkish prisoners in 1473. That Vlad was likely raped repeatedly as a boy and teen in his captive years in a Turkish prison adds another dimension to his favoured method of torture.

Bram Stoker's literary Dracula, by contrast, was a bloodsucking vampire – an undead corpse reliant on the blood of the living to sustain his own immortality. And also a Magyar. Until 1824 in Stoker's adopted England a wooden stake was commonly driven through the heart of suicide victims to ensure the ill-fated corpse did not turn into a vampire in its grave. In Romania, vampires form an integral part of traditional folklore. The seventh-born child is particularly susceptible to this evil affliction, identifiable by a hoof as a foot or a tail at the end of its spine.

Stoker set *Dracula* in Transylvania, a region the novelist never set foot in. The novel, originally set in Austria, was first entitled *The Undead*. But following critics' comments that it was too close a pastiche of Sheridan le Fanu's *Camilla* (1820) – a vampire novel set in southern France – Stoker switched titles and geographical settings. Count Dracula's fictitious castle on the Borgo Pass was inspired by Cruden Bay castle in Aberdeenshire, where Stoker drafted much of the novel. The historical facts were uncovered at the British Museum in London.

While Vlad Țepeș died in 1476, and Stoker in 1912, Count Dracula lives on, sustaining an extraordinary subculture of fiction and film. The novel itself has never been out of print (it was first translated into Romanian in 1990), while film-makers have remade the film countless times, kicking off with FW Murnau's silent *Nosferatu* (1922) and multiplying it into dozens of spin-offs. Tom Cruise, for example, would never have added fangs to his repertoire if it weren't for Stoker's original hero, who started a lineage leading to Anne Rice's Lestat.

Dracula fan clubs have been set up around the globe, many of whom meet up with fellow fans at the annual Dracula World Congress. Closer to 'home', the Transylvanian Dracula Society continues the tradition and offers Dracula-themed tours (p200).

Romanians are proud, proud, proud that the Turks never completely conquered their land, but – in quiet tones – some admit that Bucharest wasn't on the way between Constantinople and the Ottomans' main goal, Vienna.

was also crowned prince. This first political union of the three Romanian principalities lasted for slightly more than a year: Viteazul was defeated by a joint Habsburg-Transylvanian noble army just months later and in August 1601 he was captured and beheaded.

In 1683 the Turks were defeated at the gates of Vienna and in 1687 Transylvania came under Habsburg rule.

The 18th century marked the start of Transylvanian Romanians' fight for political emancipation. Romanian peasants constituted 60% of the population, yet continued to be excluded from political life. In 1784 three serfs called Horea, Cloșca and Crișan led a major uprising. It was quashed, and its leaders were crushed to death on what is today a favoured tourist site (p176). But on 22 August 1785 the Habsburg emperor, Joseph II, abolished serfdom in Transylvania.

The 17th century in Wallachia was marked by the lengthy reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu (r 1688-1714), a period of relative peace and prosperity characterised by a great cultural and artistic renaissance. In 1775 part of Moldavia's northern territory – Bucovina – was annexed by Austria-Hungary. This was followed in 1812 by the loss of its eastern territory – Bessarabia (most of which is in present-day Moldova) – to Russia. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-9, Wallachia and Moldavia became Russian protectorates while remaining in the Ottoman Empire.

## ONE STATE

In Transylvania the revolutionary spirit that gripped much of Europe in the years leading up to 1848 was entangled with the Hungarian revolution, which in Transylvania was led by Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi. Hungarian revolutionaries sought an end to Habsburg domination of Hungary. Concurrently, Romanian revolutionaries demanded their political emancipation, equality and the abolition of serfdom.

The Austrian authorities struck a deal with Transylvania's Romanians, promising them national recognition in return for joining forces with them against the Hungarian revolutionaries in Transylvania. Thus Transylvanian Romanians fought against and enacted revenge upon Transylvanian Hungarians for what was seen as centuries of mistreatment. Russian intervention finally quashed the Hungarian revolutionaries, ending a revolution that had shocked all sides by its escalation to civil war.

In its aftermath, the region fell under direct rule of Austria-Hungary from Budapest. Ruthless 'Magyarisation' followed: Hungarian was established as the official language and any Romanians who dared oppose the regime – such as the Memorandumists of 1892, a group of intellectual and political figures who voiced their opposition to Austro-Hungarian rule in a memorandum – were severely punished.

By contrast Wallachia and Moldavia prospered. In 1859, with French support, Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected to the thrones of Moldavia and Wallachia, creating a national state known as the United Romanian Principalities on 11 December 1861. This was renamed Romania in 1862.

The reform-minded Cuza was forced to abdicate in 1866 by mutinous army officers, and his place was taken by the Prussian prince Carol I. With Russian assistance, Romania declared independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. After the 1877–8 War of Independence, Dobrogea became

## THE WARRIOR QUEEN

'There is only one man in Romania and that is the queen.' That is how a French diplomat described Queen Marie of Romania whose diplomatic experience at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 bolstered Romania's flagging image abroad, raised its political profile and assured her legendary status.

Queen Marie (1875–1938), the granddaughter of Britain's Queen Victoria, married Ferdinand I (1865–1927), heir to the Romanian throne, in 1892 when she was 17. Despite widespread horror in Britain at her mismatch to a prince of a 'semibarbaric' country, Marie developed a strong kinship with Romania, declaring, 'My love for my country Romania is my religion'.

Following an alleged love affair with American aristocrat Waldorf Astor, she knuckled down to twisting her tongue around the Romanian language and acquainting herself with Romanian politics.

During the second Balkan War (1913) the princess ran a cholera hospital for Romanian soldiers on the Bulgarian side of the Danube. In 1914 Ferdinand I was crowned king and Marie became queen.

Despite proving herself to be a 'viable political force', Queen Marie remained the 'people's princess' throughout her reign. She dressed in peasant attire – an eyebrow-raising gesture for royalty. At the outbreak of WWI she wrote her first book, *My Country*, to raise funds for the British Red Cross in Romania.

Prior to her evacuation to Iași in 1916, she worked in hospitals in Bucharest, distributing food and cigarettes to wounded soldiers. In Iași she set about reorganising the appallingly makeshift hospitals.

After she represented Romania at the peace conference in Paris, the French press dubbed her the 'business queen'. A mother of six, she wrote over 100 diaries from 1914 until her death in 1938. During her lifetime 15 of her books were published. Her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, appeared in two volumes in 1934–5.

Queen Marie is buried in Curtea de Argeș (p103). Her heart, originally encased in a gold casket and buried in Balçic (in today's Bulgaria) is safeguarded in Bucharest's National History Museum.

part of Romania. Under the consequent Treaty of San Stefano and the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Romanian independence was recognised. In 1881 it was declared a kingdom and on 22 May 1881 Carol I was crowned the first king of Romania.

## WWI & GREATER ROMANIA

Through shrewd political manoeuvring, Romania greatly benefited from WWI. Despite Romania having formed a secret alliance with Austria-Hungary in 1883, it began WWI with neutrality. In 1916, the government under Ion Brătianu declared war on Austria-Hungary. Its objective was to seize Transylvania from Austria-Hungary.

The defeat of Austria-Hungary in 1918 paved the way for the formation of modern Romania. Bessarabia, the area east of the Prut River which had been part of Moldavia until 1812 when it was taken by the Russians, was joined to Romania. Likewise, Bucovina, which had been in Austro-Hungarian hands since 1775, was also reunited with Romania. Part of the Austrian-Hungarian Banat, which had been incorporated in Romania, was also handed over. Furthermore, Transylvania was finally united with Romania. Hence, at the end

1453

The fall of Constantinople. The Ottomans block trade on the Black Sea and Romania's isolation deepens.

1467

Stephen the Great defeats the Hungarian army at Baia; it is Hungary's last attempt to conquer Moldova.

1600

Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia are united for 15 months under Mihai Viteazul.

1812

Treaty of Bucharest grants Russia control of eastern Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire gains control of western Moldavia.

of WWI, Romania – now known as Greater Romania – more than doubled its territory (from 120,000 to 295,000 sq km) and its population (from 7.5 to 16 million). The acquisition of this new territory was ratified by the Triple Entente powers in 1920 under the Treaty of Trianon.

## WWII

In the years leading up to WWII, Romania, under the able guidance of foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu, sought security in an alliance with France and Britain, and joined Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in the Little Entente. Romania also signed a Balkan Pact with Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece, and later established diplomatic relations with the USSR. These efforts were weakened by the Western powers' appeasement of Hitler and by Romania's own King Carol II.

Carol II succeeded his father Ferdinand I to the throne. Extreme right-wing parties opposed to a democratic regime emerged, notably the anti-Semitic League of the National Christian Defence, which consequently gave birth to the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1927. This notorious breakaway faction, better known as the fascist Iron Guard, was led by Corneliu Codreanu and by 1935 dominated the political scene.

Finding himself unable to manipulate the political parties, Carol II declared a royal dictatorship in February 1938. All political parties were dissolved and laws were passed to halve the size of the electorate. Between 1939 and 1940 alone, Romania had no less than nine different governments.

In 1939 Carol II clamped down on the anti-Semitic Iron Guard, which until 1937 he had supported. Codreanu and 13 other legionaries were arrested, sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, and then assassinated. In revenge for their leader's death, Iron Guard members murdered Carol II's prime minister, Armand Călinescu, leading to the butchering of 252 Iron Guard members by Carol II's forces. In accordance with the king's wishes, the corpses were strung up in public squares. Only with the collapse of the Axis powers at the end of WWII did the Iron Guard disintegrate (in 1999, Codreanu's nephew Nicadur Zelea Codreanu tried unsuccessfully to revive the reviled group).

Romania was isolated after the fall of France in May 1940, and in June 1940 Greater Romania collapsed in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The USSR re-occupied Bessarabia. On 30 August 1940 Romania was forced to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary by order of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. In September 1940, Southern Dobrogea was given to Bulgaria.

Not surprisingly, the loss of territories sparked widespread popular demonstrations. Even Carol II realised he could not quash the increasing mass hysteria and on the advice of one of his councillors, the king called in General Marshall Ion Antonescu. To defend the interests of the ruling classes, Antonescu forced King Carol II to abdicate in favour of the king's 19-year-old son Michael. Antonescu then imposed a fascist dictatorship, with himself as *conducător* (supreme leader).

German troops were allowed to enter Romania in October 1940, and in June 1941 Antonescu joined Hitler's anti-Soviet war. One of Antonescu's aims in joining forces with Hitler was to recover Bessarabia and this was achieved in August 1941. The results of this Romanian-Nazi alliance were gruesome, with over 200,000 Romanian Jews – mainly from newly regained Bessarabia – and 40,000 Roma deported to transit camps in Transnistria and murdered

in Auschwitz. After the war, Antonescu was turned over to the Soviet authorities who condemned him to death in a show trial. Bessarabia fell back into Soviet hands.

As the war went badly and the Soviet army approached Romania's borders, a rare national consensus was achieved. On 23 August 1944 an opportunistic Romania suddenly changed sides again, capturing the 53,159 German soldiers who were stationed in Romania at the time, and declared war on Nazi Germany. By this dramatic act, Romania salvaged its independence and shortened the war. By 25 October the Romanian and Soviet armies had driven the Hungarian and German forces from Transylvania, replacing the valued territory back under Romanian control. The costs, however, were appalling: 500,000 Romanian soldiers died fighting for the Axis powers, and another 170,000 died after Romania joined the Allies.

## THE COMMUNIST ERA

Of all the countries that burst forward into the mass-industrialised, communist experiment in the 20th century, Romania and Russia were the most ill-prepared, both being overwhelmingly rural, agricultural countries. Prior to 1945, Romania's Communist Party had no more than 1000 members. Its postwar ascendancy, which saw membership soar to 710,000 by 1947, was a consequence of backing from Moscow. The Soviet-engineered return of Transylvania greatly enhanced the prestige of the left-wing parties, which won the parliamentary elections in November 1946. A year later Prime Minister Petru Groza forced King Michael to abdicate (allegedly by holding the queen mother at gunpoint), the monarchy was abolished, and a Romanian People's Republic proclaimed.

A period of terror ensued in which all the prewar leaders, prominent intellectuals and suspected dissidents were imprisoned or interned in hard-labour camps. The most notorious prisons were in Pitești, Gherla, Sighetu Marmatei and Aiud. Factories and businesses were nationalised, and in 1953 a new Slavified orthography was introduced to obliterate all Latin roots of the Romanian language, while street and town names were changed to honour Soviet figures. Braşov was renamed Oraşul Stalin.

