

A Journey Into Nature



Welcome to the Carpathian Garden!



Romania is a land of natural beauty, where all types of landscapes are to be found, from mountain peaks, home to chamois and reaching 2,000m, where you can walk among alpine vegetation, to plains, coastline and the Danube Delta, the world's third most bio-diverse delta. In Romania's many national parks, nature parks and reservations, you can see so many specimens protected by the law at European and international level you might be in a botanical museum.

Romanians are famous for their hospitality in the welcome they extend to their guests. You'll be delighted both by the welcome you receive from your hosts and the traditional food, not to mention the wide range of sporting activities you can choose from. Come and discover Romania's most beautiful sights!



GENERAL INFORMATION


Geography: Romania is located in south-eastern Europe (2,900 km east of the Atlantic Ocean, and 900 km from the Mediterranean), where the 45° north latitude parallel meets the 25° east longitude meridian.

Accessibility: **By road** - European entrance/exit points into/from Romania: Borș, Nădlac, Petea, Turnu, Vărășand, Cenad (Hungary), Halmeu, Siret (Ukraine), Albița, Sculeni, Galați (Republic of Moldova), Negru Vodă, Giurgiu, Vama Veche (Bulgaria), Porțile de Fier I, Moravița (Serbia); **By plane** - main airports: Bucharest (Henri Coandă, Băneasa), Constanța (Mihail Kogălniceanu), Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Târgu Mureș, Suceava, Sibiu, Tulcea, Bacău, Iași, Oradea, Arad; **By sea** - harbours: Constanța and Mangalia.

Surface area: 238,391 km²

Population: 21.5 mil. inhabitants (2008)

Religion: Orthodox (87%)

State flag: 

Official language: Romanian. Many Romanians also speak English, French or German
Capital: Bucharest, 1,944,000 inhabitants (2008)

Other principal cities: Constanța, Timișoara, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Brașov, Galați, Craiova, Ploiești, Brăila

Form of government: republic

Legal holidays: January 1st and 2nd; the first and second days of Easter; May 1st; the first and second days of Pentecost; Dormition of the Theotokos feast day; December 1st; the first and the second day of Christmas; two days for each of the three annual religious holidays, as designated by religions other than Christianity, for their devotees

Emergency services' telephone number: 112

Climate: varies between temperate and continental. During summer, the average temperature falls between 22°C and 24°C, but can reach 38°C. During winter, the average temperature falls to around -3°C, and can reach -30°C.

Romanian time zone: GMT + three hours during summer (from the last Sunday of March until the last Sunday of October), GMT + two hours for the rest of the year

Units of measurement: metric system (1 km = 0.62 miles)

National currency: LEU (1 leu = 100 bani)

Bank cards: large hotels, restaurants and shops accept credit cards including American Express, Master Card, Visa, Diners Club



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National Parks

Whether you wish to explore unique ecosystems, get a workout, relax, or do a little of everything, you'll find yourself accommodated by Romania's 13 national parks: Semenic - Caraş Gorges, Nera Gorges - Beuşniţa, Domogled - Cerna Valley, Retezat, Călimani, Bicz Gorges - Hăşmaşului, Ceahlău, Rodna Mountains, Piatra Craiului, Cozia, Buila-Vânturariţa, Jiul Gorge and Măcin Mountains.

Semenic - Cheile Caraşului National Park



Mountain river bordered by beech forest.

Within this park lies the widest virgin beech wood forest in Europe (close to 50 km²), with over 350-year-old beech woods, mountain elms measuring nearly two meters across, hornbeams, sycamore, ashes, birches, durmasts, junipers and bilberries. The park contains Romania's largest compact karst structure, and stunning mountain landscapes are set off by beautiful naturally dammed lakes - Secu, Văliug, Trei Ape. Visitors seek out both water sports and relaxation here. Botanical and zoological diversity are both very rich, with the park home to 1,200 species of plants and 691 species of animals which are strictly protected. The rivers have cut impressive channels through the rock, and underground flows have created 125 hollows and 566 caves. At 1446m, Semenic Mountain is the highest peak in the country's South-West, and has ski resorts. You can find accommodation in any of the boarding houses at the park's entrance or in designated camping areas.

Recommended tourist routes:

Route 3 Comarnic Cave - Baia Vulturilor

Grade: red cross

Duration: 3 hours 30 minutes

Route 6 Iabalcei Cross - Prolaz

Grade: red triangle

Duration: 45 minutes

Location: south-west Romania, Caraş Severin county

Area: 362 km²

Access:

By car - through Prislop (DJ582E), Crivaia (DJ 582 D), Anina/Oraşul Nou (DJ 582 C), Reşiţa/Minda (DJ 582 C), Padina Seacă (DC 92), Curiaciţa (DN 58), Celnic (DN 58), Anina/Maial (DP 9), Botu Calului (DP 5)

By train - to Reşiţa or Anina

Local accommodation: guest houses, mountain huts, 2 to 3-star villas

Contact: National Park Authority Semenic Caraş Keys

www.pnsc.ro





Recommended tourist routes:

Ochiul Beului Lake - Beușnița

Grade: blue triangle **Duration:** 1 hour

Sasca Montană - Șușara Waterfall - Nera Keys

Grade: blue cross **Duration:** 3 to 4 hours

Nera Keys - Poiana Meliugului - Tișului Spring

Grade: blue circle **Duration:** 2 hours

Location: south-west Romania, Caraș Severin County

Area: 377 km²

Access:

By car - Caransebeș (E 94), DN 58 Caransebeș - Reșița - Anina, DN 58B Timișoara - Reșița;

By train - to Reșița, Anina or Oravița

Local accommodation: forest range huts, camping areas, 2 to 3-star guest houses

Contact: Nera Keys - Beușnița National Park Authority

www.cheileneriei-beusnița.ro

Cheile Nerei - Beușnița National Park

The area's spectacular landscapes will delight you even before you enter the park. On the marked hiking trails or cycle-friendly access roads, accompanied by authorised tour guides or on your own, you will be able to admire Turkish hazelnut trees and the superb pinks of Banat iris or peony. You may see some of the local fauna - white eagle, large martin, red-breasted swallow or cirl bunting. But we recommend you stay on the paths, because it's also possible to see a bear, a lynx, or a horned viper. The local stone is mainly calcarous, so water has been able to sculpt many caves - Dubova, Gaura Porcarului, Sfânta Elena, Ochiul Beului, Lacul Dracului (Devil's Lake) - and rock formations including Nerei, Minișului and Șușarei. Popular visitor destinations include Bișăr, Beușnița and Șușara waterfalls and the cultural and historic sites Călugăra Monastery and Socola Fortress. During spring and in early summer you can raft on Nera River and try canyoning in the gorges.



The non-venomous grass snake.

Domogled National Park

Domogled's natural diversity has something to please every eye - its limestone landscapes feature gorges, soaring ridges, canyons, mountain hamlets, sub-alpine meadows, and thermal caves that are unique in Europe. Here you will find rare plants protected by law, including sângele-voinicului orchids (*nigritella nigra*), globe flowers (*bulbucul-de-munte/trollius europaeus*), snow roses (*smârdarul/rhododendron kotschii*), irises (*iris graminea*) and saffron crocuses (*crocus moesiacus*). Many unique animal species, especially insects, thrive. The park's thermal caves create a tropical microclimate (35-45°C), their steam heating streams to 52°C. Filtering through the bedrock, these waters have sunk through fissures as low as 1,200m, emerging hot and mineralised, making them an elixir harnessed in famous spa resorts ever since Roman times.

Location: south-west Romania in Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți and Gorj Counties
Area: 612 km²

Access: **By car** - DN 6 Bucharest - Timișoara near Băile Herculane resort, DN 67 D Băile Herculane - Târgu Jiu near Godeanu area, and county road Padeș - Valea Mare near Padeș locality- Gorj

By train - to Băile Herculane

Local accommodation: 2 to 4-star motel

Contact: National Park Authority Domogled Cerna Valley

www.domogled-cerna.ro

Retezat National Park

Glacial reliefs formed during the Quaternary period and its geological composition makes the Retezat Massif a distinctive and wild landscape. Its many peaks exceeding 2,000m, countless glacial cirques and lakes together form an unmistakable geography, enhanced by different levels of vegetation.

