

Romania

A world where video speed-traps monitor zooming Audis and horse carts carrying hay, fake and real Dracula sites dot the landscape where shepherds tend to flocks and many farmers plough by hand – Romania may well be Europe's most interesting country. It's certainly beautiful. The mountains that spread and curl across Transylvania create a world of hiking, biking and skiing options. Gothic towns like Braşov still have walls guarding cobbled cores with buildings from the Austro-Hungarian Empire standing still with chipped paint-jobs.

Sometimes con-artist taxi drivers unfortunately give Romanians a tainted name across the region, but it's far from the truth – here, couples of all ages show more sickening PDA (public displays of affection) than any country in Eastern Europe, and volunteer to help you get unlost. After joining the EU in 2007, some locals worry that the West will touch areas that communism missed, like bucolic Maramureş, with its 'merry cemetery' and lush rural life evoking (way) past eras. Those who limit their trip to chasing Dracula – and the real Vlad Ţepeş (that moustached impaler from the 14th century) is revered here – will miss out on a lot.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 237, 500 sq km
- **Capital** Bucharest
- **Currency** nou leu: €1 = 3.51 lei; US\$1 = 2.72 lei; UK£1 = 5.09 lei; A\$1 = 2.04 lei; ¥100 = 24.25 lei; NZ\$1 = 1.72 lei; see p687 for details on the changed currency as of 2007
- **Famous for** Dracula, Transylvania, Nadia Comaneci's 10.0 in the '76 Olympics
- **Official Language** Romanian
- **Phrases** *bună* (hello); *da* (yes); *nu* (no); *mulţumesc* (thank you)
- **Population** 22.3 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 40, international access code ☎ 00
- **Visas** Citizens of the EU, USA, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand visa-free for up to 90 days. Many others require a visa; see p688



HOW MUCH?

- **Bottle of Mufatlar table wine** €2.50
- **Museum admission (adult)** €0.60 to €2 (usually)
- **Local bus trip** €0.30
- **Short taxi ride** €3
- **Phonecard** €2.85

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** €1
- **Litre of water** €0.60
- **Beer (in a Bucharest bar)** €0.60 to €1.50
- **Souvenir item** €3 to €6
- **Street snack (kebab)** €1.50-3

HIGHLIGHTS

- Castle-hop or hike the Carpathian Mountains by basing yourself in the lively medieval paradise of **Braşov** (p640).
- Hike or bike between painted monasteries in **Southern Bucovina** (p670), collectively grouped as a Unesco World Heritage site
- Go back in time, drink the local homebrew, dance by a camp fire in the heart of rural Romania, **Maramureş** (p663).
- Follow the heroic trail of the 1989 revolution in tenacious **Timișoara** (p659).
- Rent a rowboat and venture out onto tributaries at the fragile, rich-with-birdlife **Danube Delta** (p682).

ITINERARIES

- **10 days** See Ceaușescu's grandiose buildings in Bucharest, then train to Sinaia, to see Peleş Castle and hike or bike atop the Bucegi Mountains. Continue north to Braşov, for castles by day and beer-slurps by night. Head north to Sighișoara for a look at its medieval citadel, then train back to Bucharest or on to Budapest.
- **One month** It's hard to do some backtracking. Start with three days in Bucharest, then head through Transylvania, stopping off for a day or two each at Sinaia, Braşov, Sighișoara and Sibiu, then west to Timișoara. Cross back into Transylvania to the student town Cluj-Napoca, then up to Maramureş for a four or five days

of chilling out. Continue the rural experience to the east in Southern Bucovina's painted monasteries, finishing in Iași.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Romania is a year-round destination, with much variation in its climate: the average annual temperature in the south is 11°C, 7°C in the north and only 2°C in the mountains. In the summer months, temperatures have risen to above 40°C in recent years in Bucharest and along the Black Sea Coast, while winter chills of below -35°C are not unknown in the Braşov depression. See Climate Charts p911.

HISTORY**Ancient Romania & Dracula**

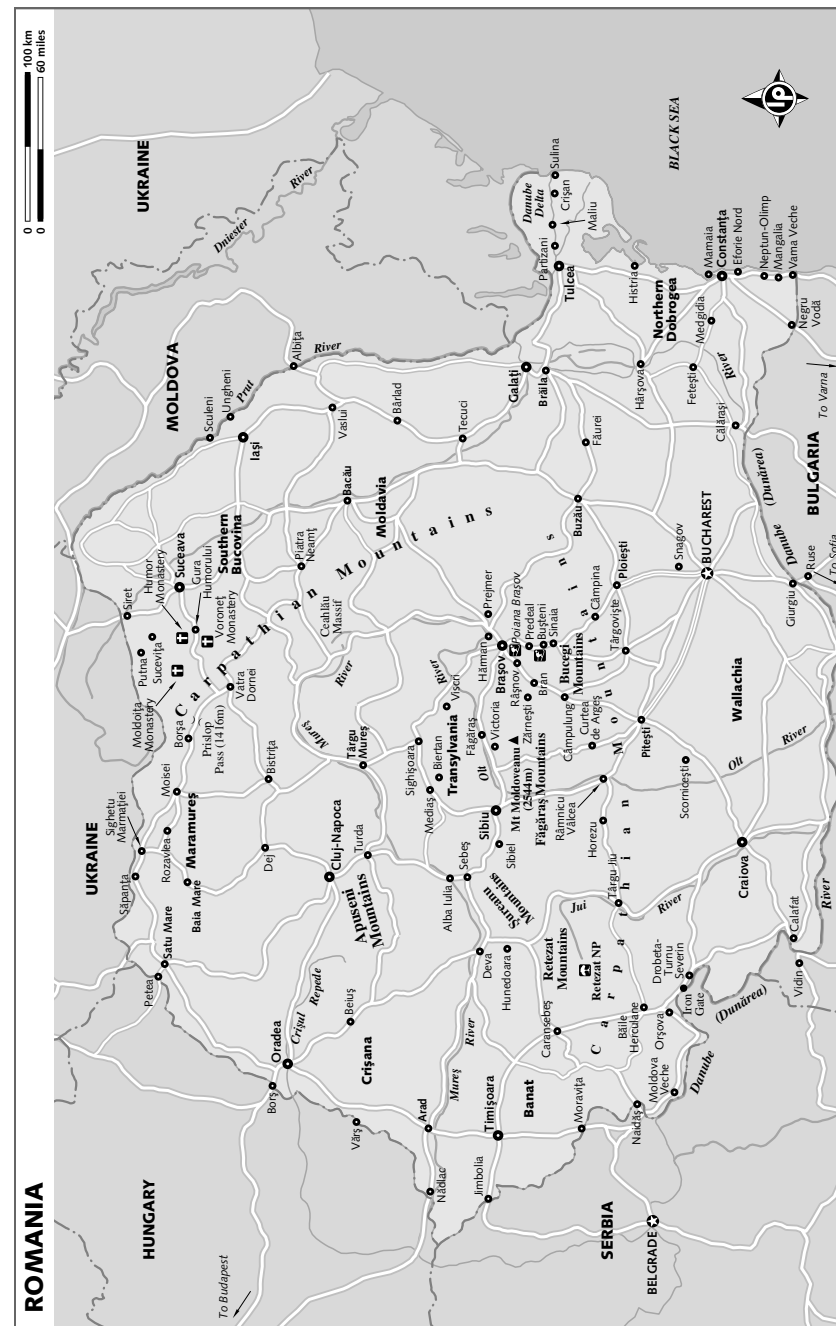
Ancient Romania was inhabited by Thracian tribes, more commonly known as Dacians. The Greeks established trading colonies along the Black Sea from the 7th century BC and the Romans conquered in AD 105–06. The slave-owning Romans brought with them their superior civilisation and the Latin language.

From the 10th century the Magyars (Hungarians) expanded into Transylvania and by the 13th century all of Transylvania was under the Hungarian crown.

The Romanian-speaking principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia offered strong resistance to the Ottomans' northern expansion in the 14th and 15th centuries. Mircea the Old, Vlad Țepeș and Ștefan cel Mare (Steven the Great) were legendary figures in this struggle.

Vlad Țepeș, ruling prince of Wallachia from 1456 till 1462 and 1476 till 1477, gained the name Țepeș (Impaler) after his primary form of punishing his enemies – impaling. A wooden stake was carefully driven through the victim's backbone without touching any vital nerve, ensuring at least 48 hours of conscious suffering before death. He is perhaps more legendary as the inspiration for 19th-century novelist Bram Stoker's Count Dracula. (Vlad was called Dracula, meaning 'son of the dragon', after his father, Vlad Dracul, a knight of the Order of the Dragon.)

When the Turks conquered Hungary in the 16th century, Transylvania became a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. In 1600 the three Romanian states – Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia – were briefly united under Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave). In 1687 Transylvania fell under Habsburg rule.



