

# Wallachia



With competition like the rural idyll of Maramureş, the elegant Habsburgs cities of Crişana and Banat and the deluge of tempting offerings just north in Transylvania, Wallachia (Țara Românească) is shamefully underrated, thus ignored by most travellers. All the better for you.

This geographically flat southern swiipe of Romania has a culturally mountainous landscape that offers increasing rewards the further one ventures from Bucharest. Snuggled into the seams of the Carpathians are Horezu, Cozia and Turnul, some of Romania's most beautiful and peaceful monasteries. Off-the-beaten-track attractions such as Câmpina's spooky Haşdeu Castle or Târgu Jiu's open-air museum of sculptor Brâncuşi's work, are refreshingly free of tour buses. The heart of the Roma community can be found here, tearing through villages on horse-drawn carts and tending to their unusual houses. During summer months, fearless drivers will want to navigate the heart-stopping Transfăgărăşan road – said to be one of the highest roads in Europe – cutting across the Făgăraş Mountains and passing the real 'Dracula's castle'.

The Danube River flows along the southern edge of Wallachia and is best seen between Moldova Veche and Drobeta-Turnu Severin in the west where it breaks through the Carpathians at the legendary Iron Gates (Porţile de Fier), a gorge on the Romanian–Yugoslav border. Equally scenic is the drive east along the Danube from Ostrov into northern Dobrogea.

Wallachia has charming treasures and enough elbow room to make it special. Sidle down here for a few days, but don't tell the others where you'll be!

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Know the misery of captured Turks as you gasp up 1480 steps to Vlad Ţepeş' **Poienari Citadel** (p105), the 'real' Dracula's castle
- Visit the region's exquisite monasteries – **Horezu** (p106), **Curtea de Argeş** (p104) and **Bistriţa** (p106)
- Submit to total immersion (read inebriation) while eating, drinking *ţuică* (fruit brandy), singing and dancing around a campfire in the rural village of **Arefu** (p105)
- Judiciously cruise the **Transfăgărăşan road** (p105), stopping to ogle **Lake Vidraru** (p105)
- Enjoy Brâncuşi's ornamental contributions to **Târgu Jiu** (p107), including his 'Endless Column'



## HISTORY

Before the formation of Romania in the 19th century, the Romanians were known as Vlachs, hence Wallachia. Romanians call Wallachia 'Țara Românească' (Land of the Romanians).

Founded by Radu Negru in 1290, this principality was subject to Hungarian rule until 1330 when Basarab I (r 1310–52) defeated the Hungarian king Charles I and declared Wallachia independent, the first of the Romanian lands to achieve independence. The Wallachian princes (*voievozi*) built their first capital cities – Câmpulung Muscel, Curtea de Argeș and Târgoviște – close to the protective mountains, but in the 15th century Bucharest gained ascendancy.

After the fall of Bulgaria to the Turks in 1396 Wallachia faced a new threat, and in 1415 Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Old; r 1386–1418) was forced to acknowledge Turkish suzerainty. Other Wallachian princes such as Vlad Țepeș (r 1448, 1456–62, 1476) and Mihai Viteazul (r 1593–1601) became national heroes by defying the Turks and refusing to pay tribute. Indeed, Vlad Țepeș'

legendary disposition and gruesome tactics against the Turks – and the old and the crippled and anyone else he didn't much care for – directly inspired Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, four centuries later, curiously relocating the 'Prince of Darkness' to Transylvania.

In 1859 Wallachia was united with Moldavia, paving the way for the modern Romanian state.

## PLOIEȘTI

☎ 244 / pop 234,929

Ploiești, the main city in the Prahova region, ranks as Romania's second-most important industrial city. Dubbed the city of 'black gold', Ploiești has had an oil refining industry since 1857 and this is a source of enormous pride for its inhabitants.

Glamorous it may not be, but Ploiești has a nice little centre and several interesting museums.

## Orientation

Ploiești has four train stations, but most travellers will only use the southern station (Gară Sud) and the western station (Gară Vest).

If you are arriving from Moldavia you will stop at the southern train station. Exit the station and head north up B-dul Independenței for 15 minutes to Piața Victoriei. All hotels, museums and restaurants are centred on this square.

From Transylvania, you will arrive at the western train station. From here, take bus 1 or 2 to Piața Victoriei in the centre. If you are coming from Bucharest or Târgoviște you could arrive at either station; get off at the southern station, as it's closer to the centre.

## Information

There is an ATM and exchange office next to McDonald's on Piața Victoriei.

**Agencia de Turism Passion** (☎ 514 507, 515 118; Piața Victoriei 3; ☹ 8.30am–6pm Mon–Fri) This is the best choice in Ploiești as there's no official tourist information office. Friendly staff offer maps, information, hotel bookings and wine tours of the Prahova Valley.

**Eurom Bank** (☎ 540 351; Piața Victoriei 6) Offers the usual services.

**Post & telephone office** (Piața Victoriei 10; ☹ 7am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon Sat) The central office is south of Piața Victoriei on B-dul Republicii.

**Transylvania Travel** (☹ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Inside Hotel Central (p96).

## Sights

**The Museum of Oil** (Muzeul Național al Petrolului; ☎ 523 564; Dr Bagdasar 8; admission €0.50; ☹ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) charts Ploiești's place as Romania's *Dallas*.

Nearby is the **History & Archaeology Museum** (Muzeul de Istorie și Arheologie; ☎ 514 437; Str Toma Caragiu 10; admission adult/student €0.85/0.45; ☹ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun). Housed in a former girls' school dating from 1865, it has a room devoted to Romanian sporting achievements (ie gymnastics). At the same location is the **Museum of Popular Art** (Muzeul de Artă Populară).

**The Clock Museum** (Muzeul Ceasului; ☎ 542 861; Str Nicolae Simachei 1; ☹ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun; admission adult/student €1/0.45) boasts clocks owned by several famous Romanians including Carol I, King Mihei and an 18th-century rococo Austrian clock that belonged to Wallachian prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

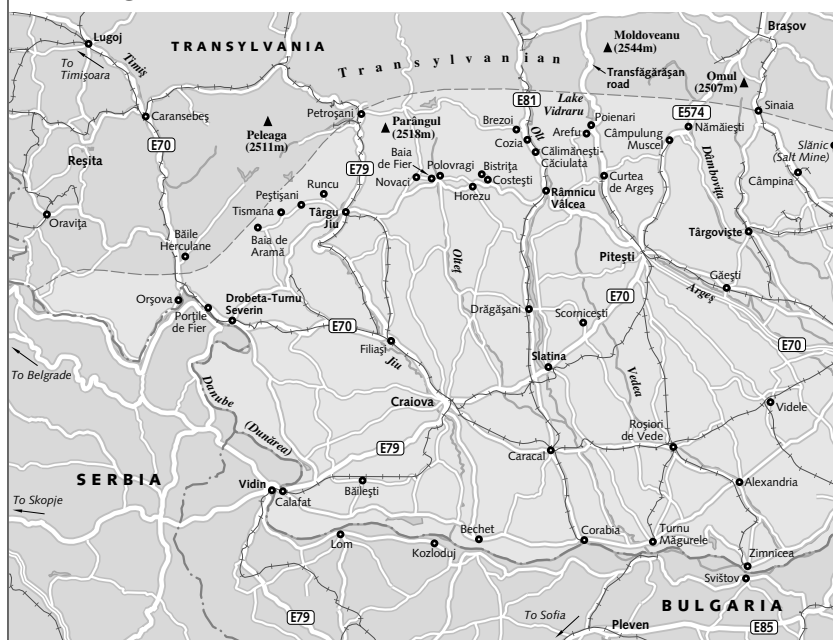
In the centre of the park on Piața Victoriei, there is a **memorial** to the victims of the 1989 revolution, as well as a **Liberty Statue**. The **Culture Palace** (Palatul Culturii), at the northern end of the square, is home to the **Museum of Natural Science** (Muzeul de Științe ale Naturii Prahova; admission €0.60; ☹ 9am–5pm). Opposite the Culture Palace is the impressive **St John's Cathedral**, dating from 1810. To its east lies the **Central Market**, housed in two large, domed buildings.

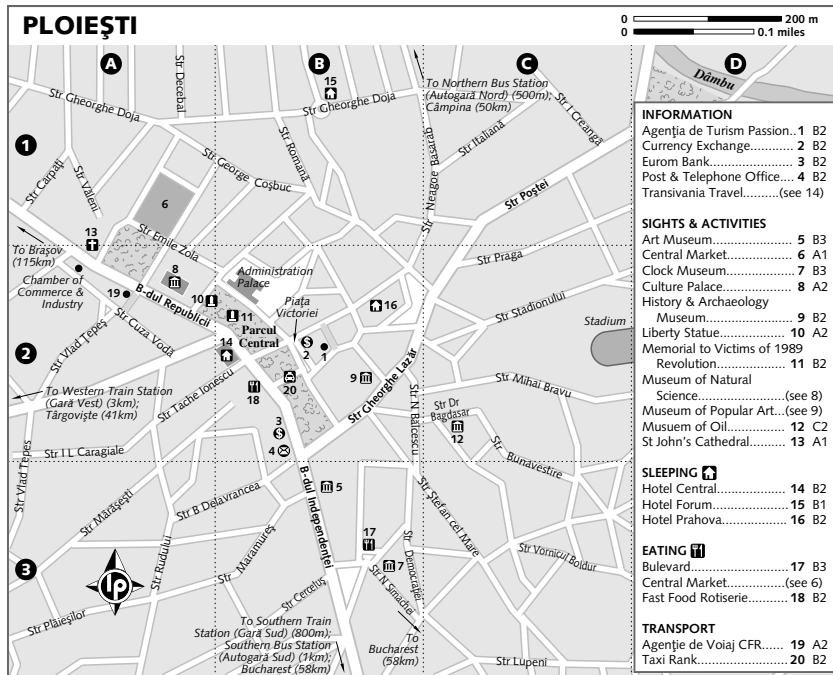
A 19th-century white Empire-style building houses the **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Artă; ☎ 511 375; B-dul Independenței 1; admission adult/student €0.70/0.40, Sun free; ☹ 10am–4pm Sun–Fri) displaying engravings, Romanian paintings and ongoing temporary exhibitions.