Above 2,000m large glacial cirques and moraines testify to

the former existence of large masses of ice. Bucura Lake is the largest of the 82 Carpathian glacial lakes, and here too are Romania's three deepest glacial lakes (more than 20 metres) - Zănoaga, Tăul Negru, Galeşul. The area between Gemele Lakes - Tăul Negru - Valea Dobrun has been declared a scientific reservation and public access is forbidden.

In Retezat, 90 types of plant specific only to the Carpathians are found, as well as a remarkably dense population of zâmbriu (swiss pine/pinus cembra). Sub-alpine vegetation is dominated by scrub trees. The fauna is also extremely diverse, comprising deer, chamois, wild boar, marmots, wildcats, bears, wood and hazel grouses, and others. Venomous horned vipers prefer the chalky areas, while fast-water fish such as trout swim in the local lakes and rivers.



Themed tourist routes with puzzles and riddles, created by the Park Administration:

1. Chamois and their neighbours: Pietrele (the Stones) - Stânişoara Valley - Ciurila Saddle - Lolaia Ridge - Pietrele

2. Nature, people and history:

a) Visiting centre Nucşoara - Cârtoş - Mălăieşti Fortress - Nucşoara

b) Sălaşu-de-Sus - Paroş - Peştera village - Lotrilor Cave (Gura Cetăţii)

3. Spre Cetatea Colţ interpretative route: Nucşoara viaduct - Cetatea Colţ and back

Bucura Lake, Retezat Massif.





Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*)

The chamois is Romania's oldest mammal inhabitant, resident since the Quaternary Ice Age. Its rust-red fur has a black stripe along the back, which has earned it the nickname 'black goat'.

Location: south-west Romania, Hunedoara County
Area: 381 km²

Access:

By car - through Hațeg 9 - Gura Zlatei (E79-DN68), Gura Apei (DN68), Râșor (DJ), Cârnic (E79 - DJ), Stâna din Râu and Baleia (E79 - DJ - DF), Buta (DN66A), Câmpușel (DF)

By train - to Subcetate, Ohaba-de-sub-Piatră, Pui, or Lupeni

Local accommodation: 2 to 3-daisy agritourism guest houses, 3 and 4-star villas, 1 and 3-star cottages

Visitor activities: wintersports, hiking, ecotourism, scientific and cultural, business and conference visits, adventure sports (caving, mountaineering, mountain biking), agritourism

Contact: National Park Authority Reteza
www.retezat.ro





Piatra Craiului National Park

Thirty-five kilometres from Braşov in the Southern Carpathians' range, Piatra Craiului Mountain is a spectacular, 25km-long limestone ridge whose peaks exceeding 2000m, and a true paradise for rock climbers.

Hikers can choose from numerous trails of varying difficulty, from simple mountain footpaths to trails canto challenging to be climbed outside summer. Many remote spots have help huts - often an appreciated refuge from the mountain's fast-changing weather.

Less demanding options include walks through the forests which hug the mountain's feet, where seeing a bear or stag is not unusual. Some 1170 species of plant have been identified within the park's boundaries, some rare enough to appear on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List. Most spectacular is the vivid pink Piatra Craiului (*Dianthus callizonus*), which has become the mountain's symbol, and cannot be found anywhere else in the world.



Brown bears, up to 2.5m long and 1.5m tall at the shoulder and weighing as much as 600kg share this environment.

Location: central Romania, Braşov and Argeş Counties; **Area:** 147 km²
Access: **By car** Braşov - Râşnov (DN 73) - Zărneşti (DN 73A), Bucharest - Predeal (DN 1) - Pârâul Rece - Râşnov - Zărneşti (DN 73A); **By train** to Zărneşti
Contact: National Park Authority of Piatra Craiului
www.pcr.ai.ro



Călimani National Park

The Călimani are extinct volcanic mountains among whose crater is the largest in Romania at 10km in diameter. Up to 2,000m, on Pietrosu, Retitis and Călimani Izvor Peaks you will find rich vegetation. Among areas protected for their geographic importance are the Twelve Apostles geological reserve and the lezerul Calimanului reservation - a naturally dammed lake surrounded by junipers, mountain pines and snow roses (rhododendron kotschy). Another highlight for visitors is the 8m-high Tihu waterfall on the Pârâul Umed rivulet. In Călimani you can enjoy cycling, horse riding, climbing, visiting tourist sheep farms cross-country skiing and winter sports on two ski slopes.



Geological reserve the Twelve Apostles.

Recommended tourist routes:

Poiana Negrii Village - the Twelve Apostles - Gura Haitii village - Calimanul Cerbului Peak - Coverca village

Grade: blue dot

Duration: 8 to 9 hours

Dornișoara village - Izvoarele Dornei

Grade: yellow dot

Duration: 4 hours

Location: north-east Romania, Suceava, Mureș, Bistrița and Harghita Counties

Area: 240.41 km²

Access:

By car - through Suceava - Vatra Dornei (DN 17), Tulgheș - Toplița - Răstolița (DN 15)

By train - to Vatra Dornei or Răstolița

Contact: Călimani National Park Authority
www.Calimani.ro

Local accommodation: motels, 2 and 3-star guest houses, 3-star cottages





Cheile Bicazului – Hășmaș National Park

Cheile Bicazului – Hășmaș National Park has the largest naturally dammed mountain lake in Romania, and the first example to be recorded – Lacul Roșu (Red Lake), also a nature reserve. The surroundings' various geological, geomorphic and climatic features, as well as the large altitude difference (from 575m in Bicz up to 1792m at Hășmașul Mare Peak) have promoted rich flora. The park's animal life too is diverse, and includes numerous endangered species.

Accommodation is available in cottages, special camping areas and in many guest houses at the base of the park. And thanks to the Forest Authority a broad range of tourist activities are on offer – horse riding, photo tourism, guided hiking, visiting specialised local communities, wildlife-watching and skiing.

Location: central-north-east Romania, Harghita and Neamț Counties; **Area:** 65 km²

Access: By car – through Bălan (DN 12), Bicz (DN 12C)

By train – to Bicz

Local accommodation: 1, 2 and 3-star guest houses, 3-star camping, 1-star cottage, 2 and 3-daisy agritourism guest houses

Contact: Cheile Bicazului – Hășmaș National Park Authority
www.cheiebicazului-hasmaș.ro



Lacul Roșu

Romania's largest naturally dammed mountain lake, Lacul Roșu (Red Lake) formed in 1837 at the foot of Hășmașul Mare Mountain when heavy rains caused rockslides on Ghilcoș Mountain, blocking the Licaș, Oii and Red Creeks. With a 11 km² area and a maximum depth of 10m, the lake sits at an altitude of 980m. Its name derives from the reddish alluvia deposited by Red Creek, which runs rich in iron oxides and iron hydroxides, as well as from the reflection of Suhardului Mic Peak on the its surface. Located in Cheile Bicazului National Park, Lacul Roșu is one of the country's most complex nature reserves.

Recommended tourist routes:

Centre of Lacul Roșu resort (967 m) - Balconul de Piatră (1007m) - Márton Ferenc Road - trout hatchery (993m) - boat house (983m) - centre of Lacul Roșu resort (967m)

Grade: red cross; **Duration:** 1 hour

Centre of Lacul Roșu resort (967m) - Cheile Bicazului - Cheile Bicazului Mic - Surducului Road - Piatra Roșie Saddle (1011m) - Lacul Roșu (967m)

Grade: yellow strip; **Duration:** 3 to 4 hours

Centre of Lacul Roșu resort (967m) - Piatra Roșie Saddle (1011m) - Vărarilor Road - Tifra Saddle (1002m) - Cheile Bicazului (850 m)

Grade: yellow triangle; **Duration:** 1 hour

Local accommodation: 3-star hotel, 2-star guest houses, 2-star cottage, 1-star tourist rest area

Ceahlău National Park

Ceahlău Mountain is the most important massif in the central Oriental Carpathians. Ascents begin from Izvorul Muntelui Cottage on the mountain's east side, from Durau resort or Ceahlău commune to the north-west or from the south at Bicazul Ardelean. On Ceahlău's west side, routes from Martin's and Bistrei Valleys offer a choice of many tourist trails. Other attractions include the natural monuments Polița cu Crini Natural Botany Reserve, Ocolașul Mare Natural Scientific Reserve, Duruitoarea Waterfall and Avenul Mare.



Duruitoarea Waterfall.