THE DICTATOR'S BRIGHT IDEAS

In the 1980s, in his attempts to eliminate foreign debt and look good in front of the world, Nicolae Ceaușescu exported Romania's food while his own people were forced to ration even staple goods and instituted power cuts to save money. His opponents were at best harassed, at worst killed by experimental methods of torture, including a method called *radu*, which involved low-level radiation to allow cancer to settle on some of his political opponents, especially Hungarian nationalists.

In March 1987 Ceaușescu embarked on a rural urbanisation programme that meant the destruction of 8000 villages (many in Transylvania) and the resettlement of the (mainly Hungarian) residents. After having bulldozed one-sixth of Bucharest to build his House of the People (p627), no-one doubted he'd proceed with his plans. Several dozen villages were razed, but thankfully the whole project went uncompleted.

In 1859 Alexandru Ioan Cuza was elected to the thrones of Moldavia and Wallachia, creating a national state, which in 1862 took the name Romania. The reformist Cuza was forced to abdicate in 1866 and his place was taken by the Prussian prince Karl of Hohenzollern, who took the name Carol I. Romania then declared independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1877 and, after the 1877–78 War of Independence, Dobrogea became part of Romania.

Romania in WWI & WWII

In 1916 Romania entered WWI on the side of the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) with the objective of taking Transylvania – where 60% of the population was Romanian – from Austria-Hungary. The Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) occupied Wallachia. With the defeat of Austria-Hungary in 1918, the unification of Banat, Transylvania and Bucovina with Romania was finally achieved.

In the years leading to WWII, Romania, under foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu, sought security in a French alliance. On 30 August 1940 Romania was forced to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary by order of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

To defend the interests of the ruling classes, General Ion Antonescu forced King Carol II to abdicate in favour of his son Michael. Then Antonescu imposed a fascist dictatorship. In June 1941 he joined Hitler's anti-Soviet war with gruesome results: 400,000 Romanian Jews and 36,000 Roma were murdered at Auschwitz and other camps.

On 23 August 1944 Romania suddenly changed sides, captured 53,159 German soldiers and declared war on Nazi Germany. By

this act, Romania salvaged its independence and shortened the war.

Ceaușescu

After the war, the Soviet-engineered return of Transylvania enhanced the prestige of the left-wing parties, which won the parliamentary elections of November 1946. A year later the monarchy was abolished and the Romanian People's Republic was proclaimed.

Soviet troops withdrew in 1958 and after 1960 Romania adopted an independent foreign policy under two leaders, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (leader from 1952 to 1965) and his protégé Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965 to 1989).

Ceaușescu's domestic policy was chaotic and megalomaniac. In 1974 the post of president was created for him. He placed his wife Elena, son Nicu and three brothers in important political positions during the 1980s. Some of Ceaușescu's expensive follies were projects like the Danube Canal from Agigea to Cernavoaie, the disruptive redevelopment of southern Bucharest (1983–89) and the 'systemisation' of agriculture by the resettlement of rural villages into concrete apartment blocks.

The late 1980s saw workers' riots in Brașov and severe food shortages in the winter of 1988–89. But the spark that ignited Romania came on 15 December 1989, when Father László Tökés publicly condemned the dictator from his Hungarian church in Timișoara. Police attempts to arrest demonstrating parishioners failed and civil unrest quickly spread.

On 21 December in Bucharest, an address by Ceaușescu during a rally was cut short by anti-Ceaușescu demonstrators. They booed him, then retreated to the boulevard between Piața Universității and Piața Romană, only to be crushed hours later by police gunfire and

READING LIST

There's surprisingly little coverage of Romania in English-language publishing. One of the best history books on Romania, Lucian Boia's excellent *Romania*, surveys Romania's past and present in a colourful, if philosophical, way. Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* devotes a couple of key chapters to postrevolutionary Romania. Some of Isabel Fonseca's fascinating *Bury Me Standing* follows the Roma population in Romania. Of course, the most famous 'Romanian' book is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which begins and ends in Transylvania.

armoured cars. The next morning thousands more demonstrators took to the streets. At midday Ceaușescu reappeared with his wife on the balcony of the Central Committee building to speak, only to be forced to flee by helicopter. The couple were arrested in Târgoviște, taken to a military base and, on 25 December, executed by a firing squad.

The National Salvation Front (FSN) swiftly took control. In May 1990 it won the country's first 'democratic' elections, placing Ion Iliescu at the helm as president and Petre Roman as prime minister. In Bucharest, student protests against this former communist ruler were ruthlessly squashed by 20,000 coal miners shipped in courtesy of Iliescu. Ironically, when the miners returned in September 1991, it was to force the resignation of Petre Roman, who was blamed for worsening living conditions.

Modern Romania

Romania's birth as a modern nation has been a difficult one. In December 1999 President Constantinescu dismissed Radul Vasile and replaced him with former National Bank of Romania governor, Mugur Isărescu. But by mid-2000 Isărescu was fighting for his political life after the opposition accused him of mismanagement of the State Property Fund. This was followed in May 2000 by the collapse of the National Fund for Investment (NFI), which saw thousands of investors lose their savings.

Romania joined the Council of Europe in 1993. The EU started accession talks with Romania in March 2000 and joined NATO in 2002. All this came as Romania chummed up with the USA, allowing Iraq-bound military to set up bases and granting lucrative construc-

tive projects to American companies – something some EU members weren't happy with. At the last minute in 2006, the EU granted Romania membership in 2007 – though Brussels warned it will continue to monitor progress in fighting corruption and organised crime.

PEOPLE

Romanians make up 89% of the population; Hungarians are the next largest ethnic group (7%), followed by Roma (2%), and smaller populations of Ukrainians, Germans, Russians and Turks. Germans and Hungarians live almost exclusively in Transylvania, while Ukrainians and Russians live mainly near the Danube Delta, and Turks along the Black Sea Coast.

The government estimates that only 400,000 Roma people live in Romania, although other sources estimate between 1.5 and 2.5 million. A good site to learn more about the Roma is the Budapest-based **European Roma Rights Centre** (<http://errc.org>).

RELIGION

The majority of Romania's population (87%) is Eastern Orthodox Christian. The rest is split between Protestant (6.8%), Catholic (5.6%), Muslim (0.4%), plus there are some 39,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and 10,000 Jews.

ARTS

Painting on glass and wood remains a popular folk art. Considered to be of Byzantine origin, this traditional peasant art was widespread in Romania from the 17th century onwards. Superstition and strong religious beliefs surrounded these icons, which were painted to protect a household from evil spirits.

The paintings of Nicolae Grigorescu (1838–1907) absorbed French impressionism and created canvasses alive with the colour of the Romanian peasantry.

Romania's most famous sculptor is Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), whose polished bronze and wood works are held at museums in Paris, New York, Canberra and in Romania at the Museum of Art in Craiova and Bucharest's National Art Museum (p629).

Modern literature emerged in the mid-19th century in the shape of romantic poet Mihai Eminescu (1850–89), who captured the spirituality of the Romanian people in his work.

The Romanian classical-music world is nearly synonymous with George Enescu (1881–1955), whose Romanian Rhapsodies

Nos 1 and 2 and opera *Odeipe* are generally considered classics.

Most Romanians and world residents are less charitable of the Cheeky Girls, Cluj-Napoca-born twins who made the big time (or at least a hit single) after leaving for the UK.

In the cinema world, Romania has scored a couple of recent international hits, with Nae Caranfil's comedy *Filantropica* (2002) and Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* (2005).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Covering 237,500 sq km, Romania – shaped a bit like a pufferfish – is made up of three main geographical regions, each with its particular features. The mighty Carpathian Mountains form the shape of a scythe swooping down into the country's centre from the Ukraine and curling up northwards.

West of this are large plateaus where villages and towns lie among the hills and valleys. East of the mountains are the low-lying plains (where most of the country's agricultural output comes from), which end at the Black Sea and Europe's second-largest delta region where the Danube spills into the sea.

Wildlife

Rural Romania has thriving animal populations, which include chamois, lynx, fox, deer, wolf, bear and badger. There are 33,792 species of animals here (707 of which are vertebrates; 55 of these are endangered) as well as 3700 species of plants (39 of which are endangered).

Birdlife in the Danube Delta (p682) is unmatched. It is a major migration hub for numerous bird species and home to 60% of the world's small pygmy cormorant population.

National Parks

Romania has nearly 600 protected areas, including 13 national parks, three biosphere reserves and one Natural World Heritage site (the Danube Delta), totalling over 12,000 sq km protected.

Environmental Issues

Romania may very well have more rubbish bins than any country on earth (look around, it's stunning) – the problem is getting people to use them. NGOs such as **Pro Natura** (www.pronatura.ro) and the

Transylvania Ecological Club (www.greenagenda.org) work to spread word about how to diminish the impact of tourism on the country's environment.

Romania has the ongoing problem of cleaning up the pollution left by communist-era chemical plants. If you're on the train between Sighișoara and Cluj-Napoca, look out for the dilapidated, blackened plants in Coșsa Mică, which were so dangerous to the local community until the early 1990s that some two-thirds of the children showed signs of mental illness.