## Sleeping

**our pick Hotel Forum** (☎ 595 628; hf\_ploiesti@yahoo.com; Str Gheorghe Doja 215a; s/d/ste €25/28/43; ☹) No doubt, you're a little frustrated with the dubious price-versus-quality quotient of many Romanian hotels and *pensiunes*. Enter this budget traveller's dream. New beds, sparkling bathrooms, public internet station, wi-fi, minibars, room service and a bar-restaurant (mains €2 to €4) are all on site. The youthful staff treat through the English language and the lobby's plasma TV area is within lurching distance of the bar, making it the perfect night-out staging point. Breakfast not included.

## WALLACHIA





**Hotel Central** (☎ 526 641; paul\_palas@yahoo.com; B-dul Republicii 9; s/d 2-star €35/43, 3-star €51/69, 4-star €85/130; 📺) Reborn after the last earthquake destroyed it, only the four-star rooms have been significantly beautified and have internet access. The two-star rooms are looking worn.

**Hotel Prahova Plaza** (☎ 526 850; hotelprahova@yahoo.com; Str Dobrogeanu Gherea 11; s/d/ste €81/81/115; 📺) This Soviet architect's delight is starting to crumble outside, but has been newly renovated inside, with the ambitious prices to prove it.

## Eating

Ploiești is shamefully devoid of decent eateries. Hotel restaurants are your best bet for a simple, filling meal.

**Fast Food Rotiserie** (Piața Victoriei; mains €2; 🍷 9am-11pm) This place is next to Cinema Patria, facing Piața Victoriei. Good for refuelling rather than savouring.

**Bulevard** (☎ 517 549; Str Golești 25; mains €6-17) This is hands down the best dining experience in Ploiești, with a large menu (English available), heavy on Romanian cuisine, a

classy dining room and the best summer garden in town.

Get your fresh veggies and fish from the monster-sized **central market** (B-dul Unirii).

## Getting There & Away BUS

There are two bus stations: long-distance buses arrive at and depart from the **northern bus station** (Autogară Nord; Str Griviței 25), and buses to nearby villages use the **southern bus station** (Autogară Sud; Str Depoului), a two-minute walk from the southern train station.

The southern bus station has services to Bucharest (€2.10, 1½ hours, one daily), Câmpina (€1.10, 30 minutes, eight daily) and Târgoviște (€1.40, one hour, two daily).

## TRAIN

You can purchase train tickets in advance from the **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 542 080; B-dul Republicii 17; 🍷 7am-8pm Mon-Fri).

Fast trains to/from Bucharest, Constanța, Timișoara, Craiova and Moldavia use the southern train station (Gară Sud). Local trains use the western train station (Gară Vest).

From the southern train station, services include those to Bucharest (€4.20, 10 daily), Brașov (€7, 10 daily), Cluj-Napoca (€19.60, two daily), Baia Mare (€21, two daily) and, in summer, Constanța (two daily).

Trains to Budapest from Bucharest stop at the southern train station, as does the daily Warsaw train.

## Getting Around

Bus 1 and 2 travel from the southern train station to Piața Victoriei in the city centre and then on to the western train station. From here, bus 2 continues to the university. A taxi rank is adjacent to Parcul Central (Central Park). Avoid taxis that don't list their price per kilometre on their doors.

## CÂMPINA & AROUND

☎ 244

Travelling out of Ploiești is a surreal experience. Romania's Texas has miles of flat, bleak landscape pitted by constantly moving oil drills.

Heading 32km north of Ploiești into the Prahova Valley you come to Câmpina. Approaching this small town, you pass a memorial to pioneering pilot Aurel Vlaicu. Vlaicu, who built three planes and a glider – and designed a dirigible that was never built due to lack of funding – won several international aviation contests, flying his own planes. He met his death in 1913 after his arrow-shaped plane, the *Vlaicu-II*, crashed near Banești as he rushed to beat a foreign aviator to be the first to cross the Carpathians by plane.

## Sights

### HAȘDEU CASTLE

Get spooked in this creepy tribute to fatherly love. Construction on the **castle** (☎ 335 599; B-dul Carol I 197; admission adult/student €1.20/0.60; 🍷 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-Apr, 10am-6pm May-Aug) began in 1893, built by history professor Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu in memory of his academically brilliant daughter, Iulia, who died of tuberculosis at the age of 19 – just before she was to have been the first woman to enter the Sorbonne in Paris.

Although Iulia was buried in the Belu Cemetery in Bucharest it was here that her father held seances to communicate with her and composed the eerie funeral music said to be communicated from daughter to father via the spirit world.

## NICOLAE GRIGORESCU MUSEUM

Romania's signature **museum** (Muzeul Nicolae Grigorescu; ☎ 333 598; B-dul Carol I 166; admission adult/student €0.65/0.30), dedicated to its most famous artist, is the pride of Câmpina. It charts the life and works of Grigorescu (1838–1907) who started his career painting icons to support his family. Soon he was getting commissioned for private work, most notably the murals at Agapia Monastery (p264) in Moldavia. He studied in Paris with Pierre Auguste Renoir. Much of his mature work revolved around landscapes and peasant life, though his depictions of battles and prisoners produced while volunteering at the front during the Romanian Independence War are also renowned. His works attracted the attention of the Barbizon group and Napoleon III, who bought two of his paintings in 1867.

## SLANIC

Forty kilometres north of Ploiești lies a Disneyland of salt. The **Unirea Salt Mine Complex** (admission €3.50; 🍷 9am-3pm Tue-Sun), the largest salt mine in Europe, is the result of three decades (1943–70) of furious mining and now serves as a tourist attraction, as well as offering health and sport facilities. Salt pools and lakes notwithstanding, the very air in the mine's microclimate 220m below the surface is reputed to work wonders on the respiratory system. Additionally visitors can admire the salt statues and giant halls, dump the kids at the playground, play some football or tennis, or race through the run field. Ground-level attractions include the **Museum of Salt** (🍷 9am-7pm), depicting miner life, and the notably diminished **Salt Mountain**.

From Ploiești's southern train station, maxitaxi run to Slanic every 45 minutes (or when full), and a daily local train leaves from Ploiești's western train station.

## Sleeping

The only choice in the area, **Hotel Muntenia** (☎ 333 091; B-dul Carol I 61; s/d €23/47), is OK for a one-night stopover.

## Getting There & Away

From Ploiești's southern bus station there are several daily buses to Câmpina (32km). There are also five daily trains from Ploiești's western station to Câmpina.

Maxitaxi services run between Sinai and Câmpina.

## TÂRGOVIȘTE

☎ 245 / pop 92,320

All eyes were on Târgoviște, 49km northwest of Bucharest, following the dramatic arrest here of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena on 22 December 1989.

The Ceaușescus hijacked a car in Titu, 44km northwest of Târgoviște, where they were spotted by two soldiers who finally caught up with them in the town. Four days later, the first bloody images of the hastily arranged court session and execution by firing squad inside the military garrison flashed across the world's TV screens, 'proving' the hated pair was dead.

Aside from its spotlight in history, Târgoviște is a charming market town dating from 1396. It was the capital of Wallachia from 1418 until 1659, when the capital was moved to Bucharest. During the 15th century, Vlad Țepeș, the notorious impaler with whom the fictitious Dracula is associated, held princely court here.

### Orientation

The town centre is a 20-minute walk from the train station. Exit the station and head east, past the military barracks, up B-dul Castanilor, then turn right into B-dul Mircea cel Bătrân (previously Str Victoriei). All eastbound buses along this street stop in the centre. The bus station and central market are 3km northwest of town; turn right as you leave the bus station, then cross the large roundabout and take any eastbound bus down Calea Câmpulung.

The main shops, banks and hotels are in the modern centre clustered around Central Park (Parcul Central), which is straddled by B-dul Libertății to the north and B-dul Mircea cel Bătrân to the south. The Princely Court and key museums are in the older part of town, along Calea Domnească.

### Information

Surprise! There's no tourist office! Instead head straight for the Princely Court or the nearby History Museum where you can buy tourist brochures in English or French (€0.75) covering all the main sights. Hotel Dâmbovița (p100) offers a currency exchange service.

**Banca Comercială Română** (B-dul Independenței; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Does it all.

**Central post office** (Str Dr Marinoiu; ☎ 7.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Dates from 1906.

**Internet** (Str C A Rosetti; per hr €0.60; ☎ 8am-11pm)

**Telephone office** (Str Ion Rădulescu; ☎ 7am-8.30pm)

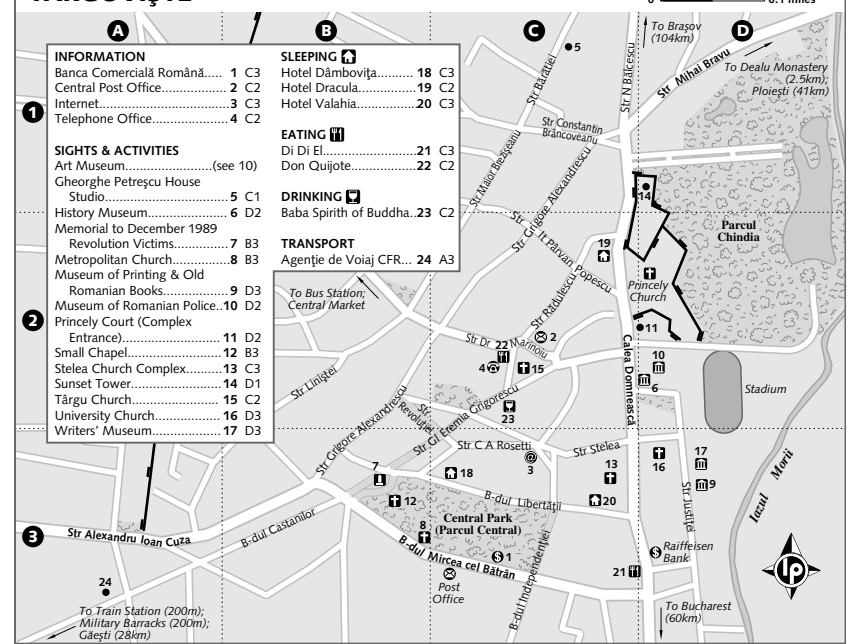
### Sights

The **military barracks**, where the Ceaușescus were executed, are immediately on the right as you leave the train station. At the hasty trial the pair faced joint charges of being accomplices to the murder of some 60,000 people, of genocide, and of attempting to flee Romania with state money, totalling US\$1 billion, stashed away in foreign bank accounts. None of the charges were proven. It's forbidden to enter or to take photographs of the garrison at the western end of B-dul Castanilor.