Recommended tourist routes:

Izvorul Muntelui Cottage - Curmătura Lutu Roșu - Dochia Cottage

Grade: blue strip; **Duration:** 3 hours

Stațiunea Durău - Poiana Viezuri - Duruitoarea Waterfall - Poiana Săiușului - Dochia Cottage

Grade: red cross; **Duration:** 4 hours

Location: north-east Romania; **Area:** 77,42 km²

Access:

By car - Toplița - Borsec - Tulgheș (DN 15), Bistrița - Vatra Dornei - Broșteni - Poiana Teiului (DN 17B), Gheorghieni - Lacul Roșu - Bicaș (DN 15D), Roman - Piatra Neamț - Bicaș (DN 15D), Târgu Neamț - Poiana Largului (DN 15B)

By train - to Bicaș, Gheorghieni and Toplița

Contact: National Park Authority Ceahlău

www.ceahlaupark.ro



Rodnei Mountains National Park

UNESCO designated this national park a biosphere reservation for its abundance of both glacial and cryonival features - lakes, valleys and glacial cirques - and its profusion of flora and fauna species. Here Izvorul Cailor, Romania's highest waterfall cascades in steps for 90m. The mountains bear excellently preserved hallmarks of the Quaternary Ice Age, their landscapes fine examples of glacial shaping and lakes, caves with galleries and spectacular waterfalls.

Rodnei Mountains National Park sits at the confluence of two areas of climatic influence - Baltic and Oceanic. This location, combined with an altitude difference of more than 1,600m - the highest peak, Pietrosu Mare, scales 2,303m - has nurtured extremely rich flora and fauna. Leisure activities available here include cultural tourism, spa therapies, horse riding and agritourism.

Recommended tourist routes:

Between the Anieșe - Anieșului Mic Valley - Între Izvoare Saddle.

Grade: yellow cross; **Duration:** 3 hours

Vinului Valley - Roșu Spring - Cisia Peak - Târnița lui Putredu

Grade: blue triangle; **Duration:** 5 to 6 hours

Boșsa touris complex - Buza Muntelui Saddle - Puzdrele - Paltinului Saddle

Grade: blue dot; **Duration:** 4 to 5 hours

Location: north Romania, Maramureș and Bistrița-Năsăud Counties

Area: 472 km²

Access:

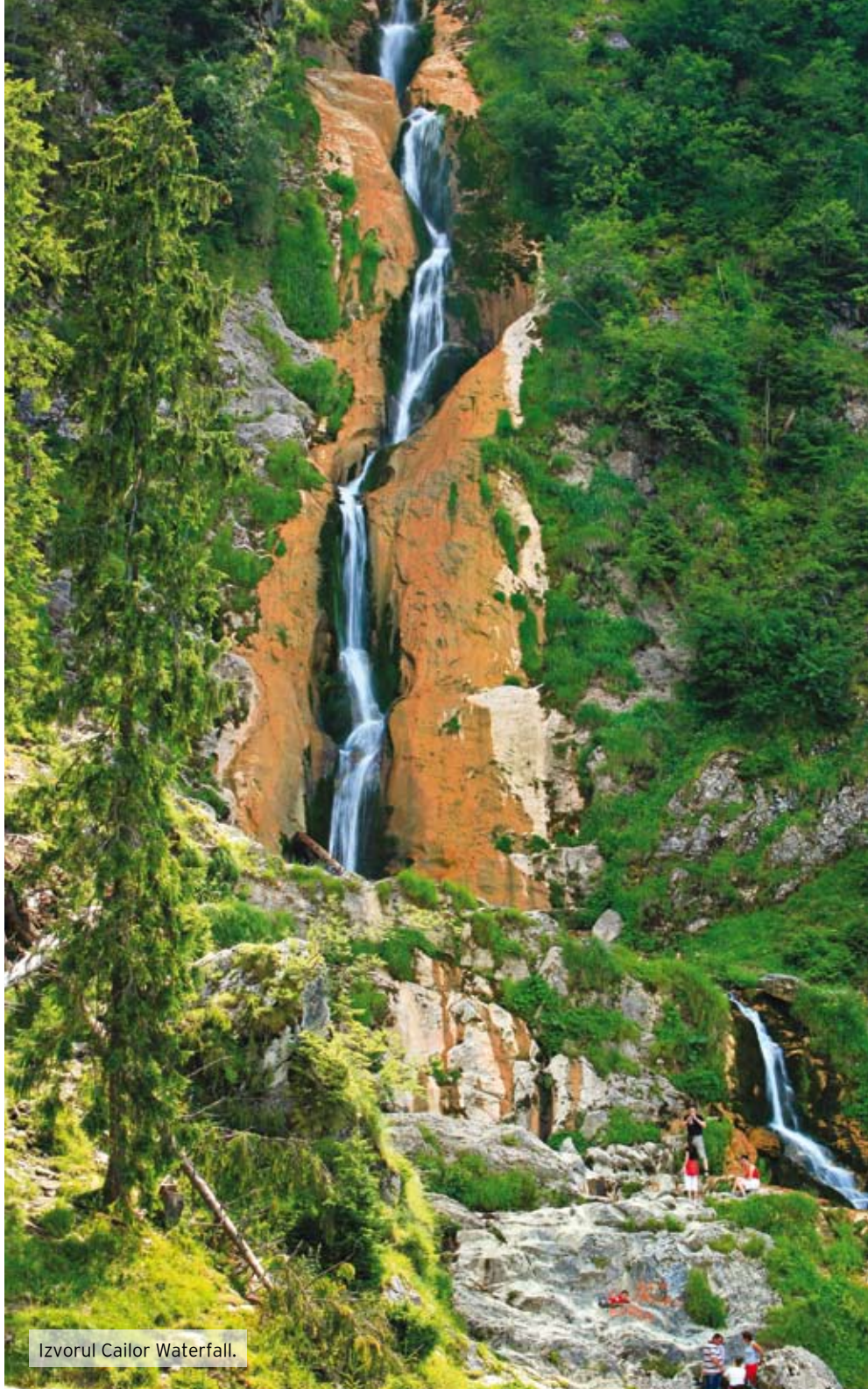
By car - through Cârlibaba, Borsa, (DN 18)

By train - to Telciu, Romuli, Rebrîșoara Sângeorz Băi, Cormaia, Anieș or Rodna

Local accommodation: 2 and 3-star guest houses, agritourism boarding houses rated with three stars, hotels rated with three stars, cottages rated with two stars.

Contact: Rodnei Mountains National Park

www.parcrodna.ro



Shepherding, a traditional Romanian occupation.





Nature Parks

Rich in spectacular landscapes and biological diversity, Romania's 14 nature parks are Bucegi, Apuseni Mountains, Portile de Fier ('Iron Gates'), Comana, Defileul Mureşului Superior ('Upper Mureş Gorge'), Balta Mică a Brăilei ('Small Moor of Brăila'), Lunca Mureşului Inferior ('Lower Mureş Meadow'), Lunca Joasă a Prutului Inferior ('Lower Meadow of Lower Prut'), Grădiştea Muncelului - Cioclovina, Maramureşului Mountains, Vânători-Neamţ, Putna - Vrancea, Geoparcul Dinozaurilor Țara Haţegului and Geoparcul Platoul Mehedinţi. Here are some of their highlights.