FOOD & DRINK

Let's leave the debate as to whether or not something called Romanian cuisine actually exists and plunge, mouth open wide, into a world of tasty, hearty, simple food: Romanian cooking. Relying heavily upon pork and staples such as potatoes and cabbage, with liberal borrowings from the cultures that have traversed and occupied its land, Romanian cooking is not for those seeking to diet.

Mămăligă is a cornmeal mush that's boiled or fried and served at every meal. *Ciorbă* (soup) is the other mainstay of the Romanian diet. Favourites include *ciorbă de burta* (tripe soup served with dollop of sour cream) and *ciorbă de legume* (vegetable soup cooked with meat stock).

Other common dishes are *mușchi de vacă/porc/miel* (cutlet of beef/pork/lamb), *ficat* (liver), *piept de pui* (chicken breast) and *cabanos prajit* (fried sausages). Typical desserts include *plăcintă* (turnovers), *clătite* (crepes) and *cozonac* (a brioche).

Thanks to the Orthodox diet, you can always find some vegetarian dishes, unexciting and repetitious as they will come to be. If a plate of *mămăligă* does not turn you on, try *cașcaval pâine* (cheese covered in bread-crumbs and fried), *salată roșii* (tomato salad), *salată castraveți* (cucumber salad) and *salată asortată* (mixed salad, usually just a mix of – guess what? – tomatoes and cucumbers). When you're really lucky, you'll find vegetable soup or stew, or a dish made from aubergine.

Among the best Romanian wines are Cotnari, Murfatlar, Odobești, Târnave and Valea Călugărească.

Țuica is a once-filtered clear brandy made from fermented fruit (the tastiest and most popular is plum *țuica*), usually 30-proof.

BUCHAREST

☎ 021 / pop 2.1 million

Much of Romania slugs it, some travellers have had enough of it after a couple of days, but Bucharest is a fascinating working experiment of mixed eras, not to mention lots of (uncute) stray dogs. Wide boulevards with century-old villas, fashioned in the best Paris style, mingle with (scattered and hidden) 18th-century monasteries, communist-built housing blocks and statement-making government headquarters (some tagged with bullet holes from the 1989 revolution). Less than two decades since the city violently ended Nicolae Ceaușescu's stranglehold on the country, life does boom here in Romania's capital – museums are super, and people are a lot nicer than some give them credit for. It's a city that's changing, and that makes it a worthy stop for those willing to poke around and find its elusive soul.

ORIENTATION

Bucharest's main train station, Gară de Nord, is a few kilometres northwest of Bucharest's centre. The station is connected by the metro to Piața Victoriei on the northern side of the centre or to Piața Unirii on the southern side. Bus 133 will take you just north of the centre to Piața Romană; bus 85 goes to Piața Universității.

Bucharest's most historic areas spread to either side of the main boulevard B-dul Bălcescu, which changes its name to B-dul General Mageru to the north, and B-dul IC Brătianu south of Piața Universității.

Maps

By far the best Bucharest map, available at bus ticket stands, is the *100% Planul Orașului București Map* (1:200,000; 11 lei), with all transport routes.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librărie Noi (Map p628; ☎ 311 0700; Blvd Nicolae Bălcescu 18; ☎ 9.30am–8.30pm Mon–Sat, 11am–7pm Sun) Best bookshop, with English-language novels, LP guides, lots of maps and a fab antiques section.

Cultural Centres

British Council Library (Map p626; ☎ 307 9600; www.britishcouncil.ro; Calea Dorobanților 14; ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, to 1pm Sat) Library, internet access and café.

French Institute (Map p626; ☎ 316 0224; www.culture-france.ro; B-dul Dacia 77; ☎ 9am–6.30pm Mon–Thu, 9am–4.30pm Fri, 10am–2.30pm Sat) Film screenings, internet and bistro.

Emergency

Ambulance ☎ 973

Emergency ☎ 112

Police (☎ 955, central station ☎ 311 2021)

Internet Access

Many hotels and hostels have internet access. Look for red-and-white 'Zapp Hotspot' signs advertising wi-fi access around town.

Access Internet (Map p626; ☎ 650 7879; Blvd Lascar Catargiu 6; per hr €0.75–0.90; ☎ 24hr) International calls are US\$0.04 per minute.

Access Internet (Map p628; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 24; per 20min €0.30; ☎ 7am–2am)

Internet & Games (Map p628; ☎ 0721-877-866; B-dul Regina Elisabeta 25; per hr €0.90; ☎ 24hr)

Left Luggage

There's **left luggage** (Map p626; Piața Gară de nord 1; per day small/big bag €0.90/1.80; ☎ 24hr) at the train station, right in the hallway leading to front exit.

Medical Services

Emergency Clinic Hospital (Map p626; ☎ 230 0106; Calea Floreasca 8; ☎ 24hr) Bucharest's best state hospital.

Pro-Dental Care (Map p628; ☎ 313 4781; Str Hristo Botev 7; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, to 4pm Sat)

Sensi-Blu (Map p628; ☎ 305 7314; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 7; ☎ 24hr) Reliable pharmacy chain with 18 Bucharest locations.

Money

Currency exchanges and ATMs are everywhere – including several along B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu in the centre. Avoid the currency-exchange counters at the airport; there are ATM machines in the arrivals hall.

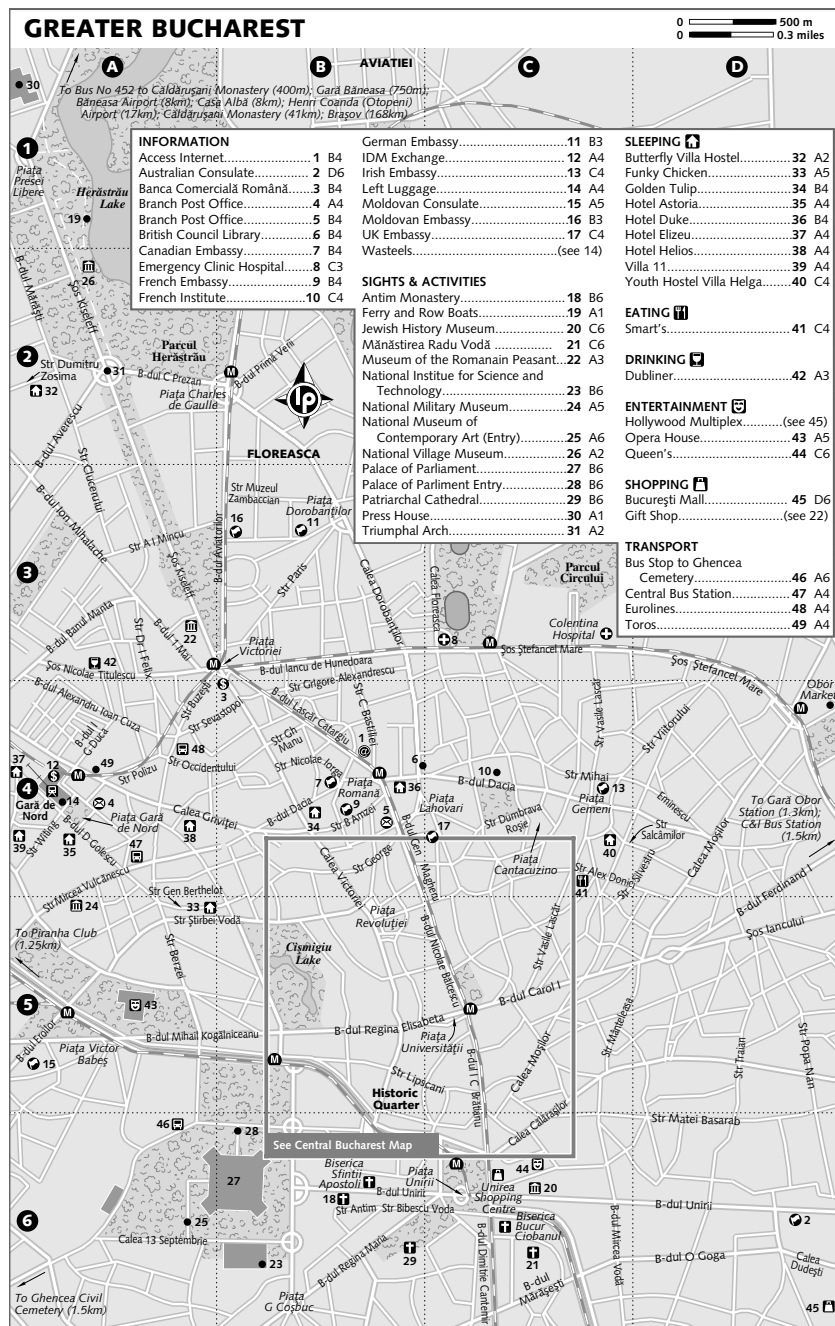
Banca Comercială Română (Map p628; B-dul Regina Elisabeta 5; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Post

Central post office (Map p628; ☎ 315 9030; Str Matei Millo 10; ☎ 7.30am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–2pm Sat) Collect post-restante mail from the central post office on Str Matei Millo.