During the 15th century, the bloodthirsty prince Vlad Țepeș resided at **Princely Court** (Curtea Domnească; Calea Domnească 181; admission adult/student €0.85/0.40; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sun). The court was built in the 14th century for Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Old) and remained a residence for Wallachia's princes until the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu (r 1688-1714). The court was gradually fortified by most princes. Matei Basarab (1632-1654) was the most prolific court developer, and also raised many of the town's churches. Mircea cel Bătrân added defensive towers and Vlad Țepeș the 27m-high **Sunset Tower** (Turnul Chindiei), from where guards would announce the closing of the city gates as the sun went down (the current tower is a replica). It houses an exhibition – in Romanian – recounting the stories of Vlad Țepeș' life: one display freely describes how he made sure impaled Turkish soldiers had their eyes cut out so they couldn't see the heavenly maidens they believed awaited them after death. Also on site are ruins of two princes' houses, aqueducts, and a church, as well as two surviving churches from the 16th century – one a museum with 18th-century frescoes, the other a functioning house of worship.

The local **History Museum** (Muzeul de Istorie Dâmbovița; cnr Calea Domnească & Str Justiței; admission adult/student €0.85/0.40; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) has local artefacts from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. An English tour is available upon request. Nearby is Romania's only **Museum of Romanian Police** (Muzeul Poliției Române; admission €0.60; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), with a number of exhibitions from the 19th and 20th centuries, including an overfilled cloakroom-style display of uniforms, verily inviting one to don and model the inventory. In the same courtyard is an **Art Museum**, under construction at the time of writing.

## TÂRGOVIȘTE



The **Museum of Printing & Old Romanian Books** (Muzeul Tiparului și al Cărții Românești Vechi; ☎ 612 877; Str Justiței 3-5; admission €0.60) is housed inside a 17th-century palace built by Constantin Brâncoveanu for his daughter Safta. It is jewelled with original books from the beginning of Romania's printing age and manuscripts by 17th- and 18th-century Romanian writers, including poet Ion Alexandru Bratescu. All exhibits are in English. A **Writers' Museum** (Muzeul Scriitorilor Dâmbovițeni) adjoins the book museum.

Opposite is the **University Church** (Biserica Universității), dating from the 19th century. In front of it are busts of local academic Ionăchiță Văcărescu (1740-97) and Radu de la Afumați, ruler of Wallachia from 1522 to 1529.

Across from the University Church is the **Steele Church Complex** (Complexul Biserica Stelea), founded as a monastery by Moldavian prince Vasile Lupu (r 1634-53) in 1645 as a peace offering to Wallachian ruler Matei Basarab.

In Central Park the marble cross **Memorial to December 1989** stands outside a small chapel. Also in the park is the 18th-century **Metropolitan Church**. At its monks' quarters, the

16th-century **Dealu Monastery** on a hill 3km northeast of the centre, the head of the great Wallachian prince Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) is buried. Beheaded on the orders of the Habsburg general George Basta on 3 August 1601, Viteazul is still hailed as the crusader of Romanian nationalism. It was at this monastery that he swore his allegiance to the Hungarian emperor Rudolph II in 1598.

A few blocks north of the park is the partially frescoed **Târgu Church** (Biserica Târgului; Str Ion Rădulescu). The 1654 church was painted during the 17th and 18th centuries but destroyed during an earthquake in 1940. Extensive renovations followed in 1941 and in the 1970s. Inside is a **memorial plaque** to local priest and teacher Professor Georgescu, who was among the thousands to die while toiling under communist forced labour to build the Danube-Black Sea Canal in Dobrogea (p301).

**Georghe Petreșcu House Studio** (Casa Atelier Gheorghe Petreșcu; Str Bărăției; admission €0.60; ☎ 9am-5pm) was where the Romanian painter (1872-1949) spent the last 20 years of his life, capturing most of the town's major sights on canvas, several of which are on display.

## GLOD VS BORAT

The ramshackle town of Glod, north of Târgoviște, had a moment in the spotlight in late 2006... but for all the wrong reasons, according to locals.

Glod was chosen as the location for the fictional hometown of Sacha Baron Cohen's Kazakhstani journalist, Borat, and featured in the opening scenes of the film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Far from enjoying their 15 minutes of fame, some of those portrayed in the film argued they were exploited and humiliated.

Villagers claimed they agreed to appear in the movie on the understanding that it was a documentary and they felt they had been duped into performing crude and demeaning acts. One armless man, who was persuaded to wear a sex-toy prosthesis while allegedly being unaware of what it was, sued for damages and sought to prevent further screenings of the movie unless offending scenes were removed.

Curiously, the Borat movie proved a boon for tourism in Kazakhstan. It remains to be seen whether it will do the same for Glod.

## Festivals

**Dragaica** A pagan pre-harvest celebration in the last week of June.

**Miorita** A Romanian folk-singer competition held in mid-September.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Dracula** (☎ 620 013; Calle Domnească; r €17) Possibly furnished through a student dorm garage sale, rooms here are spartan, but reasonably clean. Music is audible from the restaurant until 11pm.

**Hotel Valahia** (☎ 634 491; B-dul Libertății 7; s/d €30.50/40.50) This place has a strange, slightly spooky air due to the contrast of being quite grand but a bit dark and dingy. Rooms are reasonable and spacious. Reception is deficient in both English and the ambition to provide timely service.

**Hotel Dâmbovița** (☎ 213 370; www.hoteldambovita.ro; B-dul Libertății 1; s/d €37/49; ♿) This comfortable hotel has helpful multilingual staff, and rooms with balconies overlooking Central Park.

## Eating & Drinking

**Di Di Ei** (☎ 212 916; Calea Domnească; mains €3) Excellent pizzas (17 types!) and spaghetti are served on the pavement terrace.

**Don Quijote** (Str Dr Marinou 9; mains €4; ♿) 9am-midnight) This popular place has a small outside terrace and stone fireplace. Large portions of Romanian fodder are served.

**Baba Spirith of Buddha** (Str Gl Eremia Grigorescu; ♿) 10am-midnight) Persian couches, tobaccoless hookahs and nightly 'Buddha music' await in this identity-crisis chillout bar.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Major services from Târgoviște include those to Bucharest (€2.10, 78km, 10 daily), Câmpulung Muscel (€2.10, 73km, four daily), Ploiești (€1.40, 52km, two daily) and Brașov (€2.80, 90km, two daily).

### TRAIN

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 611 554; B-dul Castanilor 2; ♿) 7am-7pm Mon-Fri), just north of the train station, sells advance tickets.

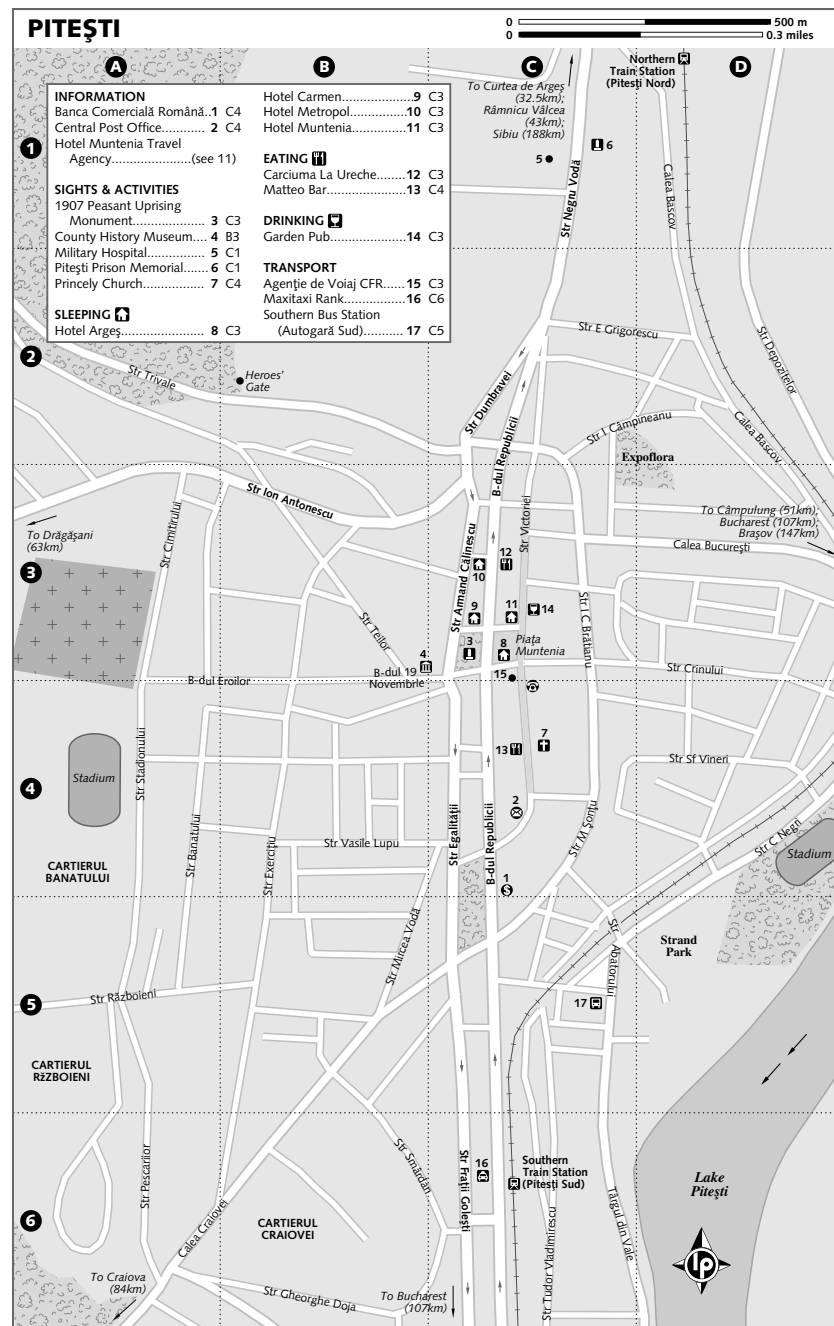
From Târgoviște there are local trains to Ploiești's western train station (1¾ hours, five daily). To get to Târgoviște from other cities, you have to change trains at Ploiești.