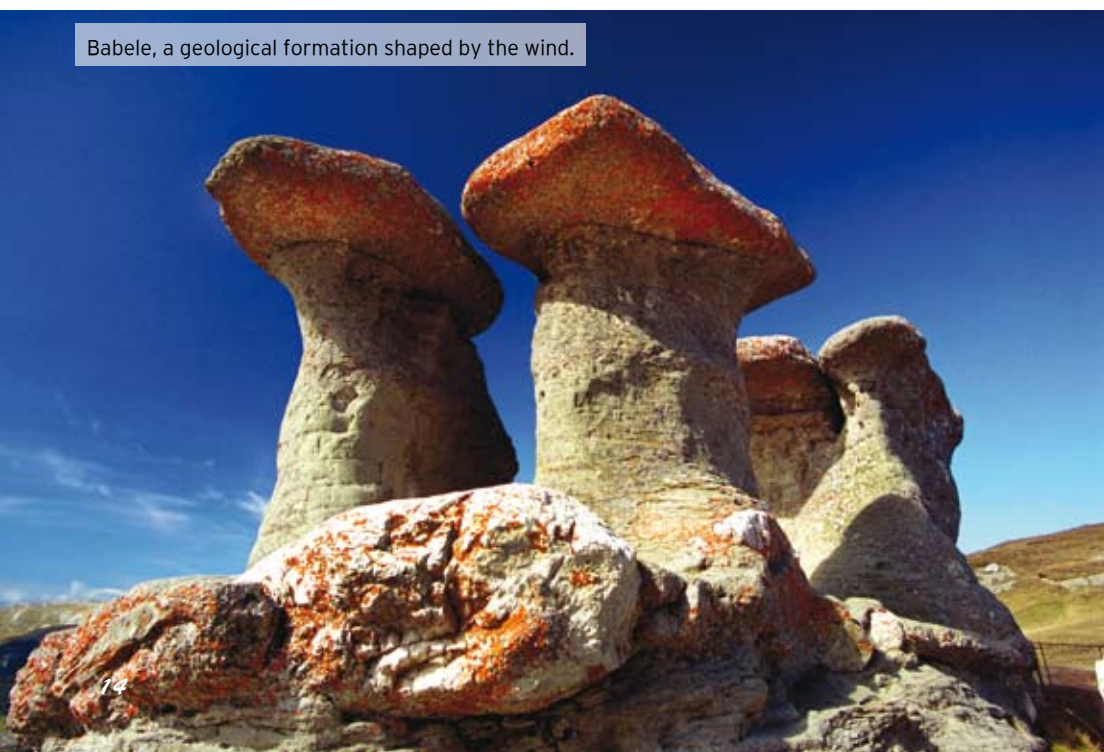
Bucegi Nature Park

The complex character of Bucegi Nature Park supports many forms of recreation - hiking on marked trails with an authorised tour guide, mountain climbing - on approximately 280 routes, speleology, photography, filming, winter sports, and mountain biking on the park's public roads. Peak Omu at 2,505m is the Bucegi Mountains' highest peak, its symbol the rock formation Sfinx and Babele, a monument to the power of the wind. The park's diverse landscapes, sculpted from calcareous conglomerates, its geological structure and its 2,000m-plus altitude

have promoted rich and diverse flora - over 3,500 known species of plants, most of them protected by law. Fauna here too is much diversified, with around 3,000 known species of animals. Emblematic of the area are the Western Capercaillie, the chamois, the brown bear, and the lynx.

The Western Capercaillie is a protected species. Its length from beak to tail is between 90 and 112cm, depending on its environment and diet. Body weight for a male is 4.5 to 6.5kg, for a female 1.8 to 3kg.

Babele, a geological formation shaped by the wind.





Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*).



Mountain ridge trail.

Recommended tourist routes:

Route 5 Bușteni (885m) - Urlătoarea Waterfall (1100m)

Grade: red dot; **Duration:** 1 hour

Route 7 Bușteni (885m), Jepilor Valley - Caraiman Cottage (2025m) - Babele Cottage (2200m) - Peștera Hotel (1610m) - Padina Cottage (1525m) - Bolboci Cottage (1460m) - Zănoaga Cottage (1400m) - Scropoasa Cottage (1205m) - Dobrești (1000m) - Căprioara - Pucheni Camp (800m)

Grade: blue cross; **Duration:** 11 to 12 hours

Route 10 Bușteni (885m) - Gura Diham Cottage (987m) - Poiana Izvoarelor Cottage (1455m) - La Prepeleac (1750m) - Omu Cottage (2505m) - Bătrâna Mountain (2181m) - Saddle Strunga (1909m)

Grade: red strip; **Duration:** 8 to 10 hours

Information points: Scropoasa canton, Park Authority headquarters, Saddle Strunga visitor refuge

Location: central Romania, Brașov, Prahova, Dâmbovița Counties

Area: 326,63 km²

Access:

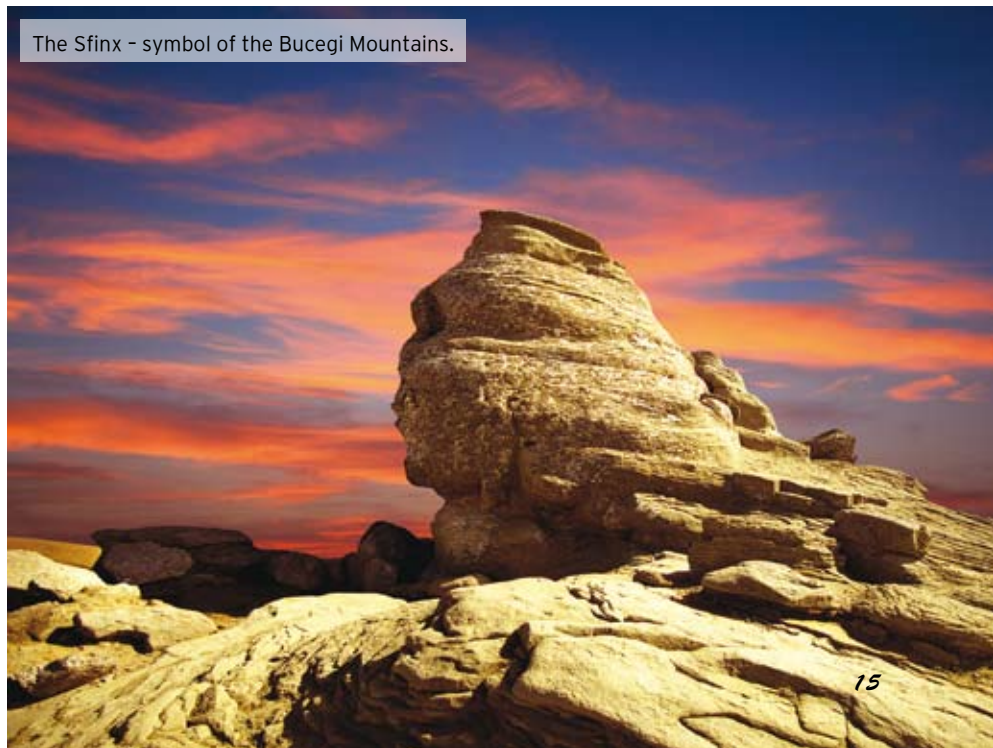
By car - from upper Prahovei Valley (DN 1), Târgoviște - Sinaia (DN 71) - Moroieni - Barajul Bolboci

By train - to Sinaia, Bușteni, Predeal or Brașov

Local accommodation: 2 and 3-star cottages, 2-star guest houses

Contact: Bucegi Nature Park Administration

www.bucegipark.ro



The Sphinx - symbol of the Bucegi Mountains.

Apuseni Mountains Nature Park



Apuseni Mountains Nature Park was among 22 destinations to be designated a European Destination of Excellence in 2009 as part of the European Destinations of Excellence project's Tourism and Protected Habitats program. Launched by the European Commission, the project was implemented by the national tourism authorities of every participating territory. The most spectacular sights in the Apuseni Mountains, from both natural and cultural points of view, are found in this park. Its character is defined by its karst landscape, with sinkholes, deep valleys and gentle ridges alternating with rocky areas with canyons and gorges, above a network of more than 3,500 underground caves. The park's characteristics distinguish it with Romania's highest and largest cave portals - Cetățile Ponorului ('Fortress of Ponor') at 76m and Coiba Mare Portal, 54 to 45m in width - the deepest hollow (Hollow V5 in Vărășoia, 642m deep), the deepest siphon (Izbucul Tăuz, 85m deep), only polje (Poiana Ponor) and the valley with highest ratio of caves to area (Sighiștelului Valley has more than 200 caves in around 10 km²).

For visitors, attractions include the karst features and spectacular natural landscapes such as Padiș karst plateau, the Cetățile Ponorului Karstic Complex, Lumea Pierdută Karst

Plateau, Urșilor Cave at Chișcău, Sighiștelului Valley, Ruginoasa Pit, Galbenei Gorge, Glacier Scărișoara, Coiba Mare Cave, Coiba Mica Cave, Șura Boghii Cave, Ordâncușii Valley, Someșul Cald Keys, Răchitele Waterfall, Fântanele Lake and Cârligate peak. Among the area's cultural highlights are Arieșului Valley and the hamlets of Moților Country. One of these, the highest permanent settlements in the Carpathians, Casa-de-Piatră is the most remote and picturesque hamlet in all the Apuseni Mountains.