Romania's loyalty to Moscow continued only until the late 1950s. Soviet troops were withdrawn from Romania in 1958, and street and town names were changed once more to emphasise the country's Roman heritage. After 1960 Romania adopted an independent foreign policy under two 'national' communist leaders, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (leader from 1952 to 1965) and his protégé Nicolae Ceauşescu (from 1965 to 1989), both of whom had been imprisoned during WWII. Under these figures the concept of a great Romanian socialist state was flaunted.

Romania never broke completely with the USSR, but Ceauşescu refused to assist the Soviets in their 1968 'intervention' in Czechoslovakia. His public condemnation of it earned him praise and economic aid from the West. In 1975 Romania was granted 'most favoured nation' status by the USA, which yielded more than US\$1 billion in US-backed credits in the decade that followed. And when Romania condemned the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and participated in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games despite a Soviet-bloc boycott, Ceauşescu was officially decorated by Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

Radu Ioanid's *The Holocaust in Romania* (2000) chronicles how Romania used other brutal methods aside from organised murder to try and rid itself of Roma and Jews during WWII.

Fifty years after his death, Carol II's remains were transferred back to Romania from Portugal, where he died. He was interred in Curtea de Argeş.

*On Clowns* (1993) is a cutting rant on Romanian dictatorship by Norman Manea, who was deported to a Transnistria concentration camp when he was five years old.

### 1819 – 34

Wallachia and Moldavia were occupied by Russia. Between 1835 and 1856, the two principalities were Russian protectorates.

### 1864

Romanian Jews forbidden to practice law.

### 1881

Carol I is crowned the first king of Romania.

### 1897

Vlad Țepeș is reborn when Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is published.

Meanwhile, Romanians suffered painfully during the 25-year dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his family. Thousands were imprisoned or repressed by the much-feared secret police (Securitate), huge amounts of money were squandered on megalomaniacal, grandiose projects and the population lived in abject poverty.

Of course Moldova's communist era continues.

See p16 for a list of communist-related sights.

Stanciu Stroia's *My*

*Second University:*

*Memories from Romanian Communist Prisons* (2005) retells the days a doctor spent behind bars.

## THE 1989 REVOLUTION

In late 1989, as the world watched the collapse of one communist regime after another, it seemed only a matter of time before Romania's turn would come. The Romanian revolution was carried out with Latin passion and intensity. Of all the Soviet Bloc countries, only Romania's government transfer ended with a dead leader.

The spark that ignited Romania came on 15 December 1989, when Father László Tökés publicly condemned the dictator from his Hungarian church in Timișoara, prompting the Reformed Church of Romania to remove him from his post. Police attempts to arrest demonstrating parishioners failed and within days the unrest had spread across the city, leading to some 115 deaths. Ceaușescu proclaimed martial law in Timiș County and dispatched trainloads of troops to crush the rebellion. The turning point came on 19 December, when the army in Timișoara went over to the side of the demonstrators.

On 21 December in Bucharest, an address made by Ceaușescu during a mass rally was interrupted by anti-Ceaușescu demonstrators in the 100,000-strong crowd who booed the dictator and shouted 'murderer', 'Timișoara' and other provocations. The demonstrators retreated to the wide boulevard between Piața Universității and Piața Romană – only to be brutally crushed a couple of hours later by police gunfire and armoured cars. Drenched by ice-cold water from fire hoses, the demonstrators refused to submit and instead began erecting barricades, under the eyes of Western journalists in the adjacent Hotel Inter-Continental. At 11pm the police began their assault on Piața Universității, using a tank to smash through the barricades. By dawn the square had been cleared of the debris and the bodies of those killed removed from the site. Estimates vary, but at least 1033 were killed.

The following morning thousands more demonstrators took to the streets, and a state of emergency was announced. At noon Ceaușescu reappeared on the balcony of the Central Committee building to try to speak again, only to be forced to flee by helicopter from the roof of the building. Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, were arrested in Târgoviște, taken to a military base and, on 25 December, condemned by an anonymous court and executed by a firing squad. Footage of the Ceaușescu family's luxury apartments broadcast on TV showed pure gold food scales in the kitchen and rows of diamond-studded shoes in Elena's bedroom.

While these events had all the earmarks of a people's revolution, many scholars have advanced the notion that they were just as much the result of a coup d'état as well: the Communist Party, tired of having to bow down to Ceaușescu as royalty, had been planning an overthrow for months before the events of December 1989.

## THE DICTATOR'S BRIGHT IDEAS

In the 1980s, in his attempts to eliminate foreign debt and look good in front of the world, Nicolae Ceaușescu exported Romania's food while his own people were forced to ration even staple goods (meat was all but unattainable by the mid-1980s) and instituted power cuts to save money. His opponents were at best harassed, at worst killed by experimental methods of torture. One such method, known as *radu*, was used by Ceaușescu on his political opponents, especially Hungarian nationalists, whom he despised. It consisted of bombarding the body with low-level radiation and allowing cancer to settle. Many of those he had arrested eventually died of strange forms of cancer.

In March 1987, Ceaușescu embarked on a rural urbanisation program that would see the total destruction of 8000 villages (mainly in Transylvania) and the resettlement of their (mainly Hungarian) inhabitants. After having bulldozed a neighbourhood in Bucharest to build his Palace of the People (p68), no one doubted he'd proceed with his plans. Several dozen villages were razed, but thankfully the project went uncompleted. However, one result was stray dogs – the number now hovers at 200,000 by some estimates – most of whom are ancestors of guard dogs that couldn't make the move into compact apartments.

Part of Ceaușescu's Securitate were child spies, forced into ratting on friends and family. It's estimated as many as 15% of the Securitate were children.

## ATTEMPTS AT DEMOCRACY

The National Salvation Front (FSN) took immediate control of the country. In May 1990, it won the country's first democratic elections since 1946, placing Ion Iliescu, a Communist Party member since the age of 14, at the helm as president. Protests ensued, but Iliescu graciously sent in 20,000 coal miners to violently quash them. Iliescu was nonetheless re-elected in 1992 as the head of a coalition government under the banner of the Party of Social Democracy. New name, same policies. Market reforms remained nowhere in sight. In 1993 subsidies on food, transportation and energy were scrapped, prompting prices to fly sky-high and employment to plummet to an all-time low. Iliescu, meanwhile, personally benefited from shady dealmaking, including a pyramid scheme that rocked Cluj-Napoca in the early 1990s.

Iliescu was finally ousted in the 1996 presidential elections by an even more embittered, impoverished and desperate populace who ushered in Emil Constantinescu, leader of the right-of-centre election alliance Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR), as president.

Constantinescu's reform-minded government made entry into NATO and the European Union (EU) its top priorities, together with fast-paced structural economic reform, the fight against corruption and improved relations with Romania's neighbours, especially Hungary.

Scandal and corruption surrounded the November 2000 electoral race. In May of that year, the National Fund for Investment (NFI) collapsed. Thousands of investors – mainly pensioners who'd deposited their life savings into the government fund – took to the streets to demand their cash back (US\$47.4 million, long squandered by the NFI). Police used tear gas to dispel rioters in Bucharest.

After Constantinescu refused to run in the 2000 'Mafia-style' elections, Iliescu retook the helm as the country's president and his Social Democrat Party (PSD) formed a minority government, with Adrian Nastase as prime

Lucian Boia's *Romania* (2001) is a rare overview of Romania written by a local; the philosophical, even playful (it includes a walking tour of Bucharest) overview covers various viewpoints of sometimes debated truths behind the origin of Romania.

For an in-depth look at Romania since communism, check out Tom Gallagher's *Modern Romania* (2005).

Conspiracy? Not a few people wonder if the communist bystanders turned 'National Salvation Front (NSF)' who jolted to power following Ceaușescu's fall had actually engineered the revolution – ie that it was more in fact a 'coup d'état'. Only in 2004 did Romania have a president other than a former communist.

1945

Following secret talks between Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, Romania falls under the Soviet 'sphere of influence'.

1976

Nadia Comaneci scores a perfect 10 at the Montreal Summer Olympics.

1989

Nicolae Ceaușescu and money-squandering wife Elena are found guilty of genocide by a makeshift tribunal and executed.

1991

Moldova declares its full independence, establishing the Dniestr Moldovan Republic.

minister. The 2004 elections were marred by accusations of electoral fraud, and there were two rounds of voting before Traian Băsescu was announced the winner, with 51% of the votes. The PNL (National Liberal Party) leader, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, became prime minister and swore in a new coalition that excluded the PSD.

Romania's 1991 constitution provides for a parliamentary system of government. Its two-chamber parliament – comprising the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) and Senate (upper house) – is elected every four years. The next general elections are scheduled for 2009.

The government's main goal, aside from their many domestic issues, was integration with international bodies, most notably the EU. In 2002, Romania was invited to join NATO. During the American war against Iraq in 2003, Romania was one of the first countries to guarantee access to airfields and allowed Americans to set up military bases on their soil. In 2006 it was reported that Romania allegedly provided the CIA with a secret detention centre for suspected terrorists – one of a few scattered 'Guatanamos' of Eastern Europe. Exact locations have been kept quiet, but some reports say that the US has used the Mihail-Kogalniceanu military airport on the Black Sea coast.

Romania (and Bulgaria) finally received approval for EU membership in 2007 just a few months before the year began. Romania's record of organised crime, corruption and food safety had delayed the membership previously, and the EU noted that progress checks would continue following membership. The EU has been a big supporter of Romania's EU cause, with Brussels granting billions of euro to infrastructure, business development, environmental protection and social services. Yet by mid 2006, only 10% to 20% of the aid in some cases had been used due to various bureaucratic hurdles.

## MOLDOVA SINCE 2000

For details on Moldova's earlier history, see p315.

Visitors are surprised to hear that there is a communist government in power in Moldova – after all the tiny country has suffered through after declaring independence from the USSR. Vladimir Voronin is president of the republic, and also the president of the parliamentary Communist Party. He has strong Russian sympathies and has taken steps to dissociate Moldova from its Romanian roots, focusing instead on the separateness of the Moldovan identity and language, but ones fashioned very much under its Soviet and Russian history of dominance. In his inaugural address in April 2001, he described Moldova as a European Cuba which needed to guard itself against 'imperialist predators' in Europe, just as Cuba had against the USA. The president is elected by parliamentary assembly. The current prime minister is Vasile Tarlev.

These officials have become highly unpopular. In 2002 several thousands took to the streets in Chişinău to protest a government plan to force school children to learn Russian. The government backed down but refused to step down, as the crowds were demanding. In November 2003, up to 50,000 took to the capital's streets in a peaceful protest demanding the government's resignation; they were incensed that Russian troops remain on Moldovan soil (in the breakaway region of Transdniest) and about a Russian plan to change Moldova to a federation, giving self-rule to Transdniest. Placards read: Down with Communists! and We Want to Join NATO!

In 2003, Russian troops started to honour their years-old agreement of pulling out of Transdniest; by the end of the year, they had removed some 20,000 tons of weapons, ammunition and equipment – about half of all that had remained on the territory since the communist era.

Run by former Red Army guards, with all its Soviet statues standing, a communist government firmly in place, and the reputation for corruption and illegal arms trade, Transdniest has a hard sell to make its case for independence to be recognised internationally. Presently it's not, other than in Russia. In 2005, Ukraine closed its border to Transdniest imports unless Moldovan customs had been processed. Transdniest returned the favour by closing all train routes in/out of the country, meaning certain routes from Moldova east were no longer running.

The government under Voronin has been both trying to buddy up to the EU and international bodies (they joined the WTO in 2001), signing a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 1999. But it's made no clear advances towards EU membership this decade.

Nicholas Dima's *Moldova and the Transdniest Republic* (2001) offers the most complete analysis of Moldova's odd political positioning, and explores Russia's interest in the area.

Only half of Romanians have access to running water, and slightly fewer than half of Romania's roads are paved.

Moldova ranks second in the world for the percentage of its population living under the official poverty line: 80% (2002).

### 1992

Civil war breaks out between Moldovan authorities and the region of Transdniest.

### 1997

The number of stray dogs (PC term 'community dogs') in Bucharest reaches between 150,000 and 200,000.

### 2004

Romania joins NATO.

### 2007

Lonely Planet releases its 4th edition of *Romania & Moldova*, and Romania joins EU (listed in order of achievement).

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

No one can settle on what it means to be 'Romanian', but the perceived Latin link – from the lone century Romans lived here 2000 years ago – seems to affect daily life to a degree (notably the Latin roots of the Romanian language). Although Romanians can be formal in business and when meeting strangers, couples of all ages are more openly affectionate than you see in some of Romania's neighbouring countries. If you say you like local delicacies like *mămăligă* (cornmeal) or are just enjoying someone's village, it's taken as a personal compliment – sometimes returned with a warm, deeply felt 'thank you'.