Telephone

RomTelecomm cards (from 10 lei) are available at newsstands. Most phone booths are neglected, but still work. You'll have no problem



finding a shop selling Orange or Vodafone SIM cards for your mobile phone – try a central street like B-dul Magheru.

Access Internet (p625) can help with international calls too.

Tourist Information

Sometimes you have to wonder if the Bucharest government just doesn't care about the city, as the nation's capital is woefully unrepresented in the world of information. The many travel agencies are focussed on getting you out of the country. Hostels tend to be excellent sources of info, helping with rental cars or day trips to Snagov or even Bran Castle.

ONT Carpați (Map p628; ☎ 314 1922; www.ont.ro; B-dul General Magheru 7; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Lots of outbound business, but staff are happy to talk through a Romania trip, arrange daily guides (€30) and offer city tours (from €40 with driver).

Wasteels (Map p626; ☎ 317 0370; www.wasteelstravel.ro; Gară de Nord; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Conveniently located on the left side of the exit hallway of the train station, Wasteels can rent cars for you, help with train reservations, and may be able to call you a reliable taxi.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

It's said that Bucharest's stray dogs (politically correct term of late: 'community dogs') number from 100,000 to 200,000. Though it's rarely a problem, travellers are occasionally bitten, and in 2006 a Japanese businessman died to death following a freak bite that severed an artery. If bitten, go to a hospital within 36 hours for antirabic injections. Avoid any packs of dogs, who occasionally occupy empty lots behind buildings.

Another 'danger' are the taxi drivers who charge extortionately high prices. Worst are those outside Gară de Nord. Avoid using these (we've heard of travellers paying US\$150 for a US\$5 ride!). Wasteels (above) can usually call for a taxi from the train station, if you don't have a phone to call the reliable companies listed on p635.

SIGHTS

Bucharest teems with museums and attractions, all relatively dirt cheap and many among the nation's best. The historic thoroughfare Calea Victoriei makes a nice walk, as it connects the two main squares of the city: Piața Victoriei in the north, and Piața Revoluției in the centre. Follow the river east to where it does under the sprawling Piața Unirii.

TOP FIVE BUCHAREST

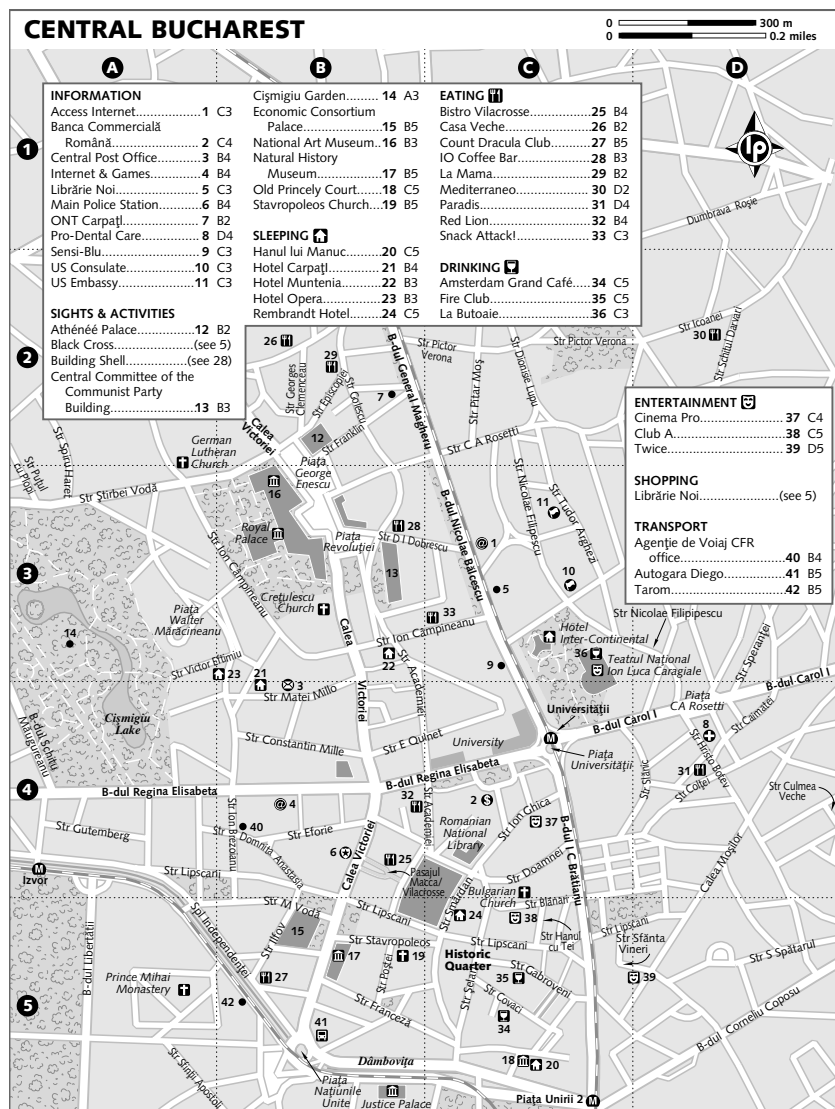
- Museum of the Romanian Peasant (p630)
- Palace of Parliament (below)
- Museum of Contemporary Art (p628)
- The churches surrounded by Ceaușescu-built housing blocks (below)
- The centre on Sundays, when traffic dries up, and the parks on weekdays, when they can be quiet (and relatively empty); best are Cișmigiu Gardens (p630) in the centre, Herăstrău Park (p630) on the northern lakes

Ceaușescu's Bucharest

Inspired by a trip to Pyongyang and Beijing, Nicolae Ceaușescu unleashed a feverish reconstruction campaign on Bucharest (and Romania) in the 1980s, and this is most evident along B-dul Unirii in southern Bucharest. Intended to be Romania's 'Champs Elysées', the busy, fountain-lined 3.2km boulevard – famously 6m longer than the Paris prototype – meant destroying an entire suburb of historic buildings. (To get a sense of what it replaced, stroll just north into the historic centre; see p629.)

From central Piața Unirii (under which the city's crippled Dâmbovița River is submerged), look southwest, where the Patriarchal Cathedral (Catedrala Patrihală; Map p626; Str Dealul Mitropoliei) – the centre of Romanian Orthodox faith, and built between 1656 and 1658 – peeks out from once-grand housing blocks – a rare religious site that gets views of the centre. B-dul Unirii's housing blocks were designed to 'hide' churches across the city, such as the Antim Monastery (Mănăstirea Antim; Map p626; Str Antim), which is south just one block before the boulevard ends, and dates from 1715.

Facing the boulevard is the impossible-to-miss Palace of Parliament (Palatul Parlamentului; Map p626; ☎ 311 3611; B-dul Națiunile Unite; adult/student €6/3; ☎ 10am-4pm), the world's second-largest building (after the US Pentagon). Built in 1984 (and still 10% unfinished), the building's 12 storeys and 3100 rooms covers 330,000 sq metres, and cost an estimated €3.3 billion. Rushed, but interesting, 45-minute tours go every half-hour or so and lead into a handful of marble rooms – still rented out for conferences – finishing at the balcony Nicolae didn't live long enough to speak from. Facing the Palace of Parliament



from B-dul Unirii, the entrance is around to the right (a 12-minute walk).

Back on the building's west side, walk back past B-dul Unirii to the building's south side, noting the half-finished **National Institute for Science & Technology** (Map p626; nr B-dul Libertății & Calea 13 Septembrie); half-done or abandoned buildings like this litter Bucharest. At the

back of the Palace of Parliament is the superb **National Museum of Contemporary Art** (Muzeul Național de Artă Contemporană; Map p626; ☎ 318 9137; www.mnac.ro; Calea 13 Septembrie; adult/student €1.50/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun), which opened in 2004. A fully changing four-floor exhibition space features eclectic European artists – including installation and video art – and is easily one

of Eastern Europe's most provocative spaces. There's a top-floor open-air café.

A 45-minute rather-dreary walk west (or accessed via bus 385 from outside the Parliament ticket office on B-dul Națiunile Unite) is **Ghencea Civil Cemetery** (Cimitriul Civil Ghencea; Map p626; ☎ 413 8590; Calea 13 Septembrie; ☎ 8am-8pm), where you can see the resting spots of Nicolae Ceaușescu (row I-35, marked with a red cross, to the left of the entry path) and his wife Elena (H25, across to the right of the entry path), both executed on Christmas in 1989.