The new administrative headquarters of Apuseni Mountains Nature Park in Sudrigiu, Bihor County has a visiting and information centre, and three further tourist information and visiting centres can be found in the Padiș Plateau (Padiș Plane area), in the villages of Gârda de Sus and Doda Pili.

Many visitor activities are possible here - summer and winter hiking, cross-country skiing on designated trails, downhill skiing on the slope on Vârtop, Arieșeni, rock-climbing on special routes, cycling, visiting the caves, rafting and white-water kayaking, visiting cultural and heritage attractions, photography, nature watching (the flora, the fauna, underground photography), horse riding and, in winter, dog sledding.





Recommended tourist routes:

Stâna de Vale (1,080m) - Bohodei Saddle - Fântâna Rece - Cârligatele - Cumpănățelul Saddle - Piatra Arsă - Poiana Vărășoia - Vărășoia Cottage - Padiș Plane - Bălileasa Depression - Poiana Glăvoi - Poiana Căput - Bârsa Cohanului - Ponița Saddle - Vârtope Peak - Vârtope Saddle (1,160m) - Piatra Grăitoare Peak (1658m) - Tarnița Bihorului Saddle - Cucurbăta Mare Peak (1849m)

Grade: red strip; **Duration:** 12 to 13 hours

Valley Sighiștelului - Sodalul Laurului - Brusturi Hill - Urșilor Cave - Brusturi Valley - Dosuri Hill - Fața Plaiului - Poiana Măgura - Sighiștelului Valley

Grade: red dot; **Duration:** 4 to 5 hours

Location: north-west Romania, Bihor, Cluj and Alba Counties

Area: 760 km²

Access:

By car - through Oradea - Cluj-Napoca (E 60) - Huedin (E60/DN1) Oradea - Deva (E 79/DN 76) - Ștei - Lunca - Câmpeni (DN 75)

By train - to Beiuș, Ștei or Huedin

Local accommodation: 3-star villas, 3-star camping, 3-star guest houses

Contact: Nature Park Administration Apuseni Sudirigiu

www.parcapuseni.ro



Iezer Ighiel Lake.





Vânători Neamț Nature Park

Vânători Neamț Nature Park is a refuge for many rare and endangered species, including lynx, otters, brown bears and aurochs, a kind of huge wild cattle and Europe's largest animal. In 1927, less than 50 aurochs survived worldwide, and all of them were in captivity. Today, 55 aurochs live in Romania in three reservations. Dragoș Vodă Reservation from Neamț County has more pairs of them and three ponds - Zimbrilor, Cerbilor and Căpriorilor - lie nearby.

Porțile-de-Fier ('Iron Gates') Nature Park

Distinctive geological, geomorphic and biological diversity including important wet areas - habitat for some species of internationally protected birds - and traces of settlement from the Paleolithic era make Porțile-de-Fier Nature Park a veritable outdoor museum. In the Cazanele Mari area, the Danube river's narrowest gorge, 53m deep and 150m wide, forces the water through such a constricted space that it creates extremely strong currents which make the surface appear to be constantly boiling, hence the name cazane ('boilers'). For many years, this barrier of rocks rising from the Danube and the turbulent water made navigating the river, at its entrance to Romania, almost impossible.

In biodiversity terms, Porțile-de-Fier National Park is one of Romania's richest regions, harbouring many species which are of great scientific interest. Beech and Durmast forests cover 75% of Almajului and Locvei mountains, while many species unique to Romania also flourish. Beech, yew and bilberry trees are unusual at such low altitude, while some lowland varieties - wild lilac, Turkey oak and flowering ash can be found in the Danube gorge at uncharacteristically high altitudes.

Recommended tourist routes:

Dubova Gulf - Cazanele Mari ('Large Cauldrons')

Grade: yellow triangle; Duration: 2 hours

Dubova Gulf - Cazanele Mici ('Small Cauldrons')

Grade: red triangle; Duration: 1 hour

Stariște - Trescovăț

Grade: red triangle; Duration: 6 hours

Location: south-west Romania, Mehedinți and Caraș-Severin Counties

Area: 1271 km²

Access: **By car** - through Drobeta Turnu-Severin - Orșova (E70/DN6) - Moldova Nouă (DN 57), Reșița - Oravița - Naidaș - Moldova Nouă (DN 57)

By train - until the train stations Drobeta Turnu-Severin, Orșova or Reșița

Local accommodation: 3-star hotels, 2 and 3-star guest houses

Contact: Porțile-de-Fier Nature Park Administration

www.portiledefierpn.ro

Location: north-east Romania, Neamț County

Area: 308 km²

Access:

By car - on E85/DN 2 Suceava - Cristești, then on DN15 B through Târgu Neamț - Vânători Neamț;

on E85/DN2 Roman - Cristești, then on DN15 B

By train - to Piatra Neamț

Contact: Nature Park Administration Vânători Neamț

www.vanatoripark.ro



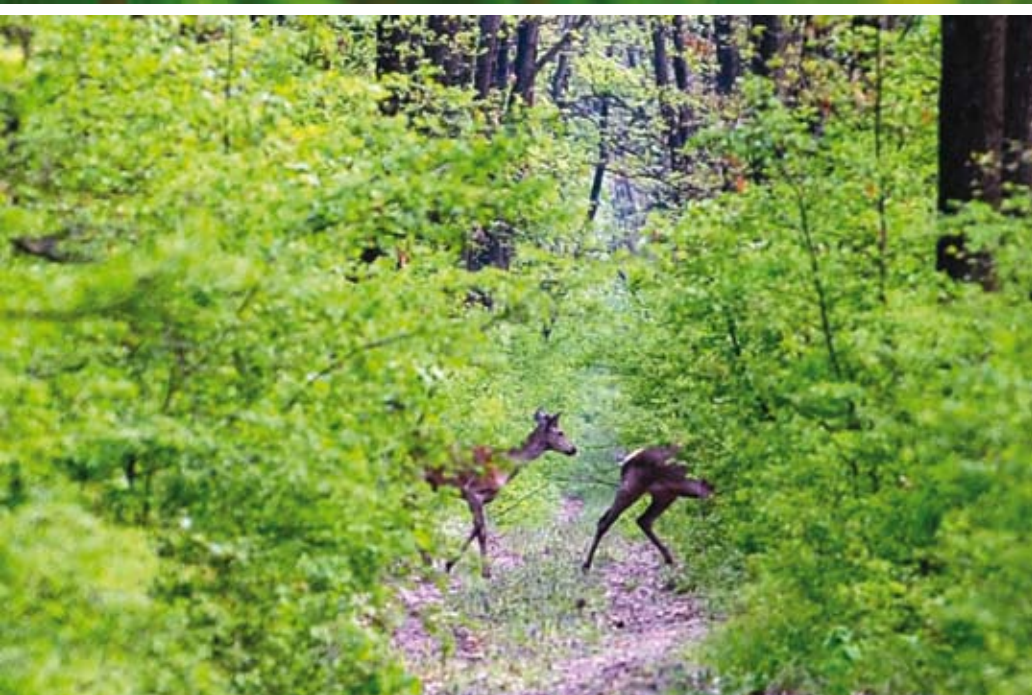


Comana Nature Park

Approximately 40km from Bucharest lays Comana Nature Park, the largest protected area in Câmpia Română. It is also known as the Delta near Bucharest, for its characteristic delta ecosystem. Visitors who want to dip a toe in the Danube Delta but stay close to the capital can take a boat through the reeds on the park's lake or walk in the adjacent forest. Although a protected area, the park is home to five villages. Residents may grow crops only in legally designated areas, and must take care where they graze their animals.

Here you can also visit two floral reserves, unique in Romania, which nurture kneeholy (*ruscus aculeatus*) and the Balkan peony (*Paeonia peregrine*), which is celebrated by local villagers every May with an event called Sărbătoarea Bujorului.

Just at the edge of the forest, near the protected areas, is Comana Monastery, built on the ruins of a monastery founded by Vlad Tepeș more than 500 years ago.



Location: south Romania, Giurgiu County
Area: 250 km²
Access: By car - towards Giurgiu, from Bucharest (E70) - Adunații Copăceni - Grădiștea commune - Comana commune
Local accommodation: camping area
Contact: Comana Nature Park Administration
www.comanaparc.ro

Făgăraşului Mountains – The Highest Peaks

Făgăraşului Mountains have the longest mountain ridge from Romania 70 km.