The struggling economy and hopes of a rejuvenating EU membership dominate the feeling of the day. Some older workers in bureaucratic jobs hold onto a 'can't do' style linked with socialism; a thoughtful 45-year-old train worker told us without bitterness that Romania has 'no hope', and dreamed his son could get a job out of the country. Many younger Romanians hightail it to summer (or lifelong) jobs abroad – in Spain, Italy, Greece, the UK or the USA – thus creating a 'brain drain'. A 25-year-old hotel clerk/clarinetist lamented, 'I get paid US\$100 a month. I can never have a family at this salary. I'd rather clean toilets in America.' But those who return see new options. Returning to Braşov from a year in Switzerland, a 25-year-old entrepreneur said, 'I wish I had been born 10 years earlier so I could have capitalised on things sooner!'

Romanians are hypersensitive of the reputation the country has abroad, with reports of corruption, rip-off taxi drivers, human trafficking, street crime, stray dogs, pollution, poverty and terrible roads. No doubt they were not happy with the 2006 *South Park* spoof where Colorado rallied against Romanians bureaucrats, shown in black-and-grey Bucharest and speaking with Russian accents, who rallied to keep orphans in Romania. The animated Colorado signs read: 'Romania sucks'.

Pro-Romanian nationalism has reared its ugly head in some places, with right-wing groups such as Nouă Dreapta (New Right) organising anti-gay banners during GayFest in Bucharest, Pro-TV talk shows discussing anti-Semitic views, groups denying the Holocaust, anti-Roma chants and banners enveloping crowds at Steaua football games, and frequent commentary complaining about the Hungarians, the nation's second largest ethnic minority.

Through it all, however, Romanians remain open and friendly to visitors. Even if you haven't had a few rounds of *țuică* (plum brandy), friendliness abounds, like the old lady in a Saxon town who came up to us with the gift of an apple from her garden: 'It's so hot today. Wouldn't you like an apple?'

Moldovans, though they are ethnically related to Romanians, have less of the reserve, shyness or formality of their cousins, thanks to generations of Slavic influence under Soviet and Russian rule. Highly approachable people, they will happily enter into conversation, extend genuine offers of help and show unbounded curiosity about you. Moldovans like to mix being productive with having a good time and will easily find time to spend with newfound friends. With a keen intelligence leaning towards the philosophical, they have no illusions about where their country stands in relation to the world but aren't self-pitying about it. The Russian language is alive and well in Moldova, whereas in Romania it's a rare occasion to find someone speaking the *russki*.

Donald Leroy Dyer has written seminal books about Moldovan culture and language issues. Try *Studies in Moldovan* (1996) and *The Romanian Dialect of Moldova* (1999).

## LIFESTYLE

Romania and Moldova are jigsaws of economics and attitude as much as of ethnicity. This has given rise to tension between minority groups, but most people today are united in their struggle to make a decent living. While pensioners are often the ones to have had the hardest time adapting to recent social changes, the younger generation is full of beans. In the cities, a sizable chunk of it drives fast cars and sports mobile phones; another chunk is driven by the dream of doing the same. Still others have embarked on a more difficult route: questioning where their country is headed and defining values and priorities. Sometimes it's easier to just head off into the mountains where no social issue matters much!

During the 1990s, Romania stumbled through ineffectual economic reforms and it has only recently found its footing and a sense of direction. This has led to a feeling of optimism, but the country is left with a host of lingering social issues to contend with. The problem of its high number of orphanages was complicated by a ban on foreign adoptions in 2001 in an effort to stem a system of auctioning babies to the highest bidder and to comply with EU directives. Only in the last days of 2001 did Romania finally repeal the criminalisation of homosexuality, becoming one of the last European countries to do so, and any women's or feminist movement is barely nascent.

Moldova remains off the EU radar, while Romania seems to be holding out for positive changes the EU membership may bring. But as one Romanian told us, 'The EU won't be the saviour some hope for and it won't be the end-all others fear.'

## POPULATION

Along with Russia, Romania was the most rural country of the former Soviet Bloc to enter the communist experiment of mass urbanisation. Modernisation, industrialisation and Ceausescu's attempts to urbanise and centralise Romania saw the urban population rise from 23.4% in 1948 to 53% today – still low by European standards. Moldova's figure of 46% makes it the second-least urbanised country in Europe (Liechtenstein gets gold in that one). Romania's overall population is decreasing by 0.12% a year, while Moldova's is increasing at a snail-paced 0.2%.

Romanians make up 89.5% of their population of 22.3 million; Hungarians are the next largest ethnic group (6.6%), followed by Roma (2.5%), Ukrainians and Germans (each 0.3%). Russians and Turks each take up but 0.2%. Germans and Hungarians live almost exclusively in Transylvania, while

In 2006 the travel sector gave Romania 485,000 jobs, nearly 6% of total employment.

Romania hopes to be the 'next India' in terms of IT. Software developers earn about US\$6000 annually (about double the average income) and number 45,000, with 8000 graduates entering the field annually.

## LOVE OUR TOILETS!

Toilets created a bit of a stir in EU-hopeful Romania in 2005, when WaterAid's World Toilet Day exposed Romania as lacking adequate sanitation on their Bogroll of Dishonour list, revealing that at least 10 million people were without hygienic lavatories.

It's a serious issue: a couple of million people die from diarrhoea annually, often due to unhygienic bathrooms. The problem is more serious for locals in rural areas than for foreigner visitors and the conditions in most restaurants and hotels are improving and toilet paper availability is on the upswing.

Some visitors, however, do grumble over some toilets – we heard of the Duke of Luxembourg getting uppity over a pit toilet in a Saxon village in 2006 (royal bowel movements require certain standards apparently – go take a dump back in Lux, pal).

One hilarious Romanian blog we stumbled upon had a fiery debate over the issue, with one local poster lashing out that Romanians need to stick up for the 'home-team' toilets. 'Tinkle with pride' would make a great bumper sticker.

**IN EMINESCU WE TRUST**

Set up to save much of Romania's traditional heritage from the merciless Ceaușescu bulldozers during communism, the Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET; [www.mihaieminescutrust.org](http://www.mihaieminescutrust.org)) has continued working to preserve Romanian heritage. In recent years, Prince Charles has got in on the act as a patron of the cause, making several trips around Saxon villages outside Sighișoara and in Maramureș.

Highlight achievements include the churches in Biertan (p149) and traditional homes providing accommodation in Viscri (p151).

Ukrainians and Russians live mainly near the Danube Delta, and Turks are found along the Black Sea coast.

Moldovans comprise but 76% of their population of 4.5 million, followed by Ukrainians (8.4%), Russians (6%), Gagauz (4.4%) and Bulgarians (2%).

**MULTICULTURALISM****Germans**

The German population in Romania peaked in the 1930s when there were 800,000 Saxons in Transylvania. Numbers have dwindled to no more than 65,000 today. During WWII, 175,000 Romanian Germans were killed or left the country. After Romania switched sides to join the Allies against Hitler's Nazi Germany, 70,000 Germans were accused of Nazi collaboration and sentenced to five years' hard labour. Survivors returned to find their land and property confiscated by the newly installed communist regime.

Under Ceaușescu, Germans, like all other inhabitants, were not allowed to freely leave Romania. Instead Ceaușescu charged West Germany about US\$8000 for each exit permit it issued. In the 1980s, some 70,000 exit permits were 'bought'. Unsurprisingly, between 1989 and 1995 an estimated 100,000 Germans left the country. Today's remaining Saxon community in Transylvania is served by state-run German schools and represented politically by the German Democratic Forum (Demokratisches Forum der Deutschen).

**Roma**

Official statistics estimate the number of Roma, Romania's third-largest ethnic group, at only 550,000 within Romania. However, according to a 2004 European Commission report, the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Centre (<http://errc.org>) and the community itself, the number is somewhere between 1.8 and 3 million, making it the largest such community in the world. The remaining nomadic Roma number anywhere from 2500 to 10,000. They are split between 40 different clans comprising 21 castes, each of which has its own traditional costume, superstitions and taboos.

The Mongols and Tartars brought the first enslaved Roma (*figan* in Romanian) to Romania in 1242. Nomadic Roma (*corturari*) from India settled in Romania from the 15th century onwards. Around 50% of the world's Roma population was wiped out by the Holocaust.

Marxist theories in Romania and across Eastern Europe led to forced assimilation policies that forbade nomadism, set up 'Roma' communities and denied the existence of the group. Since the fall of communism, the Roma have fallen harder into extreme poverty than any other group in the country (something like four in five are 'impoverished', earning something like US\$2.15 per day). Those who were uprooted and relocated into 'gypsy districts' (particularly in Bucharest) have fared the worst. In 2005, the US State Department's Human Rights report on Romania noted dozens of forced evictions of Roma (including 250 in Zalău and 140 in Miercurea Ciuc, and

relocations from historic neighbourhoods in Bucharest). Public racism is on the rise – including anti-Roma banners at football matches – and there have been reports of police harassment of NGOs working to help the Roma. Divisional politicians badmouth the Roma to win local elections. Roma children attend school less regularly than Romanians; many of those who do go find some schools segregating classes.

During the 2002 census, however, the Roma found themselves highly sought after, as Romanians, Hungarians and Roma organisations courted them to declare themselves as part of their respective ethnic group (the census oddly didn't allow double ethnicity).

Though the legal wedding age in Romania is 16, many Roma marry earlier. Romanian authorities intervened when a 15-year-old groom and his (allegedly) 12-year-old bride (the daughter of a self-proclaimed 'gypsy king') were wed in Sibiu, stating the couple would have to live apart.

In 2005, the World Bank initiated the EU-funded Decade of Roma Inclusion, a ten-year plan across Eastern Europe aimed to aid education, housing and health for the Roma.

Not all Roma are hurting. Some 'Gypsy palaces' (rather garish, Disney-esque homes) have been built by more affluent figures.

Politically, Roma are represented by several groups, including the Roma Party (Partida Romilor), which is guaranteed a seat in Romania's national legislature (Romania is the only Eastern European country to provide this).

**Hungarians**

Under Ceaușescu, all Hungarian-language newspapers and magazines in Romania were closed down, and very few Hungarian schools and cultural centres existed. Since 1989, however, the rights of Romania's 1.5 million Hungarians have been recognised. They are represented politically in parliament and have their own publications, schools and cultural centres.

Though relations have calmed between Romanians and Hungarians (and their respective countries), there is still a palpable level of distrust and tension, fuelled by historical injustices on both sides. Despite attempts to assimilate the Hungarians into local culture, they have retained a distinct identity; in Székely Land, it sometimes feels as if the population has no idea they're actually living in Romania!

**Moldova**

In 1992 tension between the Ukrainian- and Russian-dominated Transdnestr region and the rest of Moldova sparked a brutal civil war. The great disagreement between the Moldovan government and the Transdnestrian

Because public discrimination, racism and violence have erupted since 1989 across Eastern Europe, many Roma actually lament the days of communism. In her insightful book on the Roma population in Eastern Europe, *Bury Me Standing* (1995), Isabel Fonseca wrote that some Roma here actually mourned Ceaușescu, whom some call 'Papa.'

**LAND OF CONFUSION**

- **Bucharest/Budapest?** Famously during Michael Jackson's visit to Bucharest, he called out that he was 'happy to be in Budapest' – a common slip, white glove or no.
- **Compass Points of Confusion?** Northern Dobrogea is a region in extreme southeastern Romania and 'Southern Bucovina' is in northeastern Romania.
- **Moldova/Moldavia?** Moldova is the neighbouring republic in the former USSR; Moldavia comprises the eastern region of Romania.
- **Roma-nia?** Romania is not named for the Roma; recently officials controversially changed the spelling to Rroma to stress the distinction.
- **Roman-ia?** Many westward-thinking leaders have stressed the link with Rome, but the truth is that Romans spent more time in present-day England than here.



administration erupted again on the streets of Tiraspol in 2006, with Transdnestr closing off all train service to/from its region. Despite this, very little inter-ethnic tension is felt between Moldovans and any of their minority groups.

## WOMEN IN ROMANIA & MOLDOVA

Romania is still a 'man's country', as writer Lucian Boia states. This was typified by the Romanian head delegate to the world's women's congress in recent years: a man. Memory of Romania's Queen Marie, the leader once called 'the only man in Romania' due to her selfless acts during WWI, has faded considerably.

Despite some laws of equality between men and women, some things remain off-balance in both Romania and Moldova. Domestic violence is a problem and 'spousal abuse' is not necessarily covered by any laws. In 2002, the UN estimated that nearly half of Romanian women had been verbally abused and 7% sexually abused, yet only 380 convictions were recorded.