Historic Centre

Some of the fiercest fighting during the 1989 revolution took place at **Piața Universității** (Map p628; M Piața Universității), which straddles Bucharest's most evocative, historic streets. Journalists watched tanks roll over Romanian freedom-fighters and soldiers shoot into crowds of protestors from their viewpoint inside Hotel Inter-Continental. Scour the area and you'll find bullet marks in some buildings and 10 stone crosses commemorating those killed. A **black cross** and plaque on the wall at B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 18 marks the spot where the first protestor, Mihai Gărlan, died at 5.30pm on 21 December 1989.

Much of the historic centre looms in the blocks to the southwest. A good access way is along historic **Calea Victoriei**, built in 1692 under Brâncoveanu's orders to link the centre with his summer palace in Mogoșoaia, 14km northwest. Three blocks south is **Str Lipskani**; its blocks to the east of Calea Victoriei become a centre of bohemian ballyhoo at night, especially in summer.

Another block south is the ritzy **Economic Consortium Palace** (Casa de Economii și Consennațiuni), designed by French architect Paul Goussier between 1894 and 1900. Across the street is the **National History Museum** (Map p628; ☎ 311 3356; Calea Victoriei 12; adult/student €0.90/0.45; ☎ 9am-5pm), housed in the neoclassical former Post Office Palace (1894). The museum is mostly under a long-winded renovation, but it's worth seeing for the dismantled replica of the 2nd-century 40m Trajan's Column; its 2500 characters retell the Dacian Wars against Rome. (Go to panel 18 to see decapitated heads.) There's also a gold-crammed treasury.

A block east of the museum, the **Stavropoleos Church** (Map p628; Str Stavropoleos), on a street meaning 'town of the cross', dates from 1724 and is one of Bucharest's most atmospheric

churches, with a courtyard filled with old tombstones and an ornate wood interior.

The centre of the old historic centre is around the **Old Princely Court** (Palatul Voievodal; Map p628; Curtea Veche; ☎ 314 0375; Str Franceza 21-23; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am-5pm), a bused-up court from the 15th century with a Vlad Tepeș statue out front.

Just southeast, **Hanul lui Manuc**, an active hotel with a courtyard restaurant-bar (p631), was built to shelter travelling merchants, and is one of the few remaining buildings of the era.

To the southeast, just beyond Piața Unirii, the interesting **Jewish History Museum** (Muzeul de Istorie al Comunităților Evreiești din România; Map p626 ☎ 311 0870; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-1pm Sun-Fri) is housed in a colourful synagogue that dates from 1836 (but was rebuilt in 1910). Exhibits (in English and Romanian) outline Jewish contributions in Romanian history, which is not something all Romanians know about. In 1941, 800,000 Jews lived in Romania; today only 10,000 remain. You need your passport to enter.

Piața Revoluției

The scene of Ceaușescu's infamous last speech of 21 December 1989 was on the balcony of the former **Central Committee of the Communist Party building** (Map p628), a few blocks northwest of Piața Universității. Amid cries of 'Down with Ceaușescu' he briefly escaped in a helicopter from the roof. Meanwhile, the crowds were riddled with bullets, and many died.

The **building shell** (Map p628; nr Str DI Dobrescu & Str Boteanu) once housed the hated Securitate and was destroyed by protestors in 1989. Now a modern glass structure stands inside it; you can get hipster coffee in the basement IO Coffee House (p632).

Housed in the early 19th-century Royal Palace, the **National Art Museum** (Muzeul Național de Artă; Map p628; ☎ 313 3030; http://art.museum.ro; Calea Victoriei 49-53; combo ticket adult/student €3.60/1.80, Romanian & European collections €2.40/1.20, first Wed of month free; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun) is a super three-part museum. The north door leads to the **Gallery of Romanian Art** (adult/student €2.10/0.90), with hundreds of icons saved from communist-destroyed churches and many paintings, including arresting portraits of Nicolae Grigorescu. Also in the building is the small **Treasures of Roman Art** (adult/student €1.50/0.60). The south door leads to the absorbing **Gallery of European Art** (Map p628; adult/student €1.20/0.60), a 12,000-piece collection, which was largely assembled from Tsar Carol I's collection,

which covers all things from Rembrandt and Bartolomeo to Rodin and Monet.

Just to the north is the **Athénée Palace** (Str Episcopiei 1-3), so evocatively captured in its post-revolutionary, prostitute-teeming state by Robert Kaplan in *Balkan Ghosts*. Designed to out-do Paris in 1918, the hotel later served as a hotbed for Romania's 'KGB', the Securitatea. Now Hilton has cleaned it up – and priced rooms beyond their worth.

Just east is the grand domed **Ateneul Român** (Romanian Athenaeum; Map p628; ☎ 315 6875), which hosts prestigious concerts. Built in 1888, this is where George Enescu made his debut in 1898. Today it's home to the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra.

Just west is the local-loved **Çismigiu Garden**, with shady walks, cafés and a ridiculous number of benches on which to sit and stare at Bucharestians going by.

Northern Bucharest

Bucharest's most luxurious villas and parks hug the grand avenue **Șoseaua Kiseleff**, which begins at **Piața Victoriei** (Map p626; 📍 Piața Victoriei). A leafy walk north are two museums that pay tribute to Romania's rural heart.

About 200m north, the **Museum of the Romanian Peasant** (Muzeul Țăranului Român; Map p626; ☎ 212 9661; Șos Kiseleff 3; adult/student €1.80/0.60; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is so good you may want to hug it. Chosen as Europe's best museum in 1996, it makes the best of little money. Hand-made cards (in English) personalise exhibits, such as a full 19th-century home located upstairs, a heartbreakingly sweet room devoted to grandmas, and 'hidden' rooms that hand-scrawled directions usher you to. Don't miss the (rare) communism exhibit downstairs, with Lenin busts and portraits of Romanian leader Gheorghiu-Dej. An 18th-century Transylvanian church is in the back lot, as is the museum's **gift shop**.

About a kilometre north is the **Triumphal Arch** (Arcul de Triumf; Map p626), based on the Paris monument, and devoted to WWI and the reunification of Romania in 1918 (built 1935–36). Traffic roars by, so it's tricky to reach; its viewing platform at the top was closed at the time of writing.

Pathways just east lead to the lovely **Herăstrău Park** (Parcul Herăstrău), which hugs the chain of lakes that stripe northern Bucharest. There are plenty of cafés around. On the east side, about 500m north, a **ferry** crosses the lake regularly (3 lei one-way), and there are **rowboats**

(per hr 5 lei) to rent. Adjoining the park, but best accessed from Șos Kiseleff, is the **National Village Museum** (Muzelul Național al Satului; Map p626; ☎ 317 9110; Șos Kiseleff 28-30; adult/student €1.50/0.60; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sun, to 4pm Mon May-Sep, to 5pm Tue-Fri, to 4pm Mon Oct-Apr), a terrific open-air collection of several dozen homesteads, churches, mills and windmills that have been relocated from rural Romania. At times in July and August artisans in traditional garb show off various rural trades.

At the north end of Șos Kiseleff is the Stalinesque **Press House** (Casa Presei Libre), built in 1956. Note the imprint of the former hammer and sickle midway up the tower.

Western Bucharest

Not far from the train station, the pinky-peach **National Military Museum** (Muzeul Militar Național; Map p626; ☎ 319 6015; Str Mircea Vulcănescu 125-127; adult/student €1.50/0.75; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) doubles nicely as a Romanian history museum. Note the 1988 communist mural in the entry; in back is a superb hangar with Aurel Vlaicu's famed 1911 plane, which Romanians attest made the first 'real' flight.

SLEEPING

If you only have a couple of days, it may be worth trying to stay near the centre. The area around the grotty Gară de Nord has some cheaper options. Breakfast is included unless otherwise noted.

Budget

CENTRAL BUCHAREST

Hotel Muntenia (Map p628; ☎ 314 6010; Str Academiei 19-21; s/d with shared bath €15/21, d with private bath €51) Walls are yellowing and the façade's chipping, but the rooms are clean. Skip the private-bath option; it's hardly worth the extra euros. No breakfast.

NEAR THE TRAIN STATION

Vila 11 (Map p626; ☎ 0722 495 900; vila11bb@hotmail.com; Str Institutul Medico Militar 11; dm/s/d €10/18/28) Run by a Canadian family, this homy *pension* is on a back street. Call ahead; sometimes no one's around.

OUTSIDE THE CENTRE

Casa Albă (Map p626; ☎ 230 4525; Alea Privighetorilor 1-3; camp sites per tent €6, bungalows €22) This camping ground is in way-north Bucharest. Take bus 301 north from Piața Romană; get off a stop after the Băneasa airport and walk 500m east.

Funky Chicken (Map p626; ☎ 312 1425; funkychickenhostel@hotmail.com; Str Gen Berthelot 63; dm €8) Just a couple of blocks from Cișmigiu Gardens, this hostel occupies an historic home on a shady street, with three dorm rooms that sleep 18. No breakfast, but there's a kitchen and free cigarettes.