Here are picturesque glacial lakes, the largest of which is Bâlea Lake, the centrepiece of Bâlea Nature Reserve. Sitting at 2,040 m, the lake has a 4.65ha surface area and a depth of 11 m, and is easily accessible, close to the highest point of the Transfăgăraşan road which crosses the massif from north to south. The sunny southern ridge is reached via a highway tunnel (or, for rock-climbing enthusiasts, over the ridge. Plant life here differs from that on the north side, but also features some of the plants specific to the higher ground of the Transylvanian ridge - juniperus, juniperus communis and bilberry (vaccinum myrtillus). Hiking on the ridge trails (we recommend visitors hike accompanied by a tour guide or a local) you can see rare species of birds, including several varieties of falcon, kestrel and spotted nutcracker (Nucifraga caryocactes). During summer, it is possible to see chamois here,

especially in the remote depressions and away from frequently passed tourist routes in places such as Arpăşel, Albota, Lăiţa. Foxes, bears and wolves rarely climb higher than 2,100m, but roam the lower ground in the dense coniferous forests, as do stags, lynx, European pine martens, wild boar and roe deer from the broadleaf forests.

In Făgăraş Mountains Nature Park you can also visit Arpăşel Fauna Reservation, the limestone landscape of Turnu Roşu and the highest peaks in Romania, eight of which rise above 2,500m, with the highest, Moldoveanu peak, reaching 2,544m. The ridges of Făgăraş Mountain are narrow and make for fairly challenging hiking, but the beauty of the landscape affords unique rewards. And between Bâlea Waterfall and Bâlea Lake, you can admire the views from the cable car high above a classic glacial valley.

Recommended tourist routes:

Sâmbăta de Jos - Complex turistic Popasul Sâmbăta - Piatra Caprei - Cabană Valea Sâmbetei

Grade: red triangle; **Duration:** 2 to 3 hours

Porumbacu de Sus - Râul Mare - Pârâul Şerbotei - Cabana Negoiu

Grade: blue triangle; **Duration:** 6 to 6.5 hours

Cabana Negoiu - Drumul Zmeilor - Valea Sărăţii - Piatra Prânzului - Şaua Popasul lui Mihai - Custura Sărăţii - Negoitul Mic - Peak Negoiu (2535m, the second as height in Romania)

Grade: blue triangle; **Duration:** 3.5 to 4 hours. To be avoided in winter.

Piatra Dracului - Lacul Buteanului - Vârful Buteanu - Vf.Netedu - Şaua Netedului - Valea Văiuşii - Bâlei Caldera - Bâlea Lake

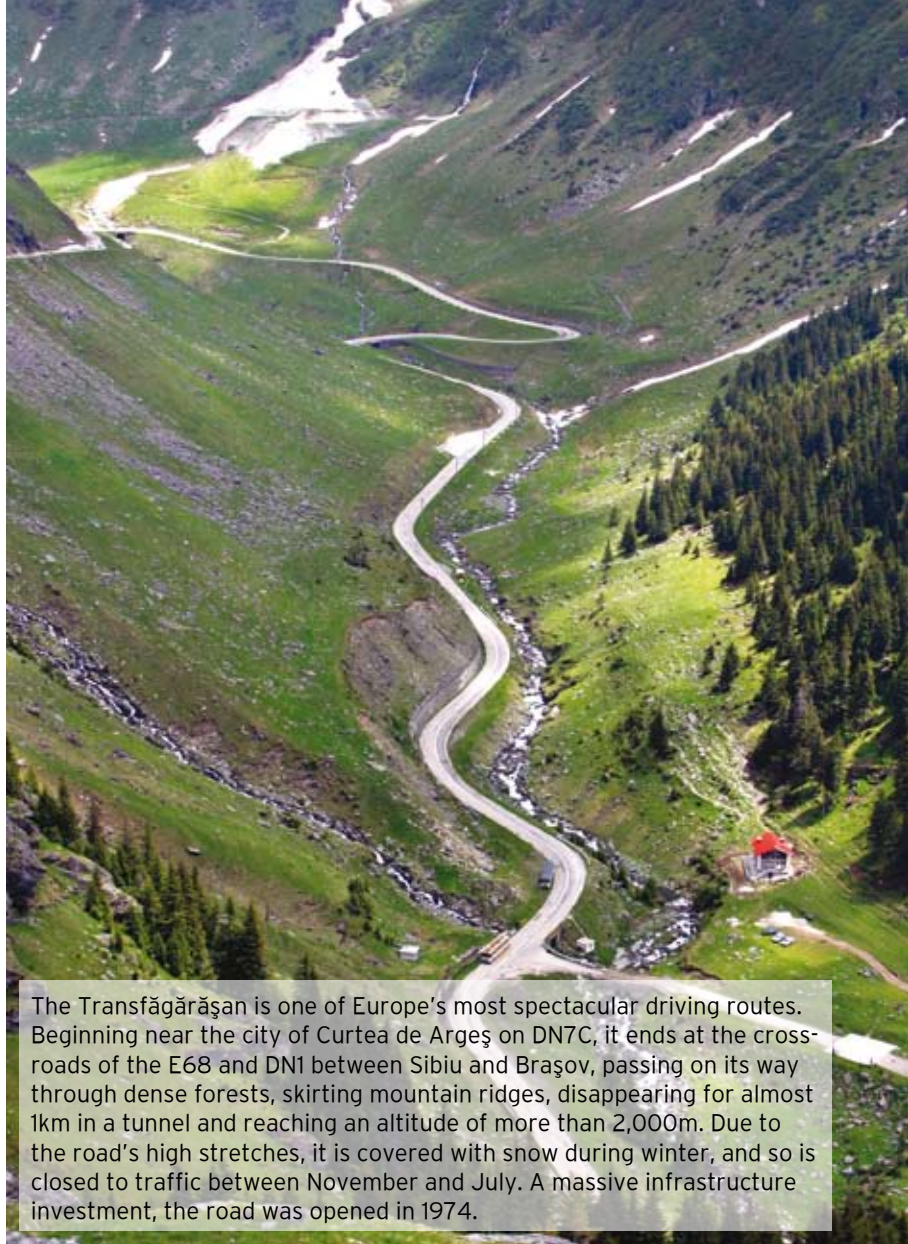
Grade: blue line; **Duration:** 4 to 5 hours

Location: central Romania, Braşov and Sibiu Counties

Access: road E68/DN1 Sibiu - Făgăraş. In summer, on the Transfăgăraşan road (closed October to June)

Local accommodation: 3-star cottage, 3-star guest houses, 4-daisy agri-tourism guest houses





The Transfăgărășan is one of Europe's most spectacular driving routes. Beginning near the city of Curtea de Argeș on DN7C, it ends at the cross-roads of the E68 and DN1 between Sibiu and Brașov, passing on its way through dense forests, skirting mountain ridges, disappearing for almost 1km in a tunnel and reaching an altitude of more than 2,000m. Due to the road's high stretches, it is covered with snow during winter, and so is closed to traffic between November and July. A massive infrastructure investment, the road was opened in 1974.



Nature Reserves

Romania's habitats let visitors see unique and endangered plants and animals and many of these ecosystems are extremely valuable to science. Come and discover them.

Mud Volcanoes Reservation

In volcanic craters, natural gas surfaces from a depth of 3,000m, bringing with it cold, liquid mud. The mud's concentric patterns in its surface film of petroleum, coloured various shades of grey, bear witness to the local soil's sulphurous and salty nature, which supports only specialised vegetation. Here plant species protected by law can be found, including *nitraria schoberi* and *obione verrucifera*. Two separate points offer rewarding views of this environment's phenomena - Pâclele Mari ('Big mists'), where cones with bases larger than 100m have formed and where several craters bubble, and Paclele Mici ('Small mists'). Another visitor attraction in the area is also the sculpture camp at Măgura.



Location: Berca and Scorțoasa communes, Buzău County

Area: 0,30 km²

Access: **By car** - on the DN10 through Buzău - Vernești - Căndești - Sătuc - Berca - Joseni, Policiori - Scorțoasa; **By train** - to Căndești or Berca

Local accommodation: 4-star guest houses, 2-daisy agritourism guest houses

Creasta Cocoșului Nature Reserve

Creasta Cocoșului Nature Reserve is located in the Gutâi Mountains, approximately 35 km from the city of Baia Mare. Its name comes from a narrow and jagged rocky ridge that resembles a rooster's crest. Part of an old volcanic crater, it rises to around 1450m. South of the main ridge are the mining centres Mare, Baia Sprie and Căvnic and two tourist centres. Rock climbers practise here and take part in rock-climbing contests on the walls of the summit, such are the challenges of its topography. A plateau lies below the ridge.