Rapes are hard to convict in Romania because a witness and medical certificate are required. In neither Romania nor Moldova is spousal rape a crime. Several dozen NGOs have set up rape crisis centres in Romania and aim to educate the public about sexual harassment. Most public awareness about domestic violence is handled by NGOs in Moldova too.

The fight against human trafficking – particularly of females – remains a work in progress and is a big problem in both countries. In July 2005, the Romanian government increased the penalty, though prison sentences remain a light five to 15 years' imprisonment. In Moldova sentences range from 10 years to life imprisonment. A 2005 study found that the majority of women sold into forced marriages or prostitution, following false ads for employment abroad, were recommended by someone they knew. Police corruption at borders, particularly in Transdnestr and Moldova, adds to the problem.

## MEDIA

After an initial explosion in print media after the fall of communism, the situation has stabilised in Romania, despite reports of journalist harassment and a continued tendency towards sensationalism in its news reporting. Among today's most influential papers are *Evenimentul zilei* ([www.expres.ro](http://www.expres.ro)), *Adevarul* ([www.adevarulonline.ro](http://www.adevarulonline.ro)), *Ziua* ([www.ziua.ro](http://www.ziua.ro)) and *Cronica Româna* ([www.cronicaromana.ro](http://www.cronicaromana.ro)).

Moldova maintains a troubled relationship between the media and the government. Most papers are under some form of state control, and restriction of journalists' access to information runs high – harassment is common. The Chişinău-based Independent Journalism Centre (<http://ijc.md>) monitors the situation. The government suspended the popular Romanian TV1 channel (replacing it with a Ukrainian station).

Useful media sources in English include the following:

**www.azi.md** English-language site devoted to Moldovan news.

**www.jurnalul.ro** Romanian-language paper *Jurnalul Național* has English version online.

**www.mediafax.ro** English-language site with Romanian news.

**www.nineoclock.ro** English-language Bucharest-based paper.

## RELIGION

The majority of Romania's population (87%) is Eastern Orthodox Christian. The rest is split between Protestant (7.5%), Catholic (4.7%) and Muslim (0.4%), plus there are some 39,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and 14,000 Jews.

In Moldova, 98% of the population is Eastern Orthodox, 1.5% are Jewish, and there are some 18,000 Jehovah's Witnesses.

'Romania is still a 'man's country', as writer Lucian Boia states.'

## SPIES ARE US

In 2006, former BBC reporter Carol Sebastian admitted to working as informant (ie 'spy') for the Securitate under Ceaușescu's rule, but claimed he was blackmailed by the government. Carol apparently reported on the doings of a writer (who was a friend), who later forgave him.

## SPORT

Football has a huge following in both Romania and Moldova. Romania's national team impressed in the World Cups throughout the 1990s, when their biggest star was Gheorghe Hagi. Two popular teams are Dinamo ([www.fcdinamo.ro](http://www.fcdinamo.ro)) and Steaua București ([www.steauafc.com](http://www.steauafc.com)), the latter forging a formidable international reputation by winning the European Champions' Cup in 1986. Steaua Bucharest's home ground is **Ghencea Stadium** (aka Steaua Stadium; ☎ 21-410 7710; B-dul Ghencea 35). Tickets are sold at the stadium gates.

One of the most famous Romanians is Onești-born gymnast Nadia Comaneci. In 1976, at the age of 15, she stunned the world by receiving the first perfect 10 in Olympic history (plus five medals) for her feats on the compulsory bars at the Montreal Olympics. She later caused a stir by moving to Oklahoma, USA, where she lives with her husband, US gymnast Bart Conner, and their baby.

Moldova is still reeling with joy from a silver medal in the 500m doubles canoe race at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. See p316 for an amusing account of Moldova's infamous underwater hockey team.

## ARTS

In 15th-century medieval society, when writings were still scripted in Slavonic, an oral epic folk literature called *miorița* emerged. Writings in Romanian, initially religious, took shape around 1420. Modern literature emerged in the mid-19th century with two great figures: Mihai Eminescu and Ion Luca Caragiale, two writers who couldn't have been less alike. A member of the influential Junimea literary society, the face of the 500-lei bill and considered to be Romania's 'national poet', Eminescu (1850–89) studied abroad but never betrayed his Romanian roots. His brooding, romantic poems sprung from folk myths and Romanian history. In recent years, some ultraconservative politicians have misused his work to rally support around xenophobic causes.

The other great 19th-century writer, Caragiale, is something of a Mark Twain or Anton Chekhov of Romania, innocently poking fun at an absurd, lightliving urban version of Romanian life at a time when Romania toyed with Western forms – something Eminescu loathed.

Romanian literature became a tool of the Communist Party from 1947 onwards, with few works of note emerging and much repression of dissident voices. Andrei Codrescu was exiled to the USA in 1966 and went on to write numerous books about Romanian-related issues.

A couple of relatively rare books show off post-communist poets: *Young Poets of a New Romania* (1996) and *An Anthology of Contemporary Romanian Poetry* (1984) translated by Andrea Deletant.

## Music

### CLASSICAL & OPERA

The Romanian classical music world is nearly synonymous with George Enescu (1881–1955), whose *Romanian Rhapsodies Nos 1 & 2* and opera *Odeipe* are considered classics. He was as accomplished a violinist as composer, studied under Fauré in Paris and was also a conductor, cellist

Number of medals  
Romania has won in  
all the Summer  
Olympics: 283  
(world ranking: 15th).

Number of medals  
Romania has won in  
all the Winter  
Olympics: one bronze  
(world ranking: tied with  
Latvia for last place).

Feminist poet Nina  
Cassian (whose *Cheer-  
leader for a Funeral and  
Call Yourself Alive?* are  
available in English)  
sought asylum in the  
USA in 1985 after her  
poems were discovered  
by the Securitate.

and pianist. Other figures of note include composer Ciprian Porumbescu (1853–83) and Paul Constantinescu (1909–63).

Transylvania was an important European centre of classical music from the 16th century. Most of the activity centred in Sibiu, the base for Romanian composer Ion Caianu and frequent stop-off for musicians such as Liszt, Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss.

In Moldova, two of the most prolific modern composers are Arkady Luxemburg and Evgeny Doga, who have both scored films and multimedia projects, and written songs, concertos, suites and symphonies. For over three decades, Dimitrie Gagauz has been the foremost composer of songs reflecting the folklore of the Turkic-influenced Gagauz population of southern Moldova.

#### FOLK & ROMA MUSIC

Traditional Romanian folk instruments include the *bucium* (alphorn), the *cimpoi* (bagpipes), the *cobză* (a pear-shaped lute) and the *nai* (a panpipe of about 20 cane tubes). Many kinds of flute are used, including the *ocarina* (a ceramic flute) and the *tilinca* (a flute without finger holes). Today, the violin is the most common folk instrument.

The *doină* is a solo, improvised love song, a sort of Romanian blues with a social or romantic theme. The *baladă* (ballad) is a collective narrative song steeped with feeling. Couples may dance in a circle, a semicircle or a line. In the *sârbă*, males and females dance quickly in a closed circle with their hands on each other's shoulders. The *hora* is another fast circle dance. In the *brâu* (belt dance), dancers form a chain by grasping their neighbour's belt.

When they perform, Roma musicians circulate through their village, inviting neighbours to join in weddings, births, baptisms, funerals and harvest festivals. Improvised songs are often directed at a specific individual and are designed to elicit an emotional response (and a tip).

To appeal to older people, the musicians sing traditional *baladă* or epic songs in verse, often recounting the exploits of Robin Hood-style outlaws who apply justice through their actions. *Muzică lătărească* is the term to describe the music you're likely to see performed with violin and accordion in restaurants.

Modern Roma or Tzigane (Gypsy) music rode a buzz in 2006, with the band Fanfare Ciocarlia winning the World Music Awards for Europe and the band Mahala Rai Banda playing UK festivals.

#### POP, ROCK & HIP-HOP

Pop music in Romania is alive and well, pumped out on the nation's radios and distorting old speakers from maxitaxi cassette players. Radio stations have a tendency to play the same few songs repeatedly through the day; you may think the stations only have five CDs to choose from. Other than the Cheeky Girls (p193), Gheorghe Zamfir is Romania's other regrettable music export – a successfully self-promoting pan-flute player who inspires groans and, enigmatically, gets big sales abroad.

Rock pioneers Iris have had fervent fans since 1977, continuing to win local MTV awards in 2006. Another rock pioneer is Compact, whose bass player was killed in a road accident when a (allegedly drunk) US marine hit him in Bucharest. Two popular, guitar-oriented pop groups from Moldova are Zdob si Zdup and Gândul Măței. Boy band O-Zone has lit up discos with its bouncy electronica.

Hip-hop is fast gaining in popularity and is well represented by local bands like Paraziți, Moromeți, The Family, and Bustaflex. The R&B queen of Romania is Nico. Pashaman is a mildly popular singer doing something akin to reggae.

Despite the cheesy name, *Romantic Walk Through Romanian Music* is the best introduction to Romanian classical music, with works by Enescu, Dimitrescu, Porumbescu and others.

#### BEST FOLK CDS

- **Band of Gypsies by Taraf de Haidouks** – Romania's most famous 13-piece band once played Johnny Depp's Viper Room in LA
- **Art of the Bratsch by Anatol Ștefăneț** – frenzied viola playing from Moldavia
- **Baro Biao by Fanfare Ciocarlia** – intoxicatingly fast and furious Roma horn section romping through tango-tinged songs at punk speed
- **World Library of Folk & Primitive Music, Vol XVII** – 35 Alan Lomax-collected recordings of traditional folk and dance songs

A pop style termed *manele* has overtaken the airwaves recently; it's a suspicious mix of dance, hip-hop, reggae and home-made techno with wild flourishes of pseudo-Turkish and Middle Eastern-influenced wailings to boot.

#### Architecture

Travelling through Romania, you're likely to notice a variety of styles: arched Byzantine porches and windows in Northern Dobrogea; ornamental, wooden gates in Székely Land; lavish villas in areas peopled with rich Roma; gothic and baroque structural masterpieces in Transylvania; traditional folk-styled homes in small villages; and endless stretches of functionalist concrete block apartment buildings in and around most city centres. This is aside from the unique Saxon fortified churches in Transylvania, and Moldavia's fortified and painted monasteries. Bucharest is a fascinating blend of grand, florid buildings, French eclecticism, rococo and grey Soviet-style experiments. The Brancovan style, incorporating Oriental and baroque elements, was developed under Wallachian Constantin Brâncoveanu.

#### Visual Arts

##### PAINTING

Medieval painting was marked by a strong Byzantine influence. Devised to educate illiterate peasants, paintings took the form of frescoes depicting scenes from the Bible on the outside walls of churches; they also appeared on iconostases inside churches and in miniature form as a decorative frame for religious manuscripts. Bucovina's monasteries (p275) – with almost pop art-like scenes, painted to instruct and entertain soldiers waiting for battles with the Turks – are home to Romania's loveliest and most colourful frescoes.

As art entered its 'modern' phase, Romania often trailed behind Western Europe. One young art historian told us, 'Our masters were merely the first to see works in France that they'd mimic and bring back. They weren't expressing a Romanian need.' A key exception, the historian agreed, were the paintings of Nicolae Grigorescu (1838–1907), big with international collectors. Grigorescu absorbed French impressionism, but brought it home with scenes celebrating Romanian peasantry. He broke the prevailing strict academic mould, heralding the emergence of modern Romanian painting. His straight-on portraits included unexpected subjects, like Roma women and Jewish Romanians. There are many of his works at Bucharest's National Art Museum (p73).

Modernism was further embraced by Gheorghe Petrașcu (1872–1949), whose paintings also drew on the world around him. The symbolist movement was represented by Ion Țuculescu (1910–62), who incorporated elements of decorative motifs of Moldavian carpets in his work.

Since 1989, Romanian painting has undergone an explosion of exploration; artists are experimenting with a variety of styles and themes which beforehand were either discouraged or repressed.

The biggest name in Moldovan painting is Mihai Grecu (1916–98), who co-founded the National School of Painting and was also a poet and ‘free love’ advocate.

### GLASS ICONS

Painting on glass and wood remains a popular folk art today. Considered to be of Byzantine origin, this traditional peasant art was widespread in Romania from the 17th century onwards. Superstition and strong religious beliefs surrounded these icons, painted to protect the household from evil spirits. Well-known 19th-century icon painters include Dionisie Iuga, Maria Chifor and Tudor Tocariu. The glass icons of contemporary artist Georgeta Maria Uiga (from Baia Mare) are exhibited worldwide.