Butterfly Villa Hostel (Map p626; ☎ 0747 032 644; www.villa-butterfly.com; Str Dumitru Zosima 82; dm/s/d €9/14/26; 📍 📍) By far Bucharest's best hostel, run by a German-Romanian couple, Butterfly is not necessarily the best located. Free laundry, a roof terrace, all-day breakfasts and courtyard are bonuses. Bus 282 leaves from the train station, and bus 300 from Piața Romana.

Youth Hostel Villa Helga (Map p626; ☎ 610 2214; www.rotravel.com/hotels/helga; Str Salcânilor 2; dm/s/d €12/16/28; 📍 📍) A converted old villa east of the centre has nice, clean rooms, with a new kitchen to use, two private rooms, and patio seats under the vine shade. Prices drop after summer.

Midrange

CENTRAL BUCHAREST

Hanul lui Manuc (Manuc's Inn; Map p628; ☎ 313 1415; hmanuc@mc.ro; Str Franceză 62-64; s/d €36/60) Originally a 19th-century merchants' inn (*caravanserai*), this hotel is one of the city's oldest buildings and has an equally colourful guest list from its past including prostitutes, criminals and Lonely Planet authors. Sculpted wooden balconies line the terrace overlooking the courtyard. It's a bit dated, but the location and price make it a steal.

Rembrandt Hotel (Map p628; ☎ 313 9315; www.rembrandt.ro; Str Smârdan 11; s €63, d Mon-Fri €91-113, d Sat & Sun €81-93; 📍 📍) This wonderful, relatively new 15-room, Dutch-owned hotel faces the landmark National Bank in the historic centre. Rooms win serious points for polished wood floors, wall-size timber headboards and DVD players.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

If you're looking to save and be central, it's hard to beat **Hotel Carpați** (Map p628; ☎ 315 0140; carpati@compace.ro; Str Matei Millo 16; s/d with shared bath €26/42, d with private bath d €55-68), which has 40 recently renovated rooms – some are tiny, with little light – and a fun, rather scary, two-door lift. Breakfast comes with a little pomp in the Paris-style lobby lounge. All rooms have a TV and a sink.

NEAR THE TRAIN STATION

Hotel Astoria (Map p626; ☎ 318 9989; B-dul Dinica Golescu 27; s/d €30/45) Facing the station, the nine-floor Astoria, beside the railway tracks, carries some yesteryear grace.

Hotel Elizeu (Map p626; ☎ 319 1734; rezervari@hotелеlizeu.ro; Str Elizeu 11-13; s/d €46/57; 📍 📍) A notch up from the rest, this 54-room hotel is comfortable and modern, if a bit standard. It's in a quiet residential area a few blocks north of the station.

OUTSIDE THE CENTRE

Hotel Helios (Map p626; ☎ 310 7083; Str Lulia Hașden 16; s/d €66/77; 📍 📍) This 15-room hotel is only a few blocks from the train station, but feels far away – it faces a quaint Orthodox church. Stylish rooms have floor-to-ceiling wardrobes. Prices drop 20% Saturday and Sunday.

Top End

CENTRAL BUCHAREST

Hotel Opera (Map p628; ☎ 312 4857; www.hoteloprea.ro; Str Ion Brezoianu 37; s/d €120/140; 📍 📍) Set on a back-street corner, this 33-room, faintly Art Deco hotel goes all-out music theme inside. The rooms are small, but nicely arranged. Rates don't include 9% VAT.

OUTSIDE THE CENTRE

Hotel Duke (Map p626; ☎ 317 4186; www.hotelduke.ro; B-dur Dacia 33; s/d €130/150; 📍 📍) At Piața Romana, the 38-room Duke is a pleasant business-style hotel with mint-and-caramel rooms, and attentive staff. There's internet in the lobby, and a casual bar where suits chat, and it's located near central attractions and restaurants.

Golden Tulip (Map p626; ☎ 212 5558; www.goldentulipbucharest.com; Calea Victoriei 166; r €160 & €180; 📍 📍) This very stylish 82-room hotel opened close to the centre in 2005, giving Bucharest a needed modern push. Plush red chairs are set before full-wall glass windows in the stark rooms. Rates drop 20% Friday to Sunday.

EATING

International

Paradis (Map p628; ☎ 315 2601; Str Hristo Botev 10; dishes €1.80; 🕒 8am-10.30pm) Try the brilliant-value buffet lunch at this Lebanese joint: spicy aubergine stew or spinach over rice spinach stews, meatballs in tomato sauce, and mounds of flat bread.

Mediterraneo (Map p628; ☎ 211 5308; Str Icoanei 20; mains €3.60-6; 🕒 10am-midnight or later) This great little corner restaurant on a cobbled back lane

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bistro Vilacrosse (Map p628; ☎ 315 4562; Pasa-jul Macca/Vilacrosse; mains €3.30-8.10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) The small Vilacrosse borrows its style heavily from Parisian side streets, with sepia tones of Bucharest's most Parisian buildings, wood floors and gingham tablecloths. The food's good, including a wine-splattered Transylvania pork *filet* on a bed of (French!) fries and roasted cabbage. A few vegetarian options.

draws expats and locals for Turkified Mediterranean fare (fish, kebabs, pastas). Sunday brunch (35 lei) is a big deal.

Smart's (Map p626; ☎ 211 9035; Str Alex Donici 14; mains €4.50-9; 🍷 11am-late) On a shady lane, this great, popular pub serves (rather Romanian) pub fare, with a selection of salads (11 to 14 lei) and pastas (15 to 20 lei). It's popular, and a fine spot to sit over a bottle of Leffe.

Red Lion (Map p628; ☎ 315 1526; Str Academiei 1a; pizza €2.70-5.10; 🍷 9am-midnight Mon-Fri, 3pm-midnight Sat & Sun) This popular pizza-pasta place near the university fills two rooms, with locals looking for beer on draft (2 lei), pizzas (go for the large) and pastas (6 to 13 lei).

Casa Veche (Map p628; ☎ 0724 232 631; Str Enescu 15; pizza €4.20-6.60; 🍷 noon-midnight) With courtyard seats under vines, and traditional upstairs seating, this place wins Bucharest hearts for its great-quality crispy pizzas and a winner setting near the centre.

Romanian

Count Dracula Club (Map p628; ☎ 312 1353; www.count-dracula.ro; Splaiul Independenței 8a; meals €20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Sometimes you have to succumb to things, like this: a spooky home with blood-dripping walls and cosy rooms themed as hunting, medieval and Transylvanian, and a chapel-coffin room with impaled heads, hands reaching through walls, and blood-red lights. Plus, Drac himself shows up 'for a show' at 9.30pm on Tuesday and Friday.

La Mama (Map p628; ☎ 312 9797; Str Episcopiei 9; mains €3-5; 🍷 10am-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat) This converted villa, with its sprawling covered deck that's filled all hours, dates from the late 19th century. Its menu is stuffed with very tasty, meat-heavy options. The roasted pork neck (13 lei), with country-style potatoes, is unbeatable.

Cafes & Quick Eats

10 Coffee Bar (Map p628; ☎ 315 6098; Str Demetrie Dobrescu 5) In a chic spot looking out from a blown-out ruin of the 1989 clash at nearby Piața Revoluției, this two-floor café has back-lit wall-length B&W prints of the 1989 scene and candles on the table.

Snack Attack! (Map p628; ☎ 312 7664; Str Ion Câmpineanu 10; sandwiches €1.50; 🍷 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Fresh and cheap take-out panini, salads (including hummus and tabbouleh with tortillas).

DRINKING

Bucharest's budding bar scene is liveliest in the Str Lipsani area. Piața Universității is alive with revellers at the weekend, and hosts free outdoor pop concerts in summer.

Amsterdam Grand Café (Map p628; ☎ 313 7580; Str Covaci 6; 🍷 10am-2am) This rustic, wood-floor café has high ceilings and nooks to sit in, drink, and catch some live jazz some afternoons. There's food, but it's better for drinks.

Dubliner (Map p626; ☎ 505 Nicolae Titulescu 18; 🍷 9-2am) A long-time expat hang-out for Guinness on draft and football games, attracting a grab bag of fans; the steak sandwich (priced at €6.60) is super.

Fire Club (Map p628; ☎ 0722-390 946; Str Gabroveni 12) This big red-brick room usually has groups of students crouching on stools around small tables with bottles of Tuborg in hand. Rock and punk shows are staged in the basement.

La Butoaie (Map p628; B-dul Nicolae Bălcescu 2) Huge with uni students, this lively open-deck bar on the 5th floor of the Ion Luca Caragiale National Theatre fits hundreds, with benches and big pillows in seating areas. It fills early on warm days.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Piranha Club (Map p626; ☎ 315 9129; www.clubpiranha.ro; Spl Independenței 313; 🍷 10am-late) About 2.5km west of the centre, this student-dorm area teems with drinking and eating life on either side of the Dâmbovița River. This jungle lodge-type place has piranhas in aquariums, low-lit gazebos decked out like country homes, cosy seating when it's cold outside, and pretty good food. There are live shows often. Very unique. It's south of the river, a couple of hundred metres west of the Grozăvești metro station.