## PITEȘTI

☎ 248 / pop 173,298

The infamously delicate and altogether Romanian Dacia cars have been produced here since 1966, giving Pitești an important place in Bucharest's industrial heritage. Dacias may be the butt of endless jokes but they've kept Romania on the move (eventually) in the face of the worst roads in Europe. In mid-1999, French car manufacturer Renault acquired a majority stake in Dacia and followed through with a €500 million investment that has brought new esteem to the name, rolling out the affordable, frill-free, attractive and fast-selling Dacia Logan.

Pitești boasts one of the country's few stretches of pristine motorway, linking it to Bucharest (114km east), and has a lovely pedestrianised centre lined with trendy new bars.



## Orientation

There are two bus stations and two train stations, although the southern stations are the most useful for travellers. Buses to/from Bucharest and other major cities in Romania use the southern bus station (Autogară Sud), off B-dul Brătianu on Str Abatorului Târgul din Vale. All Bucharest and Curtea de Argeș trains stop at the southern train station (officially Pitești Sud but known as Pitești) on B-dul Republicii. Bus 2, 4 and 8 run between the train station and the town centre.

B-dul Republicii leads north from the train station towards the town centre. The main pedestrianised street, Str Victoriei, is lined with most of the town's hotels and restaurants.

## Information

**Banca Comercială Română** (B-dul Republicii 83;

☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri)

**Central Post Office** (Str Victoriei; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

**Hotel Muntenia Travel Agency** (☎ 210 880;

entrance on Str Victoriei; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Arranges excursions to anywhere in Romania, including day trips to Curtea de Argeș, and organises car hire.

## Sights

After WWII **Pitești prison** (Str Negru Vodă), just to the north of the city centre, was a site of the communist government's 'Student Re-education Centre' because of its high security and isolation. Operational since 1900, it was not until 1949, following the arrest of some anti-communist students, that psychiatric abuse became a favoured correctional technique.

Today a tall, mosaic-tiled column in memory of those who died marks the spot where the prison stood. The **memorial** stands between the first two of three apartment blocks built on the site. A **military hospital** (Spitalul Militar; 1881) still stands opposite.

The existence of the prison and the atrocities committed are completely ignored in the **County History Museum** (Muzeul Județean de Istorie; Str Armand Călinescu 4; admission €0.60; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) in favour of exhibitions on biology and archaeology. Crossing the park nearby you pass the **monument** to those who died in the 1907 peasant uprising.

On Str Victoriei, the unusual St George's Church (Biserica Sfântul Gheorghe), more commonly known as the **Princely Church** (Biserica Domnească), was built by Prince Con-

stantin Șerban and his wife Princess Bălașa between 1654 and 1658.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Argeș** (☎ 625 450; Piața Muntenia; s/d €18/30) This is the town's cheapest option; it's worn and noisy, but clean.

**Hotel Metropol** (☎ 222 407; Str Panselelor 1; s/d €23/28.50) There are large, passably clean rooms here, though the assumed nature of the 'transit rooms' – 'to rent for three or four hours' – may give one pause.

**Hotel Muntenia** (☎ 210 880; www.turism-muntenia.ro; B-dul Republicii; s/d 2-star €23/32, 3-star €41/58; ☎ ♿) This hotel is monstrously ugly and fantastically old-fashioned, but it's dead centre. The two-star rooms are in dire need of renovation.

**Hotel Carmen** (☎ 215 297; B-dul Republicii 84; s/d €32/36) This small, friendly place with contemporary décor offers three varieties of room (and price); midrange, quoted here, is the best value.

## Eating & Drinking

The restaurant at Hotel Carmen is the best in town, with an international menu in stylish surroundings (mains €5 to €10).

**Matteo Bar** (Str Victoriei 2; mains €4; ☎ 9am-10pm) Take in the buzz here with locals enjoying pizza and beer.

**Carciuna 'La Ureche'** (☎ 0723-281 110; B-dul Republicii 39; mains €5; ☎ noon-11pm) The long menu of Romanian cuisine is translated into English. Opt for the insulated cellar as the terrace is just off a noisy street.

**Garden Pub** (☎ 0723-201 254; Str Victoriei 20; ☎ 10am-11pm) Relax at the lovely terrace's wooden tables with large jugs of beer.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Maxitaxis depart from outside the southern train station, heading to Bucharest (€3, every 15 minutes), Constanța (€12) and Craiova.

All state buses use the southern bus station (Autogară Sud). Services include buses to Râmnicu Vâlcea (€1.75, 75km, two daily), Brașov (€2, 136km, two daily), Bucharest (€2.50, 108km, three daily), Craiova (€2, 142km, one daily) and Târgu Jiu (174km, one daily).

## TRAIN

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 630 565; Str Domnița Bălașa 13) sells advance tickets.

## FROM VICTIM TO TORTURER

From 1949 to 1952 a unique and experimental 'student re-education program' was introduced in Pitești, Gherla and Aiud prisons as a means of torturing political prisoners. The program was implemented by Eugen Țurcanu, an inmate at Pitești prison, acting on the orders of the Securitate. Țurcanu rounded up a core team of torturers from among his fellow inmates.

'Re-education' induced tortured prisoners to become torturers themselves. The first stage of this grotesque process involved the prisoner confessing all his crimes and 'anti-state' thoughts that he'd failed to reveal earlier to Securitate interrogators. He then signed a declaration in which he consented to his re-education. Scrubbing floors with a rag between the teeth, eating soup with both hands tied behind the back, licking toilets clean and being beaten to unconsciousness were just some of the persuasive methods used.

Religiously inclined prisoners, dubbed 'Catholics', were baptised each morning with a bucket of urine. Others were forced to don a white sheet in imitation of Christ and wear a penis carved from soap around their necks. Fellow prisoners kissed the soap pendant and the prisoner was flogged by other inmates in imitation of Christ's ordeal on the road to Golgotha.

Next, the victim was forced to disclose the names of fellow inmates who'd shown him kindness or sympathy. He then had to renounce his own family, 'reviling them in such foul and hideous terms that it would be next to impossible ever to return to natural feelings towards them', according to former political prisoner Dimitru Bacu in his novel *The Anti-Humans*.

In the final stage of the program, victims had to prove their successful 'regeneration' – by inflicting the same mental and physical abuse on new prison recruits. If they refused they were driven through the program again. Those who slackened in their new role as re-educators spent time in the prison's incarceration cell, black room or isolation cell.

The incarceration cells were 1.8m-tall upright coffins with a small hole for ventilation. One or two prisoners had to stand in these cells for eight to 15 days. The black room was 2.7 sq metres and windowless. Up to 30 prisoners were detained here for a maximum of three weeks without water. Isolation cells were reserved for sentences of three months or more, and many prisoners kept in these cells died of tuberculosis.

In 1954 Eugen Țurcanu and 21 other prisoners were secretly tried and sentenced to death for the murder of 30 prisoners and the abuse of 780. The Securitate denied all knowledge of the program.

Trains to/from the **southern train station** (Pitești Sud; ☎ 627 908; B-dul Republicii) include InterCity (IC) services to/from Bucharest (€5.50, three daily) and Craiova (three daily), and **rapid** trains to Constanța (€12.50, one daily).

## CURTEA DE ARGEȘ

☎ 248 / pop 33,365

Curtea de Argeș was a princely seat in the 14th century after the capital of Wallachia was moved here from Cămpulung Muscel. The town's church is considered to be the oldest monument preserved in its original form in Wallachia, while the monastery (or Episcopal cathedral), sculpted from white stone, is unique for its chocolate-box architecture and the royal tombs it hides.

The historic town is a gateway to the Făgăraș Mountains.

## Orientation

The train station, a 19th-century architectural monument, is 100m north of the bus station

on Str Albești. The centre is a 10-minute walk along Str Albești then up the cobbled Str Castanilor and along Str Negru Vodă. Continue on until you reach a statue of Basarab I, from where all the major sights, camping ground and hotels (signposted) are a short walk.

## Information

**Post office** (B-dul Basarabilor 17-19; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri) The telephone office is in the same building.

**Raiffeisen Bank** (B-dul Basarabilor; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri) Next to Hotel Posada.

**Tourist office** (☎ 721 451; B-dul Basarabilor 27-29; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Within Hotel Posada.

## Sights

### PRINCELY COURT

The ruins of the **Princely Court** (Curtea Domnească; admission €0.60; ☎ 9am-6pm), which originally comprised a church and palace, are in the city centre. The church was built in the 14th century by Basarab I, whose statue stands in the square outside the entrance to the court.

Basarab died in Târgovişte in 1352. His burial place near the altar in the princely church at Curtea de Argeş was discovered in 1939. The princely court was rebuilt by Basarab's son, Nicolae Alexandru Basarab (r 1352–68), and completed by Vlaicu Vodă (r 1361–77). While little remains of the palace today, the 14th-century church (built on the ruins of a 13th-century church) is almost perfectly intact.

### HISTORIC CENTRE

The **County Museum** (Muzeul Orăşenesc; ☎ 711 446; Str Negru Vodă 2; ☹ 9am–4pm Tue–Sun) charts the history of the region. Rising on a hill are the ruins of the 14th-century **Sân Nicolar Church** (Biserica Sân Nicolară).

### CURTEA DE ARGEŞ MONASTERY

This fantastical **Episcopal cathedral** (Mănăstirea Curtea de Argeş; admission €0.60; ☹ 8am–7pm) was built between 1514 and 1526 by Neagoe Basarab (r 1512–21) with marble and mosaic tiles from Constantinople. Legend has it that the wife of the master stonemason, Manole, was embedded in the stone walls of the church, in accordance with a local custom that obliged the mason to bury a loved one alive within the church to ensure the success of his work. The story goes that Manole told his workers that the first of the wives to bring their food the next day would be the one entombed alive. The workers duly went home and warned their women – it was hence Manole's wife who made the fateful visit.

The current edifice dates from 1875 when French architect André Lecomte du Nouy was brought in to save the monastery, which was in near ruins.

The white marble tombstones of Carol I (1839–1914) and his poet wife Elizabeth (1853–1916) lie on the right in the monastery's *pronaos* (entrance hall). On the left of the entrance are the tombstones of King Ferdinand I (1865–1927) and the British-born Queen Marie (1875–1938), whose heart, upon her request, was placed in a gold casket and buried in her favourite palace in Balçic in southern Dobrogea. Following the ceding of southern Dobrogea to Bulgaria in 1940, however, her heart was moved to a marble tomb in Bran. Neagoe Basarab and his wife Stăna are also buried in the *pronaos*.