### SCULPTURE

Romania’s most famous sculptor is Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957), whose polished bronze and wood works display a refined subtlety which belie the great passion and depth of thought which has gone into them. His work is held at the Pompidou Centre in Paris (across the street from which is a replica of his Paris studio), the Guggenheim, New York’s MOMA, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Australian National Gallery in Canberra and in Romania at Craiova’s Museum of Art and Bucharest’s National Museum of Art.

Moldovan sculptor and designer Anatol Coseac today produces some highly original woodworks.

### Theatre

The first theatre on Romanian soil was reputedly in the ancient city of Histria. The first Romanian-language theatre opened in 1817 and the literary cultural boom of the following decade gave rise to talented playwrights and stage actors. Today, there are theatres in every major city and town, and several respected theatre schools.

A Jewish theatre was established in Bucharest in 1948 and the first-ever Jewish professional theatre in the world was formed in Iași in 1876. The Hungarian minority have established theatres in Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara and Târgu Mures.

### Cinema

The so-called ‘Romanian New Wave’ exploded in the 1990s and is gaining steam this decade, with increased attention at international film festivals, such as Cannes. The biggest success of recent years is Cristi Puiu’s *The Death of Mr Lazaurus* (2005), a black comedy that follows an unlikable sick man’s journey from hospital to hospital, as he attempts to get treatment. Puiu apparently based it on his tense dealings with the National Centre of Cinematography (CNC; [www.cncinema.abt.ro](http://www.cncinema.abt.ro) in Romanian), who finance most Romanian films, and a 1997 incident where a hospital left a patient to die on the Bucharest streets.

A couple of other recent hits include: Nae Caranfil’s *Filantropica* (2002), a comedy about corruption and greed and how to get a free meal in fancy restaurants; and Corneliu Porumboiu’s 2006 debut *East of Bucharest*, where three people argue on a local talk show about whether the revolution happened in their town.

Much of the international film world is heading to Romania too, as the Transylvania Film Festival (held in Cluj-Napoca) brings in dozens of movies

annually. Anthony Minghella’s *Cold Mountain* (2003, starring Nicole Kidman) and *An American Haunting* (2005) both shot southern USA scenes on location in Transylvania. Director Francis Ford Coppola shot a low-budget flick in Romania in 2005; the film *Youth Without Youth* is based on Romanian Mircea Eliade’s novella. Sacha Baron Cohen shot his ‘Kazakhstan’ scenes for *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006) in the village of Glod, which was not without its repercussions; see p100.

During the communist years, the government controlled much of cinema’s content. One big director, Lucian Pintilie, gained awareness in the west with the political *Reconstituirea* (1969), which the government promptly banned. His film *Unforgettable Summer* made a splash at Cannes in 1994 and is seen as a key film to igniting the last decade of action.

In Moldova, a separate film industry came into being with Khrushchev’s thaw, when emerging works combined unabashed romance with Soviet realism (known as ‘Moldovan poetic film’) and became popular throughout the USSR. Moldova’s films are generally more lyrical and nostalgic than Romania’s, which have tended to prefer realistic depictions of life. One of the most famous ‘Soviet films’ ever was a Moldovan masterpiece from 1976: Emil Loteanu’s *The Gypsy Camp Vanishes into Heaven*, which blends hauntingly beautiful music with sweeping landscapes and impassioned love between a Gypsy horse thief and a young girl. Very few films are made in Moldova today and Moldovans are far less rabid about going to the cinema than Romanians are.

In 2005, one of Brâncuși’s *Bird in Space* pieces sold for US\$27.5 million at a Christie’s Auction

# Environment

## THE LAND

Covering 237,500 sq km, oval-shaped Romania is made up of three main geographical regions, each with its particular features. The mighty Carpathian Mountains form the shape of a scythe swooping down into the country's centre from Serbia and curling up northwards towards Ukraine. West of this are large plateaus where bucolic villages and towns lie among the hills and valleys. South and southeast of the mountains are the low-lying plains (where most of the country's agricultural output comes from) which end at the Black Sea and Europe's second-largest delta region where the Danube spills into the sea.

Moldova couldn't look more different. Tiny (33,843 sq km) and landlocked, it's a flat country of gently rolling steppes, with a gradual sloping towards the Black Sea. With one of the highest percentages of arable land in the world, Moldova is blessed with rich soil. Fields of grains, fruits and sunflowers are characteristic of the countryside. Mineral and rock deposits are typically lignite, gypsum and limestone. A great effort has been made by environmental groups to protect Moldova's wetland regions along the lower Prut and Dniestr rivers.

## WILDLIFE Animals

The highest concentration of large carnivores anywhere in Europe is found in the Romanian Carpathians (about half of Europe's bear population and a third of its wolves live here).

Romania's splendid nature teems with enough life to keep enthusiasts busy for quite a while: there are 33,802 species of animals here (32 of these are endangered) as well as 3700 species of plants (39 of which are endangered).

Birdlife in the Danube Delta is a never-ending treat, as the delta provides a major transit hub for birds migrating from as far off as the Russian arctic to the Nile Delta. About 60% of the world's small pygmy cormorant population tweets in Romania.

Moldova counts some 16,500 species of animals (460 of which are vertebrates) as its citizens.

### TRAVEL WIDELY, TREAD LIGHTLY, GIVE SUSTAINABLY – THE LONELY PLANET FOUNDATION

The Lonely Planet Foundation proudly supports nimble nonprofit institutions working for change in the world. Each year the foundation donates 5% of Lonely Planet company profits to projects selected by staff and authors. Our partners range from Kabissa, which provides small nonprofits across Africa with access to technology, to the Foundation for Developing Cambodian Orphans, which supports girls at risk of falling victim to sex traffickers.

Our nonprofit partners are linked by a grass-roots approach to the areas of health, education or sustainable tourism. Many – such as Louis Sarno who works with BaAka (Pygmy) children in the forested areas of Central African Republic – choose to focus on women and children as one of the most effective ways to support the whole community. Louis is determined to give options to children who are discriminated against by the majority Bantu population.

Sometimes foundation assistance is as simple as restoring a local ruin like the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan; this incredible monument now draws intrepid tourists to the area and its restoration has greatly improved options for local people.

Just as travel is often about learning to see with new eyes, so many of the groups we work with aim to change the way people see themselves and the future for their children and communities.

See the difference!  
Highest elevation in Romania: 2543m (Mt Moldoveanu); highest elevation in Moldova: 430m (Mt Balanesti).

Proportion of forested land in Romania/Moldova: 26.3%/9.9%.  
Proportion of agricultural land in Romania/Moldova: up to 60%/64%.

## Plants

Both Romania and Moldova are home to 6600 plant species. About 1350 floral species have been recorded. Typical Alpine flora species include the yellow poppy, Transylvanian columbine, saxifrage and, in the southern Carpathians, the protected edelweiss.

The Carpathian Mountains are among the least-spoilt mountains in Europe, with Alpine pastures above and thick beech, fir, spruce and oak forests below.

## NATIONAL PARKS

Romania has more than 500 protected areas, including a dozen national parks, three biosphere reserves and one World Heritage site (the Danube Delta), totalling over 12,000 sq km. Most of these areas are located in the Carpathians.

Except for the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR), none of the reserves or national parks have organised visitor facilities. Some reserves and national parks are accessible by public transport; others are not. More information on many reserves and parks is included in the relevant regional chapters.

Moldova has five scientific reserves and 30 protected areas, but has only recently designated one area as a national park; the 500-sq-km Lower Dniestr National Park (p333).

Following is a rundown of Romania's major parks and reserves.

### Apuseni Mountains

Running across the Transylvania/Crişana border, the Apuseni Mountains were recognised as a geological reserve in 1938. At their centre is a karst plateau with an extensive cave system lying beneath and rich wildlife above (eg boars, deer, stags, bears). See p197 for access from the north, or p226 from the south.

### Bucegi Nature Reserve

The Bucegi Nature Reserve protects the entire 300 sq km of the Bucegi Mountain Range (p122). The reserve contains a variety of forests and abundant botanic species including edelweiss.

### Ceahlău Massif

The 52-sq-km area of the Ceahlău Massif (p267) in Moldavia has been protected since 1941 as the Ceahlău Massif National Park (Parcul Naţionale Muntele Ceahlău). Among its many treasures are countless flower species and rare fauna.

### Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve

One of the world's biggest wetlands (and Europe's biggest), the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve ([www.ddrba.ro](http://www.ddrba.ro)), a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to over 5000 plant and animal species. About 2700 sq km are protected lands, maintaining the migratory hub for the 300 bird species that pass through. See above.

### Iron Gates Natural Park

Wallachia's phenomenal park (Porţile de Fier; [www.portiledefier.ro](http://www.portiledefier.ro); p110) takes up a staggering 115,655 sq km of spectacular scenery at the area where the Danube first enters Romania at the most impressive stretch of the great river's entire course. The park contains a series of stunning gorges 134km long.

Frank Carter and David Turnock's *Environmental Problems in East-Central Europe* (2002) is the place to turn for the specific ecological problems – and solutions – for this area.

### Piatra Craiului

The Transylvanian range Piatra Craiului (p142), a staggering wall of mountains 25km long, stretches from Zărnești in the north to Podu Dâmboviței in the south. Since 1939 the area has been protected but it was only declared a national park in 1990. Its treasures include wolves, stags and unusual hazel-coloured bears.

### Retezat National Park

Transylvania's Retezat Mountains (p183) encompass Romania's first national park, established in 1935 on 130 sq km. Today it has been declared a Unesco Biosphere Reserve and expanded to 544 sq km. It has some 300 plant species and its wilds are roamed by black mountain goats, bears, foxes and stags. Come migration season, the monk eagle is known to pass by.

### Todirescu Flower Reservation

The crowning glory of the Rarău Massif (p280) is the glorious Todirescu Flower Reservation (Fânețele Montane de la Plaiul Todirescu; 1933), which sprawls for 44 hectares across Todirescu Mountain on the southern edge of the Slătioara Reservation. In July its meadows are ablaze with colour. Tulips, bluebells, chrysanthemums and the poisonous omagul (*Aconitum anthora*) are just some of the many floral delights found here.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

It's a sad and distressing scenario that repeats itself throughout Romania: you'll be in the middle of nearly incomprehensible beauty when you suddenly stumble upon a dozen crushed beer cans or spot a pile of garbage floating in a creek. Two key EU criticisms of Romania included waste management and water pollution. For NGOs like Pro Natura ([www.pronatura.ro](http://www.pronatura.ro)) and the Transylvania Ecological Club (p187; [www.greenagenda.org](http://www.greenagenda.org)), in Cluj-Napoca, sensitising an apathetic public about how to diminish the impact of tourism on the environment is a main priority.

In spring 2006, the Danube River water level rose to its highest level in over a century. Various engineering projects have resulted in up to 20,000 sq km of floodplains being cut off from the river, which has endangered many species in this area. Romania's neighbours to the north haven't helped either. The controversial Bystroye Canal, which Ukraine began building in 2004 to allow ships to reach the Black Sea from the Danube in their territory, is currently on hiatus, but at research time Moldova was going ahead on a new oil terminus that could affect the delta.

In 2005 and 2006, birds with the Avian flu virus were found in the Danube Delta, and through spring several towns became quarantined – as far inland as Făgăraș – for safe measure. No people were afflicted.

### Cleanup since 1990

Much has been done since 1990, including cleaning up a chemical and nuclear waste-pit at Sulina; building new smoke stacks at Baia Mare, Romania's largest nonferrous metal centre; closing industrial plants in Giurgiu and Copșa Mică (p151) and outfitting others with special filters.

Though the pollution bellowing out of Romania's factories has been halved, air pollution still exceeds acceptable levels in some areas, and the Danube Delta has a long way to go before it can be pronounced a healthy environment (particularly with an increase in fertilisers being used in farms).

In 2006 tension built up over the mining of Roșia Montana (p180). This followed a disaster in 2000 at a gold mine in Baia Mare, when 100,000 cubic metres of cyanide-contaminated water spilled into the Tisa and Danube

It's not been counted, but by the naked eye, it would appear that Romania, and in particular Bucharest, may have more public trash cans than anywhere else on the planet. Walk through Cișmii Gardens and you'll see one between each of the hundreds of benches. Next up is getting people to use them...

The Romanian government issued an ambitious plan to cut energy used by at least 30% by 2015, partly by introducing renewable energy sources.