Location: north Romania, Maramureș County

Area: 0.5km²

Access:

By car - on DN18 Baia Mare - Sighetu Marmăției, up to Pasul Gutâi then forestry road to NE

By train to Baia Mare

Local accommodation: 3 and 4-star guest houses, 2 and 3-daisy agritourism guest houses





Sfânta Ana Lake Complex Natural Reservation

Sfânta Ana is Romania's only volcanic lake. It lies in the Harghitei Mountains, on the left bank of the Olt River near Tuşnad. At 946 m, the lake occupies the bottom of an extinct volcano, named Ciomatu, from the volcanic massif Puciosu, whose 1,301m summit was the location of the most recent volcanic eruption in the Carpathians, and indeed Central Europe, several thousand years ago. Almost circular, it is 620m long and 460m wide at its widest point, has a surface of 0.2 km² and a maximum depth of 7m. With no springs feeding it, the lake is replenished only by rain, and its water's purity comes close to that of distilled water, containing only 0.0029ml minerals per litre. Extremely poor in oxygen, the lake supports no animal life.

A reserve on account of its natural, geological, floral and wildlife riches, Sfânta Ana Lake is linked to Băile Tuşnad resort by tourist paths and a road.

Routes in the Sfânta Ana Lake area

Tinovul Mohoş - Băile Nadaş - Tuşnadul Nou train station
Accessible by vehicle all year round, and exceptionally beautiful
Grade: red dot; **Duration:** ascent 4 to 4.5 hours, descent 3 to 3.5 hours
Distance: 14km

Sfânta Ana Lake - Carpați Hotel
Grade: yellow cross; **Duration:** 1 to 2 hours
Distance: 7km, the shortest distance between Sfânta Ana Lake and Băile Bălványoş. This route is accessible by vehicle all year round
Sfânta Ana Lake - Țetelea

This route is moderately difficult, and in winter it is recommended only to experienced and well-prepared walkers. Take plenty of water, as there are no springs along the way

Grade: blue cross; **Duration:** 3 to 4 hours; **Distance:** 9km

Location: central Romania, Harghita County; **Area:** 2 km²

Access: By car - on the E578/DN12 Miercurea Ciuc - Băile Tuşnad - Bixad and then the DJ113 Bixad - Sfânta Ana Lake

Local accommodation: 2 to 3-star guest houses, 1-star camping



Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation is the third-richest biosphere reservation in the world in terms of biodiversity, after Australia's Great Barrier Reef and Ecuador's Galapagos Islands. It is home to more than 7,000 known species of plants and animals known and, scientists believe, still more as yet unknown.

This feature of the Danube River is the only delta in the world with biosphere reservation status. Its area accounts for 2.5% of Romania's surface, and is the third largest delta in Europe, after those of the Volga and the Kuban, and it is the 22nd largest in the world. It shelters the largest compact area of reed beds on the planet and supports 30 types of ecosystem. Thanks to all these factors, the Danube Delta is a unique treasure of the planet's natural heritage.

Its natural wonders afford the delta triple status. It is, since 1990, part of the international network of biosphere reservations recognised by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, has been declared by the RAMSAR Convention of 1991 a wetlands area of international importance for its habitats for water birds, and it has been included on UNESCO's World

Culture and Natural Heritage List as of December 1990.

Besides the actual delta's 3510 km², Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation's other remarkable features includes the Razim - Sinoie complex of lakes (1145 km²), the Black Sea beach strip (1030 km²), the Danube riverbank between Cotul Piscii and Isaccea (13 km²) and the Danube flood-meadow between Isaccea and Tulcea (102 km²).

The Delta is exceptional not just for its biodiversity, but also for the large population sizes of many species. The mosaic of habitats here is the most varied in Romania, with the number of plant species recently estimated at 2,994, and the number of animal species at 4,262. Approximately 70% of the Delta's vegetation is dominated by various reeds and rushes, some of which form the floating islands locally known as 'plauri'.

Tourist routes

Route 1: Tulcea - Mila 35 Channel - Gârla Sireasa - Gârla Şontea - Olguţa Channel - Dunărea Veche - Mila 23 village - Crişan - Maliuc - Tulcea

Route 3: Tulcea - Maliuc - Lebăda Hotel - Crişan Channel - Caraorman - Puiu Lake - BTT Roşu rest stop - Lacul Roşu - Gârla Împuţita - Busurca Channel - Sulina - Tulcea

Route 4: Murighiol - Canalul Dunavăţ - Dranov Channel - Holbina Gulf - Razim Lake - Gura Portiţei

Route D1: Letea - C.A. Rosetti - Letea Forest - Nebunu Lake and back

Route D3: Caraorman - Caraorman Forest - Erenciuc Lake and back

Route D4: Murighiol - Sărăţuri Lake and back

Route D7: Nuntaşi - Histria Fortress - Sinoie Lake and back

Location: south-east Romania, Tulcea and Constanţa Counties
Area: 5800 km²

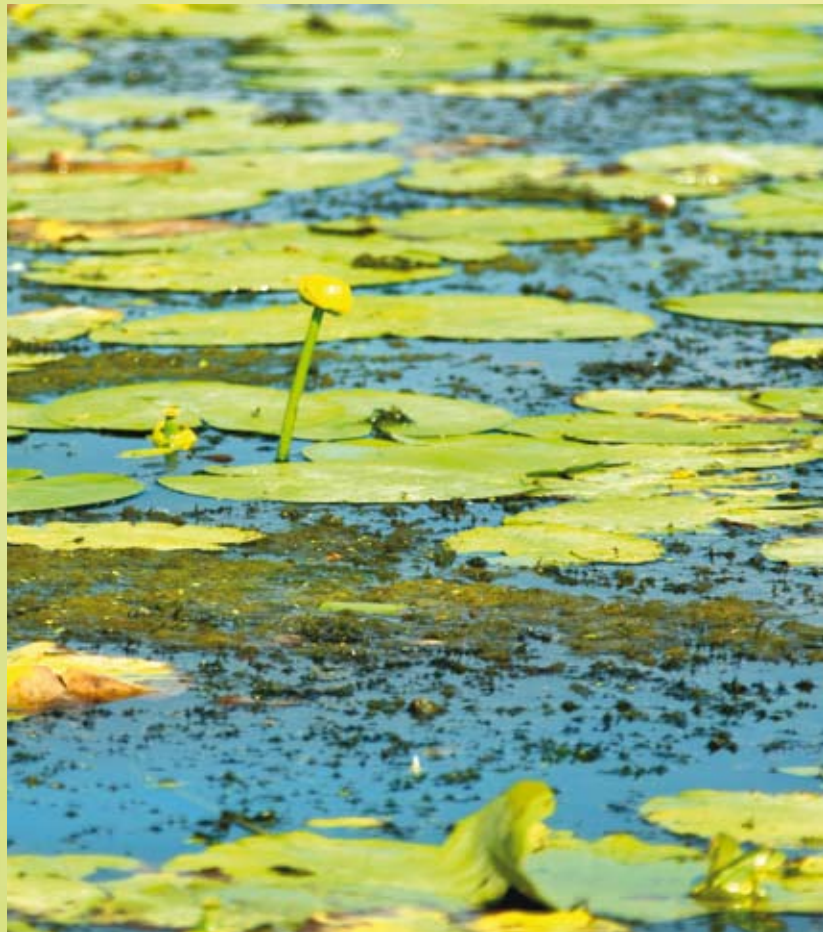
Access:

By road - through (A2) Bucharest - Drojina Nouă - DN21 Slobozia - E60/DN2A Hârşova - DN22A Tulcea, ferry from Galaţi - DN22E I.C. Brătianu - Garvăn (DN22E) - Tulcea, through Brăila - Smârdan (by ferryboat) - Măcin (DN 22) - Tulcea

By train - to Tulcea

Local accommodation: 2, 3, 4 and 5-star guest houses, 3-star bungalows, 2 and 3-daisy agritourism, 4-star camping

Contact: Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation Administration
www.ddbra.ro



The profuse plantlife of the lakes and channels support species such as white and yellow water lily, water caltrop and water milfoil. Some plant types here are carnivorous, feeding on microorganisms. These include bladderwort and waterwheel plant. Common on the high riverbanks are willow forests supporting several willow species, while grey willow is found on lower banks and even on the 'plauri' islands.