In the park opposite lies **Manole's Well** (Fântâna lui Manole). Legend has it that the

now widowed Manole tried – and failed – to fly from the monastery roof when his master, Neagoe, removed the scaffolding to prevent him building a more beautiful structure for anyone else. The natural spring marks the hapless stonemason's supposed landing pad.

### Sleeping

**ourpick Pensiunea Ruxi** (☎ 0727-827 675; www.pensiunea-ruxi.ro; Str Negru Vodă 104; r €19) Truly, you can't go wrong with accommodation in Curtea de Argeş, but family-run Pensiunea Ruxi, directly across from Hotel Confarg, is exceptional. While the rooms are new and comfortable, the real treat is the homely atmosphere, where the family will go to heart-breaking lengths to take care of you. Sweet-talking the daughter, Ruxandra, who speaks passable English, will likely win you access to her computer for a quick, gratis email session. Breakfast (€2) is served in front of the TV, with remote control at the ready.

**Hotel Posada** (☎ 721 451; www.posada.ro; B-dul Basarabilor 27-29; s 1-star €19, s/d 2-star €23/30, 3-star €30/40; 🍷) The front-facing rooms here enjoy mountain sunsets. Internet extra.

**Montana Pizzeria** (B-dul Basarabilor; s/d/ste €23/29/40) This place has simple but surprisingly comfortable rooms for rent.

**Hotel Confarg** (☎ 728 020; Str Negru Vodă 5; s/d/ste €26/34/46) Possibly the best-value hotel in Romania! Rooms are large, clean and modern. Doubles have huge baths and the suites are admirably swanky for the price. Breakfast is served in a top-floor glassed dining room. A sauna and well-stocked fitness centre are available, but that would require leaving your suite.

### Eating & Drinking

**Montana Pizzeria** (B-dul Basarabilor; pizzas €2) This place serves up fresh pizzas and beer. Most nights there is live music.

**Restaurant Capra Neagră** (☎ 721 619; Str Alexandru Lahovary; mains €2) Sit on the terrace and enjoy the Romanian dishes here.

**Hotel Confarg** (☎ 728 020; Str Negru Vodă 5; mains €4) The hotel's restaurant has an excellent, reasonably priced menu of Romanian fare.

**Be Happy Cafe** (B-dul Basarabilor; ☹ to 5am) This is a café during the week, a thumping club on the weekends.

**Disco Castel** (Str Negru Vodă; ☹ 10pm–4am) The city's newest club, 50m down the road from Restaurant Capra Neagră. Be there or be mocked.

### Getting There & Away

There are six daily local trains running to/from Piteşti; change at Piteşti for all train routes.

State buses run from the **bus station** (Str Albeşti) to/from Arefu, Câmpulung Muscel, Braşov and Bucharest. Check the station boards, as some buses travel only on weekdays and some only on weekends.

A daily maxitaxi to Bucharest via Piteşti leaves at 8am from outside Hotel Posada. Other maxitaxis go to/from Arefu and Piteşti from an unofficial **maxitaxi stop** (cnr Str Mai 1 & Str Lascăr Catargiu).

### POIENARI & AREFU

☎ 248

From Curtea de Argeş, Draculaophiles head north up the spectacular Argeş Valley to **Poienari Citadel** (Cetatea Poienari). In 1459 Turks captured by Vlad Ţepeş in revenge for killing his father and brother marched along this route. At the end of the march, the Turks built the defensive fortress for the bloodthirsty prince. The result: a castle strategically positioned to guard the entrance from Transylvania into the Argeş Valley. It's considered by Dracula buffs to be Romania's 'real' Dracula's castle.

Some 1480 steps lead up from the side of a hydroelectric power plant to the ruins. A substantial amount of the castle, which towers on a crag above a village, fell down the side of the mountain in 1888. The head-high ruins exemplify the astounding setting and scale of the former structure. Tickets (€0.60) are sold by the castle-keeper at the top of the steps.

Six kilometres south of Poienari Citadel is **Arefu**, a tiny village inhabited solely by descendants of the minions who served Vlad Ţepeş – allegedly! The village has an *agroturism* scheme, so visitors can sit around campfires, sing folk songs and listen to tales told by villagers whose forebears mingled with the notorious impaler.

Legend has it that in 1462, when the Turks besieged Poienari Citadel, the Arefians helped Vlad Ţepeş to escape into the mountains. His wife, convinced they would not escape, flung herself from the turret. As an expression of gratitude, Ţepeş gave the Arefians their pasture lands. A document signed by Mircea Ciobanul (r 1545–52) in 1540 attests to the people of Arefu being granted 16 mountains and 14 sheepfolds by Ţepeş.

Just 1km north of the fortress lies the artificial **Lake Vidraru**, which was dammed between

1961 and 1966 to feed the hydroelectric power plant. From here the towering **Transfăgărăşan road**, a mountain pass that peaks at 2034m, crosses the Carpathians into Transylvania. The tunnel cutting between the Negoiu and Moldoveanu peaks is 845m long. The pass, allegedly built by the army as a training exercise, is only open for about three months of the year during summer. A sign at the side of the road south of Poienari Citadel shows whether the pass is open or shut.

Surrounding villages are teeming with *pensiunes* (B&Bs) and homes displaying *cazare* (accommodation) signs. Villagers in Arefu open their homes to travellers. Ask at the *biblioteca* (library) for *agroturism* members, or knock on the following doors.

In Căpăţânenii village, 1km south of Poienari, is **Pensiunea Dracula** (☎ 0740-757 400; r with/without bath €23/17). Breakfast is not included.

The **Tomescu family** (☎ 730 102, 0743-678 365; per person €25) at house 229 has three clean rooms and, without a word of spoken English, manages to host Romanian feasts and *juică*-fuelled sing-alongs around the campfire. Rooms are also available at houses 53a, 330, 348 and 384. It is a 10-minute hike up the hill from the library – take the first right, then start asking people.

**Cabana Cumpăna** (☎ 0745-910 023; d/tr €31/34) is situated on the western side of Lake Vidraru. Bookings can also be made through Hotel Posada (opposite) in Curtea de Argeş.

The chalet-style hotel **Valea Cu Peşti** (☎ 0742-020 129; d €40) lies on the eastern side of Lake Vidraru.

Public transport to Arefu is limited to twice daily state buses and whimsical maxitaxis from Curtea de Argeş. To reach Poienari, alight in Căpăţânenii village – the citadel is a 1km hike north.

### NĂMĂIEŞTI

Some 11km north of Câmpulung Muscel (itself 50km north of Piteşti) is one of Romania's most unusual sights: a monastery built into a mountain cave, above the Târg River Valley. Legend has it that **Nămăieşti Monastery** (Nămăieşti Mănăstire), dating from 1547, was founded by a shepherd who dreamt of a great church inside the rock face. It is claimed that a 16th-century icon here shows the only 'real' face of the Virgin Mary and it apparently works miracles. Nămăieşti is open to visitors but only accessible by private transport.

## WEST TO TÂRGU JIU

☎ 250

The main road leads west from Curtea de Argeş to the industrialised town of **Râmnicu Vâlcea**. At the northern edge of town, on the road to Sibiu, is the **Valcea Village Museum** (Muzeu Satului Valcean; ☎ 746 869; admission/photo/video €0.90/1/2.20; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), a sprawling open-air museum with 80 examples of classic country structures and settings typical of the Valcea region, featuring sheds, houses, stores, churches, an old well, cemetery and Orthodox shrines.

For accommodation, **Antrec** (☎ 749 706) has an office here and **Hotel Alutus** (☎ 736 601; Str General Protoporgescu 10; s/d €43/47) is in the town centre.

From Râmnicu Vâlcea head north up the Olt Valley to **Călimănești-Căciulata**, a twin spa resort with 1200m-deep hot and cold mineral springs. It was awarded a gold medal for its mineral waters at Vienna in 1873 and was a favourite haunt of Napoleon III who had waters brought from here to treat his kidney stones. The old Roman town comes to life during the first week of August, when it hosts a large **folk music and crafts festival**. Accommodation can be arranged through **Călimănești-Căciulata SR** (☎ 750 270; Calea lui Traian 413).

Just 2km north is **Cozia Monastery**, built by Mircea cel Bătrân in the late 14th century, which today shelters the Wallachian prince's tomb. The original fountain dates from 1517, to which another was added by Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1711. The church frescoes are in excellent shape. There is also a small **museum**.

Two kilometres north of Cozia is the turn-off for **Turnul Monastery**, which was quietly established around 1467, when two priests from Cozia hand-burrowed caves into solid stone. The first church wasn't erected until 1676, and it later burned down. The diminutive 18th-century church has few frescoes, but the adjacent two-level *biserică* (1900), built by Polish architect Anton Lapinski, has crisp frescoes completed in 1998.

There are two hiking trails leading from the monastery, one marked by red and white stripes (3½ hours) and the other by triangles (5½ hours) leading to cabanas and Stănișoara Monastery. These hikes are difficult in winter. Ask around the monastery for current conditions.

Turnul offers sex-segregated rooms free-of-charge for one or two nights, though church attendance is required.

## Bistrița & Arnota Monasteries

**Bistrița Monastery** (Mănăstirea Bistrița) is 8km north of Costești. The current Brâncoveanu-style building (1856) was built on the site of a former 15th-century monastery. The first book printed in Wallachia (1508) is preserved here. Until 1982 the monastery sheltered one of the country's largest schools for children with special needs, now housed in a separate building at the entrance to the estate. Some 800m from the main monastery building is the **Peștera Sfântul Gheorghe**, a hillside chapel hidden in the 'St George' cave in the hill face and previously used to keep the monastery's treasures safe.

From Bistrița, a forest road leads 4km north to the smaller **Arnota Monastery** (Mănăstirea Arnota). Ancient crosses are carved in the sheer rock face lining the southern end of this road. Wallachian prince Matei Basarab, who started building the monastery in 1636 (it was completed in 1706), is buried here.