### ROMANIA'S UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

- Danube Delta
- Villages with fortified churches in Transylvania
- Monastery of Horezu
- Churches of Moldavia
- Historic Centre of Sighișoara
- Dacian fortresses of the Orastie Mountains
- Wooden churches of Maramureș

Rivers; half a decade later, the UN reported that previous risks still hadn't been properly curbed. In 2006, Romania took a €55 million loan to modernise its water supply to meet EU standards.

Change in Moldova has been even slower. Never heavily industrial, it faces more issues of protection and conservation than pollution. A majority of its 3600 rivers and rivulets are drained, diverted or dammed, threatening ecosystems.

# Activities

Considering the beauty of Romania's diverse landscape, it's a shame to visit and not get your boots dirty or adrenaline tapped. This alphabetised chapter is a teaser for all you can do in the region. Detailed listings of activities, including where to find guides and maps, are found in the relevant destination chapters throughout this book.

Moldova trails behind Romania in terms of organised activities; it's possible the still largely undeveloped Lower Dneistr National Park (p333) will gear itself to activities in the future.

## BIKING

Given Romania's ideal mountain-biking terrain, it is not surprising that the sport has taken off in a big way in recent years.

The best place to mountain-bike, and it's no secret, is the plateau atop the Bucegi Mountains, up from Bușteni (p124) in the Prahova Valley south of Brașov. From here, or from Sinaia (p118), you can hire bikes, pay for an extra ticket on the gondola lift and go up for the day on top of the world, so to speak. There are also many organised 'marathon' races (see below).

## Hire

Bike-hire places aren't found everywhere, and not all main tourist hubs have easy-to-find bikes for hire. Aside from Sinaia and Bușteni, other bike-hire options are in Sibiu (p159), Sighișoara (p147), Sovata (p171) and, up in Maramureș, Botiza (p245) in the Izei Valley from €5 per day, or in Bucharest (p78) for €12 per day. Ask staff at a hostel or pension, who sometimes can track down a bike for you to ride on country roads.

## Clubs & Events

Based in Cluj-Napoca, Clubul de Ciclism Napoca (p190) is one of Romania's leading bicycle clubs. They don't offer tours or hire out equipment, but are happy to offer advice on cycling in the region and can point you to tours.

### TOP 10 ACTIVITIES

- Hiking, biking or skiing atop the **Bucegi Mountains plateau** (p122)
- Skiing **Poiana Brașov** (p136), or kicking back with herbal tea and mountain-top cabana and looking over snowy Bucegi
- Biking on trails through the off-the-radar **Cindrel Mountains** (p162), south of Sibiu
- Hiking to Padiș Plateau's campsites and cabins in the **Apuseni Mountains** (p197), then day-tripping to glacial caves
- Horse riding on week-long trips through Dracula's land at **Bărgău Valley** (p210)
- Boating through the bird-rich **Danube Delta** (p301) from Tulcea
- Climbing up 1480 steps to – at last! – Dracula's real castle, **Poienari** (p105), outside Curtea de Argeș
- Soothing your ills in Roman baths in Hercules' former spa, **Băile Herculane** (p220)
- Rock-climbing Romania's most challenging walls at **Piatra Craiului National Park** (p142), near Zărnești
- Arranging hikes from traditional villages to meet mountain shepherds in places such as **Maramureș' Izei Valley** (p244)

## MOUNTAIN RESCUE

Emergency rescue is provided by Salvamont ([www.salvamont.org](http://www.salvamont.org), in Romanian), a voluntary mountain rescue organisation with 20 stations countrywide (listed throughout the book). Its members are skilled climbers, skiers and medics. They are also an invaluable source of weather warnings and practical advice.

Contact Salvamont via the local hospital or the mayor's office (*primăria*) or through Salvamont's headquarters in Brașov. However, in an emergency dial ☎ 112.

Some of Salvamont's major contact points:

**Brașov** (☎ 268-471 517, 0725-826 449; Str Michael Weiss 26)

**Bușteni** (☎ 244-320 048; Primărie, B-dul Libertății 91)

**Sibiu** (☎ 0745-140 144, 269-216 477; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 9)

**Sinaia** (☎ 244-313 131; Primărie, B-dul Carol I)

**Vatra Dornei** (☎ 230-372 767; Str Garii)

**Zărnești** (☎ 0722-553 121; Str Metropolit Ion Meșianu 17)

Other biking clubs that sponsor *maraton* (marathon) racing events:

**Bike Attack** (☎ 0726-187 399; [www.bikeattack.ro](http://www.bikeattack.ro); Reșița, Banat) Organises events in September in the Banat mountains.

**Cidomed** (☎ 0742-149 685; [maraton\\_medieval@biroteroc.ro](mailto:maraton_medieval@biroteroc.ro); Mediaș) Organises a July marathon.

**IntersportSE** (☎ 0745-594 030; [botond@csik.ro](mailto:botond@csik.ro); Miercurea Ciuc) Organises events in May.

## Tours

Green Mountain Holidays ([www.greenmountainholidays.ro](http://www.greenmountainholidays.ro)) runs a 10-night biking trip through Transylvania's greatest hits for €600 including guides, transfers, accommodation and food – bikes are €75 extra. For something more adventurous and off-road, contact Apuseni Experience ([www.apuseniexperience.ro](http://www.apuseniexperience.ro)).

Transylvania Adventure ([www.adventuretransylvania.com](http://www.adventuretransylvania.com)), located in Satu Mare, also offers biking tours over the Făgăraș Mountains – a seven-night inclusive trip is €800.

## BIRD-WATCHING

Europe's greatest wetland, the Danube Delta, is the obvious destination for bird-watching travellers to Romania. Here you can hire boats or take tours or ferries on one of three channels through Romania's 3446-sq-km wetland. Almost the entire world's population of red-breasted geese (up to 70,000) winter here and, in the summer, thousands of pygmy cormorants and white pelicans, along with birds from up to 300 other species, can be seen.

Though you are guaranteed to see some birds on any of the boat excursions you take, Tulcea's Ibis Tours (p304) can organise specialised tours guided by ornithologists from €30 per day. Otherwise, the Information & Ecological Education Centre (p304) can suggest other ways to spot the flying beauties.

There are also bird-watching excursions in Transylvania's mountains. Roving Romania (p130) in Brașov runs well-regarded bird trips.

Migration season in spring runs from March to May, in autumn August to October. It's particularly good in mid-April and October.

## CAVING

Romania has more than 12,000 caves (*peștera*) but only a few are open to tourism. Two of Romania's best caves are reached from south of the Apuseni Mountains: the spectacular Scărișoara Ice Cave (p227), which is one of Romania's five glacier caves, and the Bear Cave (Peștera Urșilor; p227).

More accessible, but a bit less remarkable, is the 3566m-long Peștera Muierii (Women's Cave, p107).

Romania is a serious contender in the world of caves and speleology (study of caves), thanks to Emil Racovița, who set up the world's first speleology institute and studied over 1000 caves in his lifetime (see p189).

Check with the Apuseni Experience ([www.apusenixperience.ro](http://www.apusenixperience.ro)), based in Oradea, for caving tours. Green Mountain Holidays ([www.greenmountainholidays.ro](http://www.greenmountainholidays.ro)) offers a seven-day, all-inclusive caving tour for €450.

Romania's main speleological organisations are other good sources of information. They can give practical details, help and advice and let you know the best way to visit the best caves. They sometimes organise trips of their own. The **Emil Racovița Institute of Speleology** (☎ 264-595 954; [www.speleological-institute-cluj.org](http://www.speleological-institute-cluj.org)), based in Cluj-Napoca, can offer a guided tour to the otherwise-closed 45km Wind Cave, Romania's largest.

The Romanian Speleological Foundation ([www.frspeo.ro/prezentare](http://www.frspeo.ro/prezentare)) has offices with Apuseni Experience in Oradea, plus a **Bucharest office** (☎ 21-212 8863; [iser@rol.ro](mailto:iser@rol.ro)) and a **Cluj-Napoca office** (☎ 264-195 954). GESS (p287) is an ecological group in Northern Dobrogea involved in marine and cave biology. A great bunch, they occasionally organise exploratory and diving trips to the famous Movile cave near Mangalia.

## HEALTH SPAS

The curative properties of minerals from Romania's mountains have been known since the Romans set up baths here 2000 years ago. These days many 'spa vacations' get booked in Black Sea resorts in places like Mangalia – mostly by domestic tourists. Those with aches in their bones can find relief across the country; check the map provided by National Organisation of Spas ([www.spas.ro](http://www.spas.ro)), a national organisation that represents many of the 70-plus spas nationwide. Many are geared for illnesses including kidney, liver and heart diseases as well as metabolism, gynaecological and nutrition disorders.

Treatment goes underground at popular salt mines at Turda (p195) outside Cluj-Napoca, and Praid (p171).

Some stand-out spas include the following:

**Băile Felix** (p225) Famous for its large mineral-water pool.

**Băile Herculane** (p220) If it's good enough for Hercules, then mere mortals like us can't complain. The Hercules statue's genitals have been broken off by men seeking sexual potency.

**Băile Tușnad** (p165) A pension-filled valley in Transylvania's Székely Land, with mineral baths and pools in the volcano-made Harghita Mountains.

**Covasna spa resort** (p165) Also in Székely Land. Feels like an untouched, communism-ho! resort with an elder set roaming the halls in pink and sky-blue robes.

**Eforie Nord's mud baths** (p296) Bathers (some nude) slop mud on their dirty selves and bake under the Black Sea sun.

**Sovata** (p171) Between Târgu Mureș and Sighișoara in Transylvania. Famed for a curative dip in a bear-shaped lake.

**Vatra Dornei** (p281) Moldavia's most popular spa resort.

## HIKING & CLIMBING

Hiking is Romania's most popular pastime in summer, and the action is mostly around the mountains, particularly in Transylvania, Moldavia and Crișana.

Trails are generally well marked, and a system of cabanas, huts, and even hotels along the trails on the mountain tops and plateaus makes even a several-day trek more than comfortable. Generally it's not possible or necessary to reserve rooms in a hut.

### SAFE & RESPONSIBLE HIKING

The popularity of hiking and camping is placing great pressure on the natural environment. Please consider the following tips:

- Carry out all your rubbish. If you've carried it in, you can carry it out. Especially don't forget plastic bottles, sanitary napkins and condoms!
- Never bury your rubbish. This disturbs soil and ground cover, encourages erosion, may injure animals that dig it up and may take years to decompose.
- Minimise the waste you must carry out by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you will need.
- Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, even if they are biodegradable.
- Stick to existing tracks – if you blaze a new trail, it will turn into a watercourse with the next heavy rainfall and eventually cause soil loss and scarring.
- If you light a fire, use an existing fireplace rather than creating a new one. Don't surround fires with rocks as this creates a visual scar. Use only dead, fallen wood. Remember the adage 'the bigger the fool, the bigger the fire'. Use minimal wood, just what you need for cooking.

### Where to Hike

The Carpathians (aka Transylvanian Alps) offer endless opportunities for hikers, the most popular areas being the Bucegi (p122) and Făgăraș (p151) ranges, south and west of Brașov. The Bucegi has a flat-top plateau that can be reached by cable cars from Sinaia or Bușteni, but not all the hikes are cake walks. It's possible for the strong-kneed to walk down the steep range into Bran, then bus to Brașov.

Growing in popularity are the Apuseni Mountains, southwest of Cluj-Napoca. This area, rich with hikes, karst and glacier caves, is reached from the south (p226), southeast of Oradea, or from the north (p197), west of Cluj.

Other zones include the Retezat National Park (p183), Romania's first national park, which lies northwest of Târgu Jiu and south of Deva in Transylvania; around Păltiniș, (p162) south of Sibiu; and, in Romania's Moldavian region, the less-frequented Rarău Mountains (p280) and the Ceahlău Massif (p267) near the Bicz Gorge.

Moldova's 50,000-hectare Lower Dneistr National Park (p333) has yet to create hiking trails, but this may change.

### SHORT HIKES

Maramureș is potentially good hiking turf, though information on hikes is scarce. A good day hike is up Prislop Pass (p248).

For other shorter treks, there are dozens of options: take the cable car up from Sinaia or Bușteni and make your way to the Ialomicioara monastery; hike from Poiana Brașov to Râșnov castle (p137); take a two-hour ramble up to the Rodna Mountains from Borșa (p248) in Maramureș; or trek from one colour-coded monastery to another in Moldavia's Southern Bucovina (p275). Even Prince Charles managed the 20km hike from Putna to the Sucevița monasteries here.

### Where to Climb

Rock-climbers take to the walls at the Piatra Craiului National Park (p142), not far from Bran. The Bicz Gorges (p269) offers spectacular challenges too. There's some climbing near Băile Herculane (p220).