The forests of Letea and Caraorman support very specialised ecosystems, lying in the lower and more humid areas among sand dunes. Here species of oak, ash, shrubs and climbing plants thrive, such as Virginia creeper and Greek liana. In areas where the soil is salty plants specific to the region such as frog grass, weeping alkaligrass and Rumex crispus can be found. Some plant species here, perfectly adapted to their environments, do without roots and simply float, among them salvinia natans,

three species of duckweed, onosma arenarium and aldrovanda vesiculosa. These are has also been the site of two new species discoveries - starthistle and water grass. The conditions created by this wide variety of land and water habitats also nurture rich animal life - the reservation currently shelters 4262 species. The largest group is of invertebrate organisms, whose species here number 3713 - worms, molluscs, spiders, insects and microscopic organisms.

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation is Romania's most important area for fish farming, and 135 species of fish are raised here. Most are freshwater varieties, but sea fish from the Black Sea also enter the delta and the river during their mating season. Among them are sturgeon, found only in the northern hemisphere and almost exclusively in the Black and Caspian Seas. Sturgeon fishing has been prohibited for 10 years.





But the chief reason for the Danube Delta's fame is its bird life, comprising 341 species. The Delta is home to most of Europe's populations of Great White Pelican and Dalmatian Pelican, 60% of the world's Pygmy Cormorant and, in winter, 50% of the world's Red-breasted Goose.

The largest bird of prey in the delta is the White-tailed Eagle, a protected species. During spring and autumn's migration periods, the Danube Delta provides an important rest area for several million birds, especially ducks, storks and countless species of birds of prey.





The Little Egret is a rare bird, whose nesting grounds are found principally in the Danube Delta, where it lives in mixed colonies, mostly hidden in *salix retusa* bushes, until autumn, when it migrates towards the Mediterranean Sea. In the past, the bird's brilliant white plumage made it a target for hunters.



The spoonbill is another rare species which nests here. It is a large bird, reaching 80cm long, with white feathers, shaded yellow on its chest and head. On the back of its head, a crest of longer feathers stand up like a fan when the bird feels anxious.





To date, the inventory of mammal species in the Danube Delta counts 52 varieties, among which are animals of great significance to European conservation, such as the otter and the European mink. Predators here include ermine, raccoon dog, the fox, wildcat and the golden jackal - a relatively new species.

With so much of its surface covered by water, the Danube Delta is the least populous area in Romania, with less than 3.5 inhabitants per km². Settlements border various of the Danube's channels and are small in size.

So as best to conserve the natural riches found here, the delta has been divided into 18 habitat types. These include strictly protected habitats with access only for researchers and covering 8.7% of the reservation's area, buffer habitats around the protected areas to cushion the environmental impacts on them and accounting for 38.5%, and economic habitats where agriculture, fishing and forestry are practised, and settlements are allowed. A further special category has been created, adding areas designated for ecological reconstruction.

Here, the Reservation Authority harnesses the most cutting edge knowledge and technology to develop activities designed to restore degraded areas' ecological balance.



A taste of Romania

Natural beauty, the hospitality of local people and the flavours of regional cuisine - all these combine to bring you the true taste of Romania.

A third of the country's area is covered by the Carpathian Mountains, which makes Romania a preferred travel destination for lovers of winter sports. Prahovei Valley has several ski slopes with various levels of difficulty, served by chair and T-bar ski lifts.

The Carpathians offer Romania's best high-altitude skiing and its most extreme terrain. Among the major ski resorts are Azuga, Buşteni, Cheia, Pârâul Rece, Poiana Braşov, Predeal, Sinaia and Slănic Prahova.

Romania's most noteworthy ski slope is found in Azuga. Six kilometres long, the Sorica run is of intermediate difficulty

and is enhanced by snow cannons and night lighting. Like most of the slopes in this area, it is internationally certificated.

Other main slopes in the area:

- Clăbucet, 2,100m, difficulty - intermediate, Predeal
- Cocoş, 2,250m, difficulty - intermediate, Predeal
- Poliştocă, 2,500m, difficulty - easy, Predeal
- Gura Dihamului, 4,000m, difficulty - easy, Buşteni
- Kalinderu, 1,500m, difficulty - intermediate, Buşteni
- Valea Cerbului, 3,000m, difficulty - advanced, Buşteni
- Valea Carp, 2,500m, difficulty - advanced, Sinaia
- Turistica, 2,800m, difficulty - intermediate, Sinaia







It is an ancient tradition for hosts here to greet their guests on the doorstep, with fresh baked bread, salt and țuică or horincă, alcoholic beverages made from plums and based on traditional recipes which are widely enjoyed in Romania.

You can choose to stay in a guest house in the north-eastern Crișana region, or, in Dobrogea in the south-east, you will encounter Romanians happy to prepare food in their homes to share with their guests. Visit during the Christmas holidays, and you will have the opportunity to sample various pork dishes.

Romanians have a recipe for every part of the pig. Sausages, lebăr (sausage prepared with pork intestines filled with pork liver, steak and bay leaves), caltaboș and tobă (pork heart, legs, ears) and other dishes are prepared in almost exactly the same way all over the country.



When the snow melts and water swells the streams and rivers, rafting and hydrospeeding come into their own. Guest houses offer lodging close to the biggest rivers. Crişul Repede, Jiu, Mureş and Bistriţa are ideal for beginners while Nera and Cerna are located on fascinating gorges, which are also a paradise for birdwatchers. In spring and summer, the mountains and hills are perfect for mountain biking, while the breezes over hills and valleys make paragliding a popular choice. All year round, most forest authorities offer horseriding and, in the Danube Delta, boat trips. During legally sanctioned fishing seasons, you can even catch your dinner here, best achieved by setting off with a fishermen at the crack of dawn, when the fish are ready to bite. The locals prepare matchless fish borsch, stuffed pike, saramura, carp barbecued on a spit and many other exquisite dishes.

In Moldavia, which lies in the east, you can take a ride on horseback or in a horse-drawn carriage, as this is still an important mode of transport in the area. If you come here for Easter, you will be able to see girls and women dressed in folk costumes decorating eggs. Using a very thin needle, they decorate the eggs with wax, drawing various motifs, and red paint. Easter culinary specialities include lamb steaks and round bread or pasca, which according to tradition is set on the table before going to the church for the Easter sermon. No matter which part of the country you choose to visit, for a satisfying end to the day you can get a dish of sarmale, made of pork and veal rolled in cabbage or vine leaves. On fast days, the meat is replaced with rice and mushrooms. Sarmale are best enjoyed with cream or pepperonis, accompanied by polenta, and surely a good wine.



The shores of the Black Sea offer ideal destinations for those who love water sports. Here you can hire jet skis and scuba dive accompanied by experienced instructors. Dobrogea cuisine's quirks derive from the influences of Turkish, Tartar and Russian immigrants to the area. In Constanța's old harbour, you can take an excursion at sea on one of the boats which leave every hour. Fish dishes abound in the beachside restaurants while the kebab shops of Piața Ovidiu offer their own delights.

Another Romanian dish, native to Maramureș, is bulz, made with fermented cheese in special wooden vessels and best eaten with polenta. As wheat does not have enough months of sunshine to ripen up on the mountain, corn is the most typical crop here, and most dishes are accompanied by polenta rather than bread.

During the cold winter months here, a hard day's work is best followed with a glass of țuică - a spirit of similar strength (and effects!) to vodka. And if țuică is your aperitif, a generous meal should be followed with a glass of good wine. Romania is proud to be one of the largest wine producers in the world. During the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the first ruler of Romania (1859-1866), wines from Cotnari won the supreme distinction at an international competition in Paris, and have continued to amass awards ever since. You can see the vineyards and taste the most famous Romanian wines in Iași County's Cotnari locality, on the eastern ridge of Dealul Mare of Hârlăul. If you wish to visit the wine cellars, you can take a tour of the wine preparation facility and cellars where you will taste five vintages. After your visit, lunch or dinner is available.



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