## Horezu Monastery

Seven kilometres further west along the road to Târgu Jiu is splendid **Horezu** (1694) in its idyllic mountain setting. It is one of Romania's veritable treasures and a Unesco World Heritage site. A long, increasingly picturesque road leads up to the fortress. Built in a swift four years during the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu, it is considered one of Romania's finest examples of the unique synthesis of Western and Oriental architectural styles for which he became famed. The church has an unusually large *pronaos* (temple entrances) and open porch supported by ornate stone-carved columns. The church's interior frescoes are underscored by the massive altar, carved in tea tree wood. The old rectory contains frescoes from 1705 and is only open for holy occasions (and impromptu tours if the sisters are feeling generous). Request a visit to the Princely Chapel – it's a treasure trove of religious artefacts.

During the 17th and 18th centuries Horezu housed the country's most prestigious fresco-painting school.

Nearby **Horezu village** is a centre for brown pottery. Tiny shops line the roadside.

The **Horezu Monastery** (☎ 860 071; r 623) complex boasts 20 modern, clean rooms (summer only) in possibly Romania's loveliest setting. However there's no food available. Calling ahead is requested. The monastery is sign-posted 3km east of Horezu village.

Antrec arranges rooms in private homes for €10 to €15 a night; in Horezu village contact the **Dragițu family** (☎ 860 183) or the **Figura family** (☎ 860 113).

## Polovragi & the Women's Cave

From Horezu a dirt road heads 30km west to the 18th-century **Polovragi Monastery** (Mănăstirea Polovragi), founded by Radu the Handsome (r 1474–75) in 1470. Every year in June the monastery hosts a **folk craft fair**.

The **Women's Cave** (Peștera Muierilor; adult/child €1/0.50; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep), at the gateway to the Galbenul Gorges, 3km from Baia de Fier, contains the bones of women who used to retreat into the cave for safety during invasions in the Middle Ages. Guided tours (in Romanian) of the four-million-year-old cave are given every hour. Wear a jumper, as it's 10°C year-round.

## TÂRGU JIU

☎ 253 / pop 100,360

Târgu Jiu is home to the internationally famed modernist sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957).

Frequent strikes in the Jiu Valley mining region from the 1980s onwards paralysed industrial activity, forcing the communists to give in to the miners' militant demands. The miners' mass descent upon Bucharest in 1990 ended in bloodshed and their 1991 rampage led to the fall of Petre Roman's first post-Revolution government.

In early 1999, 10,000 striking miners smashed their way through police barricades as they marched towards Bucharest, protesting layoffs and low wages. After a 17-day strike, a deal was struck for pay rises and the pits were reopened. The government then reneged on the deal, sparking more violent protests and riots.

Protest leader Miron Cozma was sentenced to 18 years in prison over the 1991 protests. This harsh sentence was intended to show the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the government was determined to forge ahead with plans to close hundreds of coal mines and loss-making factories, and pay off Romania's staggering US\$3 billion foreign debt.

During WWII Târgu Jiu prison was home to communist party leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Nicolae Ceaușescu (the then secretary-general of the Union of the Communist Youth) and Ion Iliescu, who replaced Ceaușescu as president in 1990.

Should you unfathomably find yourself in the area on the third Sunday in February, bundle up for the **Enchanted Water Springs Music Festival** (weather permitting), featuring Gorj county's folk ensembles and miners' brass bands. Contact Gorj Tourism for more information.

## Orientation

Târgu Jiu centre, east of the Jiu River, is a 15-minute walk from the bus and train stations. As you leave the station, turn right along Str Nicolae Titulescu, which becomes B-dul Republicii, until you reach Str Unirii, the main thoroughfare. Head 500m west along Str Unirii then turn right onto Calea Victoriei. The main hotels, shops and restaurants are dotted along the pedestrianised area.

## Information

There's a currency exchange service inside the Gorj Tourism office.

**Central post office** (Str Vasile Alecsandri; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri) Near Str Traian.

**Central telephone office** (Str Traian 1; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Fri) Near the central post office.

**Gorj Tourism** (☎ 224 320; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Opposite the train station; sells regional maps (€3).

**Raiffeisen Bank** (☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) In the centre on Calea Victoriei.

## Sights

Târgu Jiu's Brâncuși tour starts in **Central Park** (Brâncuși Park; ☎ 6am-10pm May-Dec, 7am-8pm Jan-Apr), at the western end of Calea Eroilor, with three of the four sculptures (1937–38) that Brâncuși created in memory of those who died during WWI. The entrance to the park is marked by his **Gate of the Kiss** (Poarta Sărutului), an archway reminiscent of Bucharest's Triumphal Arch constructed the year before. It is also in commemoration of the reunification of Romania. The stone archway bears folk art motifs from Brâncuși's native Oltenia. Flip a coin on top of the archway for good luck!

Continue along the park's central mall to the **Alley of Chairs** (Aleea Scaunelor). The dwarf-sized stone stools are grouped in trios either side of the avenue.

The alley leads to the third sculpture, the riverside **Table of Silence** (Masa Tăcerii). Each of the 12 stools around the large, round, stone table represents a month of the year.



The small **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Artă; ☎ 214 156; Str Stadion; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a photographic exhibition on the life and works of Brâncuși.

Brâncuși's most famed sculpture, the **Endless Column** (Coloana Fără Sfârșit), endowed to the town in 1937, sits at the eastern end of Calea Eroilor. The 29.35m-tall structure, threaded with 15 steel beads, is considered as much a triumph of engineering as of modern art. According to the New York-based World Monuments Fund it ranks as one of the planet's top 100 works. Standing right underneath it is where his synthesis of heaven and physicality meet, with the column seemingly rising ad infinitum. The column was restored in 2000 at a cost of €4 million.

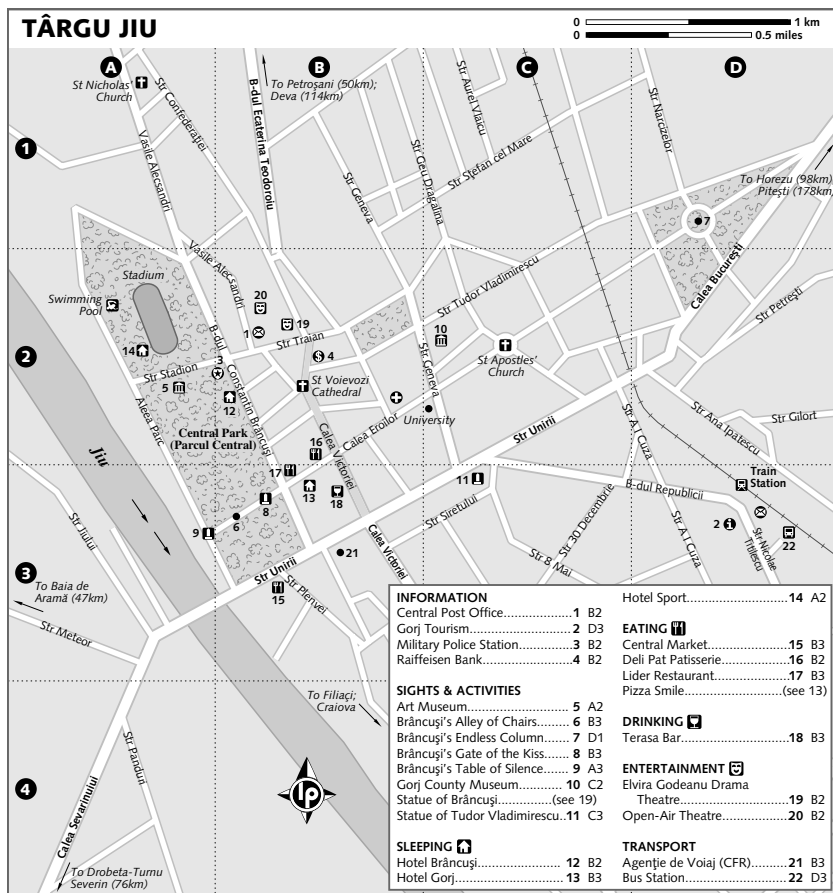
In front of the Elvira Godeanu Drama Theatre stands a **statue of Brâncuși**, armed with his sculpting chisel.

The **Gorj County Museum** (Muzeul Județean Gorj; ☎ 212 044; Str Geneva 8; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) gained its name in 1996 after the city of Geneva presented Târgu Jiu with the **trio of clocks** that stand in front of the **statue of Tudor Vladimirescu**.

### Sleeping

Gorj Tourism books rooms (about €10) in private homes.

**Hotel Sport** (☎ 214 402; s/d €16/21) Your back will not thank you for a night here. It's difficult to find, behind the stadium. Still, it's the cheapest place for 100km in any direction.



Call ahead as it is often booked by groups. Breakfast not included.

**Hotel Gorj** (☎ 214 814; turism\_ojt\_gorj@yahoo.com; Calea Eroilor 6; s/d €30/37; ☎) Skip the unrenovated rooms and the conditions here are acceptable. Internet (and wi-fi) available in some rooms.

**Hotel Brâncuși** (☎ 215 981; B-dul Constantin Brâncuși 10; s/d €37/40; ☎) After a renovation this place now sparkles with Romanian grandeur. In-room internet is extra.

### Eating & Drinking

Choice is limited in Târgu Jiu and often hotels are the best bet for a hearty meal. Hotel Brâncuși has the cleanest and nicest dining.

**Pizza Smile** (mains €2; ☎ 8am-midnight) This tiny place adjoining Hotel Gorj serves 18 kinds of fast-food-calibre pizza, best enjoyed on the terrace.

**Lider Restaurant** (☎ 219 002; Calea Eroilor 11; mains €4; ☎ 11am-midnight) This place serves hit-or-miss Romanian food. The Enigma bar downstairs is packed at weekends.

**Deli Pat Patisserie** (Calea Eroilor) Next door to Lider, this place is handy for a quick cup of coffee and a creamy cake.

**Terasa Bar** (Calea Victoriei) Behind Hotel Gorj, this bar offers an exquisitely placed terrace overlooking Calea Victoriei.

Stock up on fresh fruit and vegetables at the **central market** (Str Unirii), at the southern end of Central Park.

### Entertainment

Open-air concerts and theatrical performances are held in summer at the **open-air theatre** (Str Vasile Alecsandri 53). Close by is the **Elvira Godeanu Drama Theatre** (Teatrul Dramatic Elvira Godeanu; ☎ 216 494; cnr Str Stadion & Str Confederației).

### Getting There & Away

#### BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 243 339; Str Nicolae Titulescu 5) is 100m south of the train station. A major service runs from here to Bucharest (257km, one daily), via Pitești (174km) and to Petroșani (57km).