In 2002, cavers found a 35,000-year-old human jawbone while digging around in the Peștera cu Oase (Cave with Bones) in the south-western Carpathians, which turned out to be the oldest known human fossil in Europe.

Rock-climbers (who speak Romanian) can get the best info on the Carpathians' rocky climbs at [www.rockclimbing.net](http://www.rockclimbing.net).

If you prefer booking a hiking trip from home (and you live in the UK), check Sheffield-based [www.highplaces.co.uk](http://www.highplaces.co.uk), which runs 14-day Transylvanian hikes from £790 (not including flight).

## Finding Guides

Though individual hiking is more than possible, we also recommend going on organised treks in small groups or hiring a guide familiar with the area you choose to explore – this is partly a safety issue but also local guides' familiarity with the land can help you get the most out of the experience.

Throughout the text, we offer suggestions for guided tours. There are good guides and guided tours available from Braşov (p129) and Cluj-Napoca (p190). Some youth hostels (like the Retro Hostel in Cluj-Napoca, p191) offer fun, guided excursions. Another good source of guides can be found at [www.alpineguide.ro](http://www.alpineguide.ro). In some more out-of-the-way places, like Retezat, it's hard to just show up and assume you can find a guide – but ask around.

## Maps

Detailed hiking maps are available but are of varying quality. You'll more easily find maps in big city bookstores and outdoor activities shops. Most tourist information centres don't carry them. You might also stumble upon old maps in shops and cable car stations; some are surprisingly helpful – some. Cartografica produces excellent maps and, to a lesser degree, some of Amco Press' publications might be of use.

Your best bet, however, are maps by Bel Alpin, which also publishes excellent books on hiking in the Făgăraş Mountains.

## HORSE RIDING

Horses are everywhere in Romania – ploughing fields, pulling logs, roaming mountains, pulling carts from town to town on the same highways that new sports cars zoom along. It's tempting to join the fracas. There are some tourist-oriented outfitters that offer remarkable long-term trips.

Throughout the Carpathians a network of trails leading to some of the country's most beautiful and remote areas can be explored on horseback. The best on offer is Lunca Ilvei's Riding Centre (p211) near Bistriţa in the heart of Dracula country. Fully inclusive five-day trips cost about €780, including guides and food. Another good bet is Daksa (p190) located just outside Cluj-Napoca, which offers three- to seven-week trips from €80 or €90 per person.

Cross-Country Farm (p147), outside Sighişoara, offers day rides from €35 per person.

It's hard to beat the rural terrain around the villages of Maramureş. You can arrange horse trips from Baia Mare (p234).

## PARAGLIDING

Paragliding is far from widespread in Romania, despite the fantastic choices of jagged cliffs from which to throw yourself. Many groups are geared for more experienced locals, but you can arrange 10-day classes from ECO-S in Braşov (p132) for €180, or through Timişoara's Latura Extremă (p218), a good place for beginners; it offers day trips from €35 per person for a group of three.

Eagle Air Sport ([www.paragliding.ro](http://www.paragliding.ro)) is a national network of paraglider pilots and groups – check the site for locations in and around Romania. One English-speaking pilot that can help hook you up with travel agencies or gliding clubs is **Alexandru Balmus** (☎ 0722-520 123; [alexandru\\_b@mccann.ro](mailto:alexandru_b@mccann.ro)).

## SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

With all its mountains, skiing and snowboarding in Romania is a big draw for locals and visitors seeking long runs and cheaper lift tickets than in Western Europe. The mountains don't have the numbers of runs that are available

in Bulgaria, just south, but there are full-service resorts and ski runs for all levels. Beginner, intermediate and expert slopes are marked as blue, red and black, respectively.

The ski season runs generally from December to March, with some slopes opening by mid-November and staying open into April.

Many mountains see cross-country skiers take to hiking trails in winter. Cross-country gear is not easy to hire, but some places might let out personal gear. Wild skiing is popular atop the Bucegi.

## Tickets & Gear

Some lifts have credit passes based on type of lift – gondola, chairlift, pull lines. Prices have gone up a bit in recent years, unfortunately: it's €2 to €2.50 per ride. Hiring skis or widely available snowboards costs about €10 per day.

The equipment and services are not at Western European levels, but that doesn't stop skiers from having a great time. For proof, check out the forum at [www.ski-in-romania.com](http://www.ski-in-romania.com), which also posts snowfall information and other listings.

## Where to Ski

Transylvania dominates Romania's ski world. By far the most popular places to ski or snowboard are daytrips from Braşov, for those who like to finish a day on the mountain with juicy steaks amid cobbled Saxon sidewalks. In the Prahova Valley is the resort Sinaia (p118), and Poiana Braşov (p136) is a 20-minute bus ride west. Also nearby is the ski resort Predeal (p126), which is the focus of a lot of youth ski trips.

South of Sibiu, you can find smaller lifts at Păltiniş (p162).

Outside Transylvania, there are some fun smaller ski hills in Maramureş, at Izvoare (p238) and Borsa (p248), though the latter has no rentals. The south side of the Apuseni Mountains has a couple of ski hills at Stâna de Vale (p226) and Gârda de Sus (p227). In Moldavia, you can ski at Vatra Dornei (p281).

Check [www.surmont.ro](http://www.surmont.ro) (in Romanian only) for listings of snowboarding, skiing and mountain-biking events in the Bucegi Mountains.

To get information on great skiing expeditions outside the main resorts, check out [www.mountainguide.ro/en/ski.htm](http://www.mountainguide.ro/en/ski.htm). You'll find some excellent options in some of Romania's most scenic spots.

It's not exactly the real thing, but the Moldovan capital, Chişinău, has a parachuting club (p324) with a 40m 'parachute machine' – only US\$2 per jump.



# Food & Drink

Let's leave the debate as to whether or not something called Romanian cuisine actually exists and plunge, mouth wide open, into a world of hearty, simple (if a little repetitious) food. Incorporating the fertile land's fresh, organic produce into uncomplicated recipes, Romanian dishes have a homemade character to them. Relying heavily upon pork (at least half their traditional meals feature this meat in some form), staples like potatoes and cabbage, and liberal borrowings from the cultures which have traversed and occupied the land (Turks, Germans, Romans, Hungarians, Roma), Romanian and Moldovan cooking is not for those seeking to diet. Oh, and there's pizza too.

If you want to make your own *mămăligă*, a couple of good books include Galia Sperber's *The Art of Romanian Cooking* and Nicolae Klepper's *Taste of Romania*.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

*Mămăligă* is a word you'd better familiarise yourself with, and quick. You'll find it on every menu, and you're likely to be served it in guesthouses morning, noon or night. In short, it is a cornmeal mush similar to polenta and can be boiled, baked or fried. Traditionally it is served with nothing more than a sprinkling of *brânză*, a salty sheep cheese. *Mămăligă* can be frightfully bland (and very filling), especially the kind served in diners and bistros, but when homemade, warm and served with fresh *smântână* (sour cream), it's excellent comfort food.

*Ciorbă* (soup) is the other mainstay of the Romanian diet and is consistently a highlight of meals. Derived from Turkish *çorba*, it is tart, deliciously warming on cold winter days and usually served with a dollop of *smântână*. By far the local favourite, and worth trying despite its name, is *ciorbă de burtă* (a light, garlicky tripe soup – made from cow's innards if you don't know).

Other popular soups include *ciorbă de perișoare* (spicy soup with meatballs and vegetables) and *ciorbă de legume* (vegetable soup cooked with meat stock). Often, *bors* (a fermented liquid mixture of bran and water) with lemon or sauerkraut juice is added to give a sour taste.

*Tochitură* is likely to be found on most menus across both countries. There are regional variances (see Regional & Seasonal Cooking, opposite), but it's usually comprised of pan-fried pork, sometimes mixed with other meats, in a spicy pepper sauce served with *mămăligă* and topped with a fried egg. In cheaper restaurants, this can be horribly salty and the meat rubbery, but when done well, it's delicious.

*Sarmale* (cabbage or vine leaves stuffed with spiced meat and rice), an inheritance from the days of Ottoman rule, is another popular dish. Restaurants and beer gardens typically offer *mititei* or *mici* (spicy grilled meatballs).

Typical desserts include *plăcintă* (turnovers), *clătite* (crepes) and *cozonac* (a brioche) – not to mention *înghețată* (ice cream). *Saraillie* is a yummy almond cake soaked in syrup. *Papanasi* are cheese-filled pastries covered with jam and sour cream. *Kuros kalacs* are enormous round donuts with candied sprinkles or chocolate coating; arteries alert! For a Romanian snack attack while on the move, munch on *covrigi*, rings of hard bread speckled with salt crystals.

Romanian and Moldovan cuisines are very similar. In Moldova, some Russian influences have made pickled fruits and vegetables more popular there, as are Russian meals like *pelmeni* (similar to ravioli). A Turkic influence has arguably been stronger in Moldova; in the south you may find the delicious *gagauz sorpa*, a spicy ram soup.

Five things you must try in Romania: *ciorbă de burtă* (tripe soup), *mămăligă* (polenta), *sarmale* (vine leaves stuffed with meat and rice), *mici* (meatballs) and *țuică* (plum brandy).

Since communism, a new national dish has emerged, sneaking its way into all but the most fervently 'traditional' of Romanian menus: pizza. Quality varies from crispy pies with fresh ingredients (a real veggie-arama), to baloney bits o'er smeared ketchup.

## REGIONAL & SEASONAL COOKING

You'll be surprised at how different the same dishes can taste depending on where you eat them; each historical region of Romania has its own culinary influences, which you as a traveller can benefit from.

Moldavia is the place to try *tochitură* (where it's known as its original name *tochitură moldovenească*). Here it's made with pig's livers and kidneys, wine, pepper and garlic, and it's served without *mămăligă*. In Rădăuți, 30km north of Suceava, a worthy local specialty is *ciorbă Rădăuți*, a chicken soup with mashed garlic and vinegar, doused with sour cream.

Moldavia is also famous for other meals likely to make a vegetarian lose their cookies: *racituri* is a jelly made from pig's hooves, used primarily in winter folk celebrations, and their *ciorbă de potroace*, a soup made with chicken entrails, rice and vegetables is said to be a guaranteed cure for hangovers. Some may prefer aspirin.

Transylvania boasts a variety of flavours, plus German and Hungarian dishes. For those who find traditional Romanian dishes bland and devoid of spices, flavourful and hot Hungarian dishes like *gulasch*, paprikas and *panierte* will be welcome. When in Cluj-Napoca, look out for *varză de la Cluj* (cabbage à la Cluj), a scrumptious mix of cabbage, minced meat and light spices baked and served with sour cream.

In Wallachia, you'll find lots of prunes (*prună uscată*) on the menu, often mixed with meat in a stew (*tocană*). In the Banat region, you'll find food spicier than in the rest of Romania, as it's influenced by Serbian cuisine. *Coajă* is a unique type of cheese found only in the villages around Bran, which comes wrapped in (and tasting of) tree bark.

In and around the Danube Delta region, fish and game figure largely on the menu; a local specialty is soup made from up to 10 kinds of fish and vegetables (pieces of garlic are thrown in later), usually slowly simmered in a cast-iron kettle. Carp kebab is another goodie. In Dobrogea, mutton is cooked in sunflower oil, giving it a unique flavour, and plates like pickled fish, fillets, rolls, mincemeat balls, croquettes of zander, Danube herring, shoat fish, carp, pike and sturgeon are also very tasteful.

On All Saints Day (9 March), little *mucenici* (martyrs) are baked, in most of Romania they are pieces of unleavened dough in the form of the figure '8'. However, in Moldavia they're brushed with honey and sprinkled with walnuts, and in Wallachia they're boiled in water with sugar then covered with crushed walnuts and cinnamon.

Easter meals revolve around lamb; especially tasty is lamb *stufat*, a stew made with green onions and garlic. Traditional Christmas cakes, to coincide with carolling, are *cozonac* (a pound cake), walnut cake and pumpkin pie.

## DRINKS

Romanian wine hasn't reached its big-league potential in the world yet, but the promise is there. The reds and whites, many slightly sweet and delicious, come from five main regions: Transylvania's Târnave plateau (outside Alba Iulia), Cotnari (outside Iași in Moldavia), Murfatlar (near the Black Sea coast), Dealu Mare (south of the Carpathians, east of Prahova Valley) and Odobești (in southern Moldavia). Crafty 'Dracula'-label wines often get exported, but the best you'll find are homemade local varieties or ones such as Cotnari's Feteasca Negra (slightly sweet red wine), Grasa de Cotnari (a sweet white), Feteasca Regal (sparkling wine from outside Alba Iulia), and distinctive Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Gris from Murfatlar.