ENTERTAINMENT

Șapte Seri (Seven Evenings; www.sapteseri.ro) and *24-Fun* are free, weekly entertainment listings magazines (in Romanian).

Cinemas

Bucharest is fond of the movies, and plays foreign-language films in their original language. A few options include:

Cinema Pro (Map p628; ☎ 824 1360; Str IC Brătianu 6; tickets €2.40-3)

Hollywood Multiplex (Map p626; ☎ 327 7020; București Mall, Calea Vitan 55-59; tickets €2.50-4.50) Multi-screen jobbie.

Clubs

Club A (Map p628; ☎ 315 6853; Str Blănari 14) Run by students, this club is a classic and is beloved by all who go there. Indie pop-rock tunes rock the house until 5am Friday and Saturday nights.

Twice (Map p628; ☎ 313 5593; Str Sfânta Vineri 4, Sect 3; 🍷 9pm-5am) DJs and amateur stripping are part of the hip-to-hip youth dancing to two beats across two rooms. Come along and be prepared to sweat.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

The main gay venue in town is **Queen's** (Map p626; ☎ 0722 988 541; Str Juliu Barac 13; 🍷 noon-3am).

For more information on Romania's gay and lesbian community, see p687.

Opera & Classical Music

For information on seeing the philharmonic at the Ateneul Român (Romanian Athenaeum) see p630.

At the **Opera House** (Opera Română; Map p626; ☎ 313 1857; B-dul Mihail Kogălniceanu 70) you can enjoy a full-scale opera in a lovely building for between €1 and €4.

SHOPPING

For beautifully made woven rugs, table runners, national Romanian costumes, ceramics and other local crafts, don't miss the excellent folk-art shop inside the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (p630).

Librăria Noi (p625) has a great collection of antique books and maps.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air International flights use the **Henri Coanda Airport** (formerly Otopeni; ☎ 201 4788; www.otp-airport.ro; Șos

București-Ploiești), 16km north of Bucharest on the road to Brașov.

Arrivals and departures use marked side-by-side terminals (arrivals are to the north). There are **information desks** (☎ 204 1220; 🍷 24hr) in both terminals.

Romania's national airline is **Tarom** (Transporturile Aeriene Române; www.tarom.ro; Airport ☎ 201 400; Centre ☎ 337 0400; Spl Independenței 17; 🍷 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat).

Air Moldova (☎ 312 1258; www.airmoldova.md) also serves Henri Coanda.

Băneasa Airport (☎ 232 0020; Șos București-Ploiești 40), 8km north of the centre, is used for some internal and charter flights.

Bus

DOMESTIC DESTINATIONS

Bucharest's bus system is frankly a mess, scarred by ever-changing departure locations, companies and schedules. Try checking websites such as www.cdy.ro and www.autogara.ro, or asking your hotel to help with the latest. Or stick with the train.

The most popular routes are the maxitaxis to Brașov (€5.10, 2½ hours), which stop in Sinaia, Bușteni and Predeal on the way; **C&I** (☎ 256 8039; Str Ritmului 35) runs these from its 'station' 3.25km east of Piața Romana – it's four blocks north of metro station Piața Iancului. Buses 69 and 85 go there from Gară de Nord. Some continue on to Sighișoara (€8.10, five hours).

Every 45 minutes or so, maxitaxis head for Costanța (€9) from the so-called **Central Bus Station** (Autogara Gară de Nord; Map p626), which is located about 350m southeast of the train station.

See p635 for details on getting to Snagov.

INTERNATIONAL BUSES

Bulgaria

Maxitaxi service departs three times daily from the roadside '**Autogara Diego**' (Map p628; ☎ 311 1283; Splaiul Independenței 2K) and heads to Ruse, Bulgaria (€12 one way, three to four hours).

Turkey

Those who are Turkey-bound have several options leaving from around Gară de Nord, including **Ortadoğu Tur** (☎ 318 7538; Str Gară de Nord 6-8) and **Toros** (Map p626; ☎ 233 1898; Calea Griviței 134-136). The 12-hour trip costs about €36 one-way.

Western Europe

The biggest name in international buses is **Eurolines** (☎ 316 3661; www.eurolines.ro; Str Buzzeşti 44; ☎ 24hr), which links many Western European destinations with Bucharest, including two weekly buses to Athens (€80, 22 hours) and Berlin (€115), daily service to Rome (€115) and Vienna (€64), and three weekly to Paris (€125). Working with Eurolines, Atlassib (www.atlassib.ro) handles Italian destinations.

Car & Motorcycle

Bucharest offers some of the country's cheapest car-rental rates. Major car-rental agencies can be found at the Henri Coanda Airport arrivals hall. Cheaper is **C&V** (☎ 201 4611, 0788-998 877; www.dvtouring.ro), which offers Dacia Solenzas for €42 per day (including unlimited mileage and insurance); it falls to €27 per day if you rent over a week.

Parking a car in the centre, particularly off Piaţa Victoriei and Piaţa Universităţii, costs €0.30; look for the wardens in yellow-and-blue uniforms. In many places you can just pull onto the sidewalk.

Train

Gară de Nord (Map p626; ☎ 223 2060; Piaţa Gară de Nord 1) is the central station for national and international trains. Call ☎ 9521 or ☎ 9522 for telephone reservations. It has two halls, where same-day tickets can be purchased. Facing the station, the one to the right sells 1st- and 2nd-class domestic tickets; the one to the left sells international (marked 'casa internaţională') and 1st-class domestic tickets. If you don't have a ticket, you have to pay €0.15 to get on the platform.

For all advance tickets (over 24 hours before departure), go to **Agentie de Voiaj CFR office** (Map p628; ☎ 313 2643; www.cfr.ro; Str Domnita Anastasia 10-14; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.30pm Sat). A seat reservation is compulsory if you are travelling with an Inter Rail or Eurail pass. Wasteels agency on the platform (see p627) can help out too. International tickets must be bought in advance.

Some local trains to/from Constanţa use Gară Obor station, east of the centre. Bus 85 goes between the two stations.

Check the latest train schedules on either www.cfr.ro or the reliable German site www.bahn.de.

Sample direct daily service includes:

Destination	Price	Duration	Daily Departures
Braşov	€7.60	2½hr	hourly
Cluj-Napoca	€11-16	7½hr	six
Constanţa	€8.75	2"-4hr	almost hourly
Iaşi	€14.50	7hr	five
Sibiu	€14	5hr	three
Sighişoara	€8-12	4½hr	nine
Suceava	€15.50	8hr	one
Timişoara	€22.50	8hr	eight
Tulcea	€9.80	6hr	one

Daily international services include six trains to Budapest (13 to 15 hours); two trains to Sofia (11 hours) and Gorna Oryakhovitsa (near Veliko Târnovo, Bulgaria; 6½ hours); and one train to Belgrade (12 hours), Chişinău (13 hours), Istanbul (19 hours) and Kiev (27 hours), Moscow (39 hours).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport BUS

To get to Henri Coanda (Otopeni) or Băneasa airport take bus 783 from the city centre, which departs every 15 minutes between 5.37am and 11.23pm (every half-hour at weekends) from Piaţa Unirii and goes via Piaţa Victoriei.

Buy a ticket, valid for two trips, for €1 at any RATB (Régie Autonome de Transport de Bucureşti) bus-ticket booth near a bus stop. Once inside the bus remember to feed the ticket into the machine.

Băneasa is 20 minutes from the centre; get off at the 'aeroportul Băneasa' stop.

Henri Coanda is about 40 minutes from the city centre. The bus stops outside the departures hall then continues to arrivals.

To get to the centre from Otopeni, catch bus 783 from the downstairs ramp outside the arrivals hall; you'll need to buy a ticket from the stand at the north end of the waiting platform (to the right as you exit).

TAXI

Taking a reputable taxi from the centre to Otopeni should cost no more than €6 or €7.

Fly Taxi monopolises airport transfers and charges about €15 to the centre – go for a flat rate, and don't rely on the meter.

Public Transport

For buses, trams and trolleybuses buy tickets (€0.35) at any **RATB** (www.ratb.ro) street kiosk, marked 'casa de bilete' or simply 'bilete'.

Punch your ticket on board or risk a €10 on-the-spot fine.

Public transport runs from 5am to about 11pm (reduced service on Sunday). There's some info online. See p625 for a good map with routes.

Bucharest's metro dates from 1979 and has four lines and 46 stations. Trains run every five to seven minutes during peak periods and about every 20 minutes off-peak between 5.30am and 11.30pm.

To use the metro, buy a magnetic-strip ticket at the subterranean kiosks inside the main entrance to the metro station. Tickets valid for either two/10 journeys cost €0.60/1.90. A one-month unlimited travel ticket costs €5.75.