Maxitaxi services run from the bus station to Timișoara (€10, four daily), Cluj-Napoca (€7, one daily), Alba Iulia (€5, one daily), Baia Mare (two daily), Drobeta-Turnu Severin (two daily) and Orșova (two daily).

#### TRAIN

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 211 924; Str Unirii 2; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri) sells advance tickets.

From Târgu Jiu there are fast trains to Craiova (€3, three hours, four daily), Bucharest (€8, five hours, four daily) and Timișoara (€8, four daily). Northbound to Petroșani (1¼ to 1¾ hours), there are three local trains and one *accelerat* daily.

### DROBETA-TURNU SEVERIN

☎ 252 / pop 106,599

Drobeta-Turnu Severin is on the bank of the Danube (Dunărea) River bordering Serbia. Though of ancient origin, the present town was laid out in the 19th century when its port was built. It's best known for the Iron Gates Museum's incredible scale model of the old Roman bridge that spanned the Danube to Serbia.

### Orientation

From the train station, walk up to B-dul Republicii (B-dul Carol I). Follow this road to the east for 600m or so to Hotel Continental Parc, at the intersection of Str Bibiescu. The town centre lies one block north of here. The bus station is at the eastern end of Str Brâncoveanu.

### Information

**Banca Comercială Română** (cnr Str Coștescu & Str Aurelian; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Does everything but iron your jeans.

**Post office** (Str Decebal 41; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

**Telephone office** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Adjacent to the post office.

### Sights

The **Iron Gates Museum** (Muzeul Porților de Fier; ☎ 325 922; B-dul Republicii; adult/student €1.70/0.90; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) is housed in the former Trajan school for girls, dating from 1922. The museum was opened the day before the 1972 unveiling of the mammoth Porțile de Fier hydroelectric power station, 10km to the west. It contains a fine exhibition on the natural history of the Danube.

Other sections of the museum cover history, ethnography, astrology, popular art, the evolution of humans, and archaeology. Particularly impressive is the scale model of the Roman bridge constructed across the Danube in AD 103 by the Syrian architect Apollodor of Damascus, on the orders of the Roman emperor Trajan. The **Trajan Bridge** stood just below the site of the present museum, and

the ruins (ruinele podului lui Traian) of two of its pillars can still be seen towering beside the Danube. Northeast of the bridge ruins lie the remnants of **Castrul Drobeta**, a 2nd- to 6th-century Roman fort built to protect the bridge.

West of the castle ruins, also in the museum grounds, are the ruins of the 16th-century medieval **Severin Church** (Biserica Mitropoliei Severinului), including the remains of the crypt, which lie protected beneath glass.

In the basement of the Iron Gates Museum is a dingy **aquarium** displaying various fish species prevalent in the Danube, including the giant Somnul fish.

At the southern end of the town's main square, check out the huge metal **fountain**. It has 'arms' that spray water as they rotate, drawing crowds each night. The **old water castle**, standing a few blocks north of the square, looks deceptively medieval, but only dates from the early 20th century.

Eleven kilometres north of Drobeta is **Topolnița Cave** (Peștera Topolnița), which ranks among the largest caves in the world.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are a number of faceless, overpriced three-star hotels in town.

**Hotel Hip** (☎ 312 516; s/d €7.50/15) There's surprisingly clean bedding here, but the infinitesimal, smoke-infused rooms will challenge all but the hardest of travellers. It's on the west side of the main square, above Café Ada-Kaleh.

**Tropical Hotel** (☎ 333 023; tropical\_hotel@yahoo.com; l Caragiale 39; s/d €27/29; 📶) This hotel's poor location (2km northwest of the city centre) is compensated by comfortable rooms, a respectable on-site international restaurant and free wi-fi. Follow the signs from B-dul Vladimirescu (E70), heading towards Timișoara.

**Hotel Continental Parc** (☎ 306 730; drobeta@continentalhotels.ro; B-dul Carol I 2; s/d 2-stars €30/39, 3-stars €41/56; 📶) The two-star rooms here are in commendable condition, particularly the bathrooms, while the three-star rooms are exceptional. Request a room facing the river. The restaurant offers a cheap menu with a shady terrace overlooking the park and river. There's an outside bar and café, which is packed in summer. In-room internet extra.

**Aurora** (Str Bibescu) This is a café-bar with a covered pavement terrace; there's a small delicatessen adjacent. The opening times vary according to how the owners feel on the day!

**Hala Radu-Negru indoor market** (Str Coștescu) For fresh fruit and vegetables, head to this market near Str Unirii.

### Getting There & Away BUS

From Drobeta-Turnu Severin there is a service to Porțile de Fier (25 minutes, daily at 1.30pm).

Maxitaxis depart from the bus station. Services to and from Craiova and Băile Herculane stop at Drobeta-Turnu Severin (daily at 3.45pm except Sunday).

A private bus (€12, pay the driver) departs daily from outside the Drobeta-Turnu Severin train station to Negotin and Pojarevat in Serbia. Theoretically the bus is scheduled to leave at midnight. In reality it leaves when full. Return buses from Negotin and Pojarevat also depart for Drobeta-Turnu Severin when there are full.

### TRAIN

Book tickets at the **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 313 117; Str Decebal 43; 🕒 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri).

Most fast trains between Bucharest and Timișoara stop here. Services include those to Bucharest (€13, five hours, 10 daily), Craiova (€5, 1½ to 2½ hours, 10 daily), Timișoara (€9, 3½ hours, nine daily), Băile Herculane (€3, one hour, nine daily) and Orșova (25 minutes, four daily). In summer there are trains to Constanța (€20, six hours, two daily).

### PORTILE DE FIER

The infamous **Porțile de Fier** (Iron Gates) at Gura Văii tower above the Danube 10km west of Drobeta-Turnu Severin. This monstrous, concrete hydroelectric power station was a Romanian-Yugoslavian joint venture, conceived in 1960 and completed 12 years later. On top of the dam wall runs the road linking Romania to Serbia.

An area of 115,000 hectares around the power station has been conserved as the **Iron Gates National Park** to protect the flora and fauna of the region. A similar venture, the **Djerdap National Park**, sits across the river in Serbia.

The Porțile de Fier at Gura Văii stand on the site of **Old Orșova** (Orșova Veche), one of 13 settlements to be swallowed up by the artificial lake, created to curb this treacherous stretch of the Danube.

### Sleeping

**Motel Continental** (☎ 252-342 144; drobeta@continentalhotels.ro; s/d/ste €41/56/83; 📶 🚰 🚿) About 12km east of Drobeta-Turnu Severin on the E70 to Băile Herculane, Motel Continental is unexpectedly flashy and a convenient stopping point for motorists heading to/from Serbia. Amenities include outdoor swimming pool, tennis and wi-fi (extra charge).

### Getting There & Away BUS

There is a bus service to Porțile de Fier from Drobeta-Turnu Severin (25 minutes, daily at 1.30pm). The daily maxitaxi to/from Băile Herculane and Drobeta-Turnu Severin stops in Orșova.

### TRAIN

Fast trains to/from Drobeta-Turnu Severin stop at Orșova (four daily).

### CRAIOVA

☎ 251 / pop 311,586

The university town of Craiova, founded on the site of the Dacian stronghold of Pelendava, prides itself on its strong academic tradition and the wealth of prominent characters who have passed through on their journey to stardom: Wallachian prince Mihai Viteazul was born here, the world-famous sculptor Constantin Brâncuși carved his first sculptures from scrap wooden crates in the town, and the first cartridge fountain pen was invented by Craiovan-born Petrache Poenaru (1799–1875). Today, Craiova is better known as the source of Craiova beer!

Prior to the war in Yugoslavia, IAR93 subsonic jet fighter-bombers were manufactured in Craiova for the Romanian and Yugoslav airforces. Production ground to a halt in 1992, however, after the UN imposed trade sanctions against Yugoslavia. Workers at the plant blocked the Craiova-Pitești highway with a military plane in mid-1997 in a desperate bid to get their jobs guaranteed.

Following the outbreak of the conflict in Kosovo in 1999, UN sanctions against Yugoslavia were widened. With the conflict's end and the change of Yugoslav government, trade sanctions were finally lifted in late 2000.

### Orientation

The northern bus station (Autogară Nord), the arrival and departure point for buses to

and from most other towns, is next to the train station, 1km northeast of the centre on B-dul Carol I (B-dul Republicii). Bus 1 runs from the train station to the centre and the northern bus station. There are no buses to the southern bus station (Autogară Sud); a taxi from the centre should cost no more than €3.

### Information

**Banca Comercială Română** (cnr Calea Unirii & Str Alexandru Ioan Cuza; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

**Central Post Office** (cnr B-dul Stirbei Vodă & Calea Unirii; 🕒 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

**Mapamond Agenție de Turism** (☎ 415 071/73; travel@mapamond.ro; Str Olteț 2-4; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, to 7pm Oct-May) Friendly, English-speaking staff hand out maps. Also an agent for Antrec.

**Telephone Office** (Calea Unirii 69; 🕒 7.30am-7pm)

**TTC currency exchange** (Str Olteț 1; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Sat)

### Sights

#### ART MUSEUM

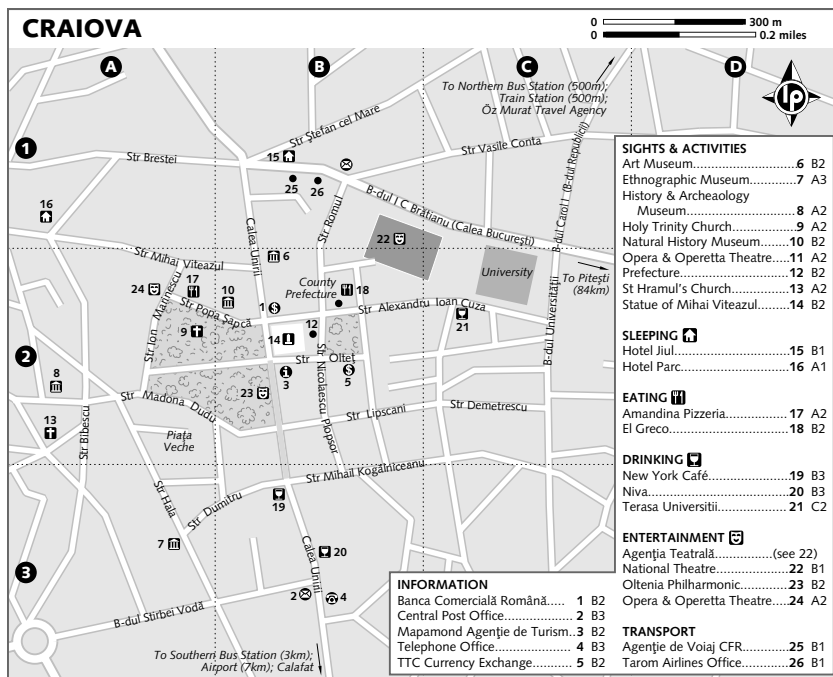
The town's treasure is the **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Artă; ☎ 412 342; Calea Unirii; admission €0.90; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sun), with an incredible collection of Brâncuși's finest works, including *The Kiss*, *The Thigh* and *Miss Pogany*. It is housed in the Dinu Mihail Palace, built between 1900 and 1907 by the wealthy Romanian nobleman Constantin Dinu Mihail, and home to former Polish president Ignacy Moscicki in 1939 and later to Ceaușescu. The room of mirrors is worth the trip to Craiova alone.