In Moldova, the big names are Cricova, Ialoveni, Cojușna, Milești Mici and Strășeni.

At Christmas in Transylvania, you will find *singeretta* – sausages made with pig's blood, liver, kidneys and fat. How perfect in Dracula country. They're a German inheritance.

What might run through your mind while watching locals feast on things like blood sausage: *gustul dispută n-are* (there's no accounting for taste).

It's said that Dionysus, the God of wine, was born on present-day Romanian lands and when the Romans marched there in AD 106, they found the local wines superior to their own.

Wine production took a hit during communism – things revived with privatisation after 1989, but problems remain. In 2006, lack of funding for grape cultivation resulted in wine imports exceeding exports for the first time.

Red wines are called *negru* and *roșu*, white wine is *vin alb*, while *sec* means ‘dry’, *dulce* is ‘sweet’ and *spumos* translates as ‘sparkling’. You’ll find that Romanian semisweet is most people’s idea of sweet and dry is closer to semisweet.

A common practice is to mix the sweeter wines with mineral water; this idea makes connoisseurs’ skin crawl – until they taste how sweet it would be otherwise. Prices for a bottle of wine in a restaurant have risen in recent years, and range from €5 to €20 or more. It’s less from a *crama* (wine cellar) where you can fill empty litre bottles with local wines for a couple of euros.

Watch for *must* (pronounced ‘moost’), a sweet, fermented, not-quite-wine brew, available for a few weeks after grape harvest in October.

In Northern Dobrogea, you’re likely to find cafés which make a mean Turkish coffee, with a thick sludge at the bottom and a generous spoonful of sugar. Unless you specifically ask, coffee and *ceai* (tea) are served black and with sugar. If you want it white ask for it *cu lapte* (with milk); without sugar, *fără zahăr*.

The harder stuff is worth trying as well – if you’re a male, you’re bound to be offered this on social occasions, but beware of the gigantic wallop it packs. *Țuică* is a once-filtered clear brandy made from fermented fruit (the tastiest and most popular is plum *țuică*), usually 30 proof. *Palincă* (called *Horinca* in Maramureș and *Jinars* in the Cluj-Napoca region) is similar, only it’s filtered twice and is usually around 60 proof; the stuff can knock your socks off. Both of these are often made at home, where the resulting moonshine can either be much tastier than the store-bought versions or much stronger and wine-inducing. In northern Moldavia, moonshine is called *samahonca*, similar to the Russian word for it.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

There are two types of main eateries: restaurants and fast-food stands. After communism fell, the restaurant scene exploded, but in many places locals go only on splurge outings or special occasions. Hence, many restaurants feel a little more formal, and more pricey, than in more developed food nations.

Many restaurants follow the same template – decked out in traditional Romanian style, with loads of grilled meats and usually pizza on the menu. That said, fast-food stands (often for pizza or kebabs) are everywhere, though not all are that cheap. A kebab in Bucharest runs about €3 – street food in New York is cheaper!

Most bars or cafés have limited food – maybe a pastry or sandwich – and in farther flung places, particularly Moldova, options may be limited to a hotel restaurant. Few restaurants cater to children (it’s rare to find a children’s menu or booster chair), but staff are usually accommodating.

Self-catering is relatively simple in these countries. Every town has a central market (*pieață centrală*), piled high with fresh fruits and vegetables, and sometimes fish and dried products. Pastries and cakes are sold everywhere in kiosks or shops for €0.20 to €0.40 a piece, a loaf of bread is about €0.40. In most cities and towns there are 24-hour shops and/or Western-style supermarkets. If you’re in small towns, you’ll probably be limited to getting fresh, filled pastries from kiosks.

Restaurant prices are remarkably consistent, with broad ranges. Mains (often a grilled meat) without sides or a salad start at €2 and go up to €5 or more. Salads and entrees are often the same, making a quick meal sometimes reach €10 per person – Bucharest and Chișinău tend to be more expensive.

Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța and Iași get tipsy all May as part of the Festivinum Wine Festival.

The maverick republic of Transnistria has delighted communist bellies (not livers), from Warsaw to Vladivostok for decades, with its cognac from the century-old Kvint factory in Tiraspol (p 338).

Something you might be offered as you stagger out of your Romanian or Moldovan friends’ house: *la botul calului* (literally ‘horse’s mouth’). It means ‘one for the road!’

Beer is about the same price as bottled water – about €1 or €1.50 – in most restaurants. Wine usually can only be ordered by the bottle (ranging from €5 to €20 or more in finer restaurants).

A 10% tip is considered decent. Always check your bill; some restaurants conveniently add in a tip (or items not ordered – particularly in Bucharest). Do your own maths and ask if something’s amiss.

## VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

Romanian restaurants really aren’t looking out for this group, but thanks to the Orthodox diet, vegetarians can always find some veggie dishes (unexciting and repetitious, yes, but veggie all the same). If you’re in the area don’t miss Oradea’s vegetarian restaurant (p225), the only one in Romania.

Most restaurants have expansive salad lists, not all of which are veggie. The *salată roșii* (tomato salad) is bowl of tomato slices doused in olive oil, vinegar and covered in chopped parsley and onion. Another popular one is *salată castraveți* (cucumber salad), or tomatoes and cucumbers combined in a *salată asortată* (mixed salad).

On appetiser lists, look for *murături* (pickled vegetables, such as cucumbers or cauliflower), *ciuperci umplute* (stuffed mushrooms), and various sorts of potatoes, including the popular *cartofi țărănești* (country-style potatoes), which is often served alongside meats.

Some menus, if you’re lucky, offer vegetable soup or stew, or an eggplant dish, such as *vinete au gratin*, a heavily buttered and cheese-sprinkled stewed or sauteed eggplant.

Otherwise, fresh fruits are easy to find (including huge watermelons), and whatever’s grown locally is bound to have had less chemicals involved in its growth than the ones in your home country.

In this guide, care was taken to note which restaurants serve substantial vegetarian meals and go beyond the bare minimum.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

To avoid having to mime the animal or vegetable of your choice, here are a few phrases and words to help you get by. See our Language chapter (p368) for more information.

### Useful Phrases

#### Please, bring me the ...

*Vă rog să-mi aduceți ...* va rawg, sa-mee a-doo-che-tee ...

#### Where can I get a quick snack?

*Unde aș putea găsi un bar expres?* oon-de ash poo-te-a ga-see oon bar eks-pres?

#### Do you know a cheap/good restaurant nearby?

*Cunoașteți prin apropiere un restaurant ieftin/bun?* koo-naw-ash-te-ti preen a-praw-pee-e-re oon re-staw-ron ee-ef-tin/boon?

#### Can you tell me what this is?

*Spuneți-mi, vă rog, ce bucate sunt acesta?* spoo-ne-tsi-mee va-rog che boo-ka-te soont a-ches-ta?

#### Keep the change.

*Fără rest.* fa-ra rest

#### Is this a vegetarian meal?

*Aceste bucate sunt din legume?* a-che-ste boo-ka-te soont deen le-goo-me?

#### I don’t want ketchup.

*Nu vreau ketchup.* noo vrea-oo ke-chup

#### I don’t eat ...

*Eu nu mănânc ...* e-oo noo ma-nink ...

Romanians expect that every ‘real’ meal must have meat in it. There’s even a proverb: *Cel mai bun pește este porcul* (The best fish is pork).

The notion of ‘organic’ food doesn’t exist in Romania as the vast bulk of the locally grown produce is already chemical-free to begin with! The catch though – and it’s a big one – is that many restaurants don’t add them to menus, as some consider ‘vegetables’ to be merely peasant fare.

**Romanian-English Menu Decoder****VEGETABLES**

<i>anchinară</i>	artichoke
<i>ardei</i>	peppers
<i>cartofi</i>	potatoes
<i>castravete</i>	cucumber
<i>ceap</i>	onion
<i>ciuperci</i>	mushrooms
<i>conopidă</i>	cauliflower
<i>dovlecei</i>	zucchini
<i>fasole</i>	bean
<i>legume</i>	vegetable
<i>marcov</i>	carrot
<i>măsline</i>	olive
<i>roșie</i>	tomato
<i>sfecl</i>	beet
<i>spanac</i>	spinach
<i>varz</i>	cabbage
<i>vinețe</i>	eggplant

**FRUIT**

<i>caisă</i>	apricot
<i>căpșun</i>	strawberry
<i>fruct</i>	fruit
<i>lămâie</i>	lemon
<i>măr</i>	apple
<i>pepene galben</i>	melon
<i>pepene verde</i>	watermelon
<i>portocală</i>	orange
<i>prun</i>	plum
<i>smochina</i>	fig
<i>struguri</i>	grapes
<i>vișin</i>	cherry

**SPECIALITIES**

<i>ciorbă</i>	soup
<i>ciorbă de burtă</i>	tripe soup
<i>mămăligă</i>	polenta-like cornmeal
<i>sarmale</i>	vine leaves stuffed with meat and rice
<i>țuică</i>	plum brandy

**STAPLES**

<i>ardei umpluți</i>	stuffed peppers
<i>brânză</i>	cheese
<i>cașcaval</i>	yellow cheese
<i>gălușcă</i>	dumpling
<i>iaurt</i>	yogurt
<i>lapte</i>	milk
<i>orez</i>	rice
<i>ou</i>	egg
<i>pâine</i>	bread
<i>smântână</i>	sour cream

When in Székely Land, you might need to know that *vendeglo* and *etterem* mean 'restaurant' in Hungarian.

**SOUPS**

<i>ciorbă</i>	mixed soup with sour creme
<i>ciorbă de burtă</i>	tripe soup
<i>ciorbă de legume</i>	vegetable soup
<i>ciorbă de perișoare</i>	meatball soup
<i>ciorbă țăranească</i>	meat-and-vegetable soup
<i>supă de fasole</i>	bean soup
<i>supă de roșii</i>	tomato soup

**CONDIMENTS**

<i>busuioc</i>	basil
<i>ceapă de apă</i>	shallot
<i>ghimber</i>	ginger
<i>mărar</i>	dill
<i>mujdei</i>	garlic sauce
<i>pătrunjel</i>	parsley
<i>piper</i>	pepper
<i>sare</i>	salt
<i>sovârf</i>	oregano
<i>unt</i>	butter
<i>untdelemn</i>	olive oil
<i>usturoi</i>	garlic
<i>zahăr</i>	sugar

**MEATS & PREPARATION**

<i>berbec</i>	mutton
<i>bine prăjit</i>	well done
<i>capră</i>	female goat
<i>creier</i>	brains
<i>cu puțin sânge</i>	rare
<i>curcan</i>	turkey
<i>în sânge</i>	very rare
<i>miel</i>	lamb
<i>mititei/mici</i>	spicy grilled meatballs
<i>mușchi</i>	sirloin
<i>pâine</i>	bread
<i>pe grătar</i>	grilled
<i>porc</i>	pork
<i>potrivit</i>	medium
<i>prăjit la cuptor</i>	roasted
<i>pui</i>	chicken
<i>pulpă de miel</i>	leg of lamb
<i>rasol</i>	poached meat
<i>rinichi</i>	kidneys
<i>slănină</i>	bacon
<i>snițel</i>	schnitzel
<i>stufat</i>	braised meat
<i>șunca</i>	ham
<i>țap</i>	male goat
<i>vacă</i>	beef

**FISH**

*crap*  
*crevete*  
*homar*  
*morun*  
*păstrăv*  
*pete*  
*raci*  
*sardele*  
*scrumbrie*  
*somon*  
*ștuică*  
*ton*  
*țipar*

carp  
 shrimp  
 lobster  
 sturgeon  
 trout  
 fish  
 crayfish  
 sardine  
 herring  
 salmon  
 pike  
 tuna  
 eel

**DRINKS**

*ap rece*  
*apă cald*  
*apă mineral*  
*bere*  
*cafea*  
*ceai*  
*lapte*  
*suc de mere*  
*suc de portocale*  
*țuică*  
*vin alb*  
*vin roșu*

cold water  
 hot water  
 mineral water  
 beer  
 coffee  
 tea  
 milk  
 apple juice  
 orange juice  
 plum brandy  
 white wine  
 red wine

**OTHER**

*barărie*  
*brutărie*  
*cafenea*  
*cofetărie*  
*copti*  
*crama*  
*fiert*  
*gogoșerie*  
*list*  
*not de plat*  
*patiserie*  
*prijit/pai*  
*restaurant*  
*tavernă*  
*terasă*

bar/beer hall  
 bakery  
 cafeteria  
 confectionery  
 baked  
 wine cellar  
 boiled  
 place selling donuts  
 menu  
 bill  
 patisserie  
 fried  
 restaurant  
 tavern  
 terrace