Taxi

Opt for a cab with a meter, and avoid the guys outside Gară de Nord. It's best to call one, or have a restaurant or hotel call for you. Reputable companies include **Cobalcescu** (☎ 9451), **CristTaxi** (☎ 9461) and **Taxi Sprint** (☎ 9495). Check the meter is on; rates are posted on the door.

AROUND BUCHAREST

The tomb of infamous tyrant Vlad Ţepeş lures visitors to **Snagov** (about 35km north of Bucharest) – as much as the large lake and leisure complex. Devour the legend of Dracula by visiting the grave where his headless torso is said to lie, buried in the famous 16th-century **church and monastery**, on an island in Snagov Lake.

Most visitors go by organised day trip – and hostels like Butterfly Villa (p631) in Bucharest arrange these, usually dropping by **Căldăruşani Monastery** 6km southeast.

It's possible to go by maxitaxi, which leave hourly from Piaţa Universităţii via Piaţa Romana, and the Press House in Bucharest (€1 each way). Once there, a good destination is **Complex Astoria** (☎ 316 7550; r€30-45), which has a pool, tennis courts and boats to rent to take to the church. It's on the south side of the lake a few kilometres east of the town centre.

WALLACHIA

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

Occupying Romania's modest southerly swipe are some of the country's most beautiful and peaceful monasteries, refreshingly free of tour buses. The heart of the Roma community can be found here, tearing through villages on horse-drawn carts and tending unusual houses. In the summer months, fearless drivers will want to navigate the heart-stopping Transfăgărăşan road – said to be one of the highest roads in Europe – cutting dramatically across the Făgăraş Mountains from its start point at Curtea de Argeş.

CURTEA DE ARGEŞ

☎ 0248 / pop 33,365

Curtea de Argeş was a princely seat in the 14th century and its church is considered to be the oldest monument preserved in its original form in Wallachia. The exquisite 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 Făgăraş Mountains.

Orientation

The train station, a 19th-century architectural monument, is 100m north of the bus station on Str Albeşti. The centre is a 10-minute walk along Str Albeşti 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, a camping ground and hotels (signposted) are a short walk.

Information

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 721 451; B-dul Basarabilor 27-29; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) within Hotel Posada.

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

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

Sights

PRINCELY COURT

The ruins of the **Princely Court** (Curtea Domnească; ☎ 9am-6pm; admission €0.60), 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 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 **Biserica Sân Nicoară** (Sân Nicoară Church).

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 church's walls, in accordance with a local custom obliging the mason to bury a loved one alive within the church to ensure the success of his work. Manole told his workers that the first wife to bring their food the next day would be entombed. The workers duly went home and warned their women – and so Manole's wife arrived first.

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 British-born Queen Marie (1875–1938) whose heart, upon her request, was put in a gold casket and buried in her favourite palace in Balcic 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 are also buried in the *pronaos*.

In the park opposite lies the legendary **Manole's Well**. Legend has it that 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

Pensiunea Ruxi (☎ 0727-827 675; Str Negru Voda 104; www.pensiunea-ruxi.ro; r €19) Directly across from Hotel Confarg. While the rooms are new and comfortable, the real treat is the homy atmosphere; the family will go to heart-breaking lengths to make sure you're taken care of. Breakfast costs €2.

Hotel Posada (☎ 721 451; www.posada.ro; B-dul Basarabilor 27–29; 1-star s €19, 2-star s/d €23/30, 3-star €30/40; ☎) Try to get a front room here to watch the sunset over the mountains. It offers both renovated and unrenovated rooms.

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 tubs and the suites are admirably swanky for the price.

Eating & Drinking

Montana Pizzeria (B-dul Basarabilor; pizza €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 here and enjoy Romanian dishes.

Be Happy Cafe (B-dul Basarabilor; admission €0.75; ☎ to 5am) A café during the week, this place transforms into a thumping club on the weekends.

Getting There & Away

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

State buses run from the bus station to/from Arefu, Câmpulung Muscel, Braşov and Bucharest (two daily). Some buses travel only on weekdays, others 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).

TRANSYLVANIA

Probably no place in Eastern Europe gets more imaginative awe than Transylvania, where you find Gothic castles that look as if fanged goons would climb down their walls and wing-flap over moats to villages where they would pick and choose their daily meal of human flesh. Beyond the myths, Transylvania is flat-out gorgeous. Separated from Wallachia to the south by a curling stripe of the giant Carpathian Mountains – the so-called Transylvania

Alps – here's what travel's about: mountain hikes and skiing, valleys of Saxon towns with fortified churches from the Middle Ages, and (yes) a Dracula site or two. The two main entry points are Braşov (a few hours north of Bucharest), with castles nearby and cobbled glory in town; to the northwest, en route to Budapest, is Cluj-Napoca, a booming student town.

Picking an itinerary around plump Transylvania is up for grabs. The 'main-three' for most visitors – and easily visited in tandem – are Braşov, the must-see citadel town of Sighişoara; and Sibiu, an EU 'Cultural Capital' in 2007. Some say, and with reason, that Romania begins only when you get to the villages. If you can, get some wheels and venture out on your own into Saxon villages between the two, or further afield, where horse carts and feet are the primary ways of getting about.

SINAIA

☎ 0244 / pop 14,240

A Carpathian resort that attracted kings and queens, and now – being on the Bucharest–Braşov highway – hordes of vacationing Romanian families, Sinaia is set on the fir-clad towering Bucegi Mountains with ski runs and hiking trails for year-round fun. Sinaia can be quiet despite all the hubbub, but King Carol I's Peleş Castle reckons to out-majestify Bran's for day-trippers looking for jaw-dropping excess. There's plenty of century-old buildings, made to impress the passing royalty (some now fashioned into hotels) to gawk at too.

The resort is alleged to have gained its name from Romanian nobleman Mihai Cantacuzino, who, following a pilgrimage to Mt Sinai in Israel in 1695, founded the Sinaia Monastery. Sinaia developed into a major resort after King Carol I selected the area for his summer residence in 1870.

Orientation & Information

The train station is directly below the centre of town. From the station climb up the stairway across the street to busy B-dul Carol I. The centre and cable car are to the left; the palace is uphill to the right.

Amco's fold-out *Ploieşti* map includes a so-so city map. Better is the SunCart *Sinaia* map (8.70 lei), which also includes Buşteni.

BOOKSHOPS

Flower Power (B-dul Carol I; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri) Carries area maps, man.

EMERGENCY

Salvumont (☎ 313 131; Primărie, B-dul Carol I) Also at Cota 2000 at top of chairlift; 24-hour mountain-rescue service.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Cafe (Str Aosta 3; per hr €0.90; ☎ 9am–11pm) Sign points to side of building.

LAUNDRY

Eco Laundry (☎ 0788 660 788; per load €2.40; B-dul Carol I 31; ☎ 7am–11pm) Drop-off laundry behind the big grey building.

MONEY

Banca Transilvania (B-dul Carol I 14; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–12.30pm Sat) Has a 24-hour ATM; foreign-exchange service is next door.

POST & TELEPHONE

Central post office (☎ 311 591; B-dul Carol I 3;

☎ 7am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon Sat)

Telephone office (☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat) In the same building as the central post office.

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL

AGENCIES

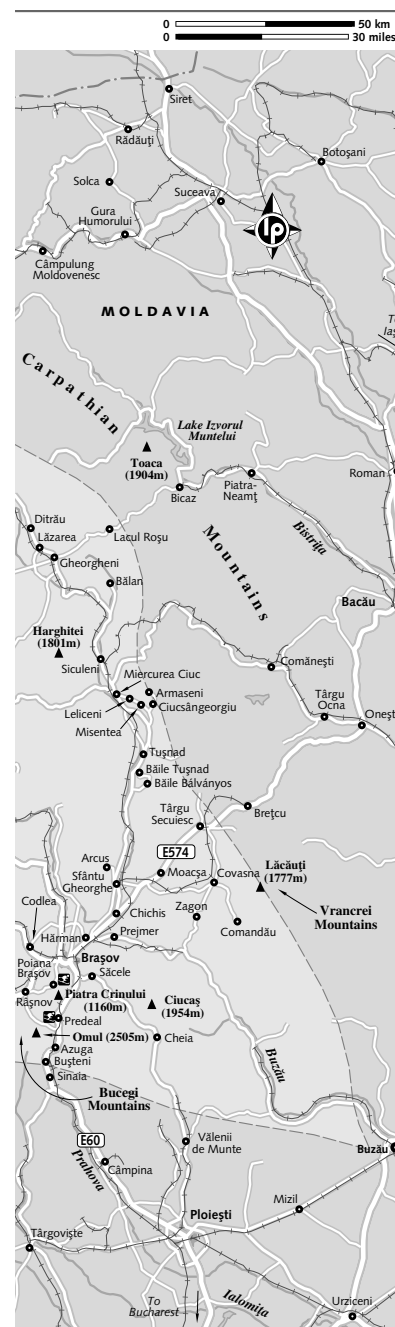