#### HISTORIC CENTRE

Overlooking Calea Unirii, in the central square, is a **statue of Mihai Viteazul** who was born in Craiova. To its eastern side is the **pre-fecture**, bearing a memorial plaque to Craiova's victims of the 1989 revolution.

The **Natural History Museum** (☎ 419 435; Str Popa Șapcă 4; admission €0.80; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), closed for renovations at the time of writing, has a tiny display of natural oddities. In the park opposite is the red-brick **Holy Trinity Church** (Biserica Sfânta Treime). Behind the church is the city's **Opera & Operetta Theatre** (p112), a former school that was a revolutionary hide-out during June 1848.

Craiova's old town lies west of Calea Unirii around Piața Veche (Old Square). An excellent **Ethnographic Museum** (Muzeul Olteniei Secția de Etnografie; admission €0.90; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), in a former governor's house dating from 1699,



stands on Str Hala at the end of Str Dimitru. Displayed inside **St Hramul's Church** (1928) is the Madonna Dudu icon said to perform miracles for those who pray in front of it. Opposite the church is the **History & Archaeology Museum** (Muzeul Olteniei Secția de Istorie și Arheologie; Str Madona Dudu 14; adult/student €0.90/0.50), which was closed for renovations at the time of writing.

### Sleeping

Mapamond arranges rooms for €10 to €15 a night in private homes in surrounding villages.

**Hotel Jiul** (☎ 414 166; www.jiul.ro; Calea București 1-2; s/d 2-star €27/36, 3-star €45/60; 🍷) This is larger than Hotel Parc and popular with business travellers.

**Hotel Parc** (☎ 417 257; Str Bibescu 16; s/d €41/54) Here you'll find pleasant rooms set in lavish, abundant gardens.

### Eating

Craiova's culinary options are limited to what you might like to wash down with a beer – and not the first beer. Try these or retreat to your hotel restaurant for sustenance.

**El Greco** (☎ 411 123; Str Alexandru Ioan Cuza 9; mains €3-5; 🍷 9am-1am) Proper pizza, spaghetti dishes, salads and Greek specialities are served with creamy milkshakes.

**Amandina Pizzeria** (Str Popa Șapcă; mains €3; 🍷 7.30am-11pm) This is a straight pizza joint with pastries and a full bar.

### Drinking

**Terasa Universitatii** (Str Alexandru Ioan Cuza) Opposite the university, this bar is packed night and day with students and is a noisy and fun hang-out.

**New York Café** (☎ 419 198; Calea Unirii) Sink back in one of the many comfortable black lounges here and enjoy your favourite drink.

**Niva** (Calea Unirii; 🍷 9am-2am) This is a chilled cellar bar with pool, a short menu and several corners for idle coffee-slurping and smoking.

### Entertainment

Highly recommended are performances at the impressive **National Theatre** (Teatrul Național; Calea București) and the **Opera & Operetta Theatre** (Teatrul de Operă și Operetă; Str Ion Marinescu 12). Tickets for both are sold at the **Agencia Teatrală** (☎ 413 755;

🍷 10am-12.30pm & 4-6.30pm), adjoining the main National Theatre building.

Classical concerts are performed by the **Oltenia Philharmonic** (Filarmonica Oltenia; Calea Unirii). The **ticket office** (☎ 411 284; 🍷 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) is inside the main Philharmonic building.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

**Craiova Airport** (☎ 411 112; E70, Craiova-București)  
**Tarom Airlines office** (☎ 411 049; Complex Unirea, Piața Unirii, )

#### BUS

The **northern bus station** (Autogară Nord; ☎ 411 187; Str Argeș 13), next to the train station, is where the main daily services depart. Maxitaxis leave from here to Bucharest (€7, every 30 minutes), Pitești (€3, two daily) and Calafat (€3, two daily). State buses run scant services to Râmnicu Vâlcea and Târgu Jiu.

**Oz Murat travel agency** (☎ 414 434), outside the northern bus station, runs a bus to Istanbul via Bucharest, departing at 10.30am daily except Saturday (€90 return).

The **southern bus station** (Autogară Sud; ☎ 428 065; Str N Romanescu), 5km south of town, runs rural routes around Craiova.

#### TRAIN

Book tickets at the **Agencia de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 411 634; Complex Unirea; 🍷 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri).

All fast trains between Bucharest and Timișoara stop at Craiova's **train station** (B-dul Carol I/B-dul Republicii). Services include trains to Bucharest (€12, three hours, 12 daily), Timișoara (€13, five hours, seven daily), Calafat (2½ hours, five daily), Budapest (€35, two daily) and Belgrade (€30, one daily).

### CALAFAT

#### ☎ 251

The small town of Calafat, on the Danube opposite Vidin in Bulgaria, makes a convenient entry/exit point to/from Bulgaria. Car ferries cross the river and there are frequent local trains between here and Craiova, from where you can catch a fast train on to Bucharest or Timișoara.

For cashing cheques and money withdrawals, there's a **Banca Comercială Română** (Str 1 Decembrie 3).

If you have some spare time, visit the unlabelled, but hard to miss, **Art Museum** (Muzeul de Artă; Str 22 Decembrie) and the **monument** to the

1877–78 War of Independence against the Turks.

The ferry landing is situated in the centre of Calafat, about four blocks from the train station.

There are local trains to/from Craiova (2½ hours, five daily). If you're continuing on to Bucharest or elsewhere, buy a ticket for your final destination and, as soon as you reach Craiova, go into the train station and purchase a compulsory seat reservation for your onward express train.

The car ferry to Bulgaria crosses the Danube here (€20 plus an additional €3 per person, cash only, 30 minutes) at least six times daily, and up to once per hour depending on traffic. Cars can spend several hours waiting to cross but pedestrians can avoid the queues and walk on in both directions.

In March 2000, after almost a decade of negotiations, the Romanian and Bulgarian governments agreed on the construction of a new bridge here over the Danube River (although Romania wanted the bridge to be built further east). The €155-million bridge, funded by the Bulgarian government and the European Union, will connect Calafat with the Bulgarian city of Vidin and was reported to be at least two years from completion at the time of writing.

### GIURGIU

#### ☎ 246

A typical dusty border town, Giurgiu is the main route from Bucharest to Bulgaria. Ferry services across the river have ceased in favour of the quick and easy bridge.

Giurgiu's train and bus stations are five minutes' walk from the centre. When you leave the station walk up Str Gării to the main street. Giurgiu's northern train station (Giurgiu Nord) is 5km out of town; local trains run between the two. Most trains heading for Bulgaria depart from the northern station.

The post office and central market are on Str Constantin Brâncoveanu. Turn right at the bridge crossing, then right onto Str Constantin Brâncoveanu. To get to the centre from here, turn left onto the main street.

### Getting There & Away

If self-driving, take the main E70 highway from Bucharest to Giurgiu. This leads directly to the bridge crossing, signposted 'Punctul de frontieră Giurgiu'. To bypass the lengthy

queue of waiting lorries (semis), drive up the left side of the median to the administrative building in the centre of the road as you approach the customs control zone where toll tickets are sold. It's €6 per car and €2 per motorbike or bicycle. A compulsory €10 ecological tax is levied by the Bulgarian authorities. You are not permitted to cross at Giurgiu without transport.

Most Giurgiu–Ruse trains (4km, every 15 minutes) depart from the northern train station. The daily *Bosfor* train to Istanbul from Bucharest passes through the northern train station at 3.32pm, and leaves in the other direction on its way to Bucharest at 3.30pm. The daily *Bulgaria Expres* from Bucharest stops at Giurgiu at 9.33pm, and leaves on its way to Bucharest at 4.50am. The daily *Transbałkan* train from Bucharest stops at the northern train station at 1.35pm, and leaves for Bucharest at 5.56pm.

### CĂLĂRAȘI, OSTROV & AROUND

Industrial Călărași offers yet another exit point. A ferry goes across the Danube to Ostrov (still in Romania) from where you can cross the border to Silistra in Bulgaria.

Travellers are allowed to cross here on foot. The border is 8km south of Călărași, and is served by a maxitaxi (€0.50).

The ferry takes cars (€6), motorbikes (€1.50) and foot passengers (€0.30); tickets are sold at the small green hut. The journey takes 30 minutes and the ferry generally operates between 6am and 7pm daily, but sometimes goes 24 hours, departing when full. In summer services can be disrupted if the level of the Danube is low. Restaurant Monica and a sorry looking camp site (open in summer only) are just west of the port. There is a maxitaxi service from the port to the centre of town. Negotiate with the driver for onward transport to the train/bus station.

Once in Ostrov you can continue east to the Black Sea coast, or cross the border into Silistra. As you come off the ferry a one-way street leads you directly to the customs control point. Continuing past the border control, the eastbound road to Dobrogea follows the Romanian–Bulgarian border for a further 200m.

Ostrov village proper is 5km east of the ferry terminal and border crossing. From here, the eastbound road follows the twists and turns of the magnificent Danube River, making it one of the most scenic drives in Romania. This majestic riverside stretch peaks at the **Derveni Monastery** (Mănăstirea Derveni), which overlooks Lake Bugeaculi, south of the Danube. The road continues east into northern Dobrogea.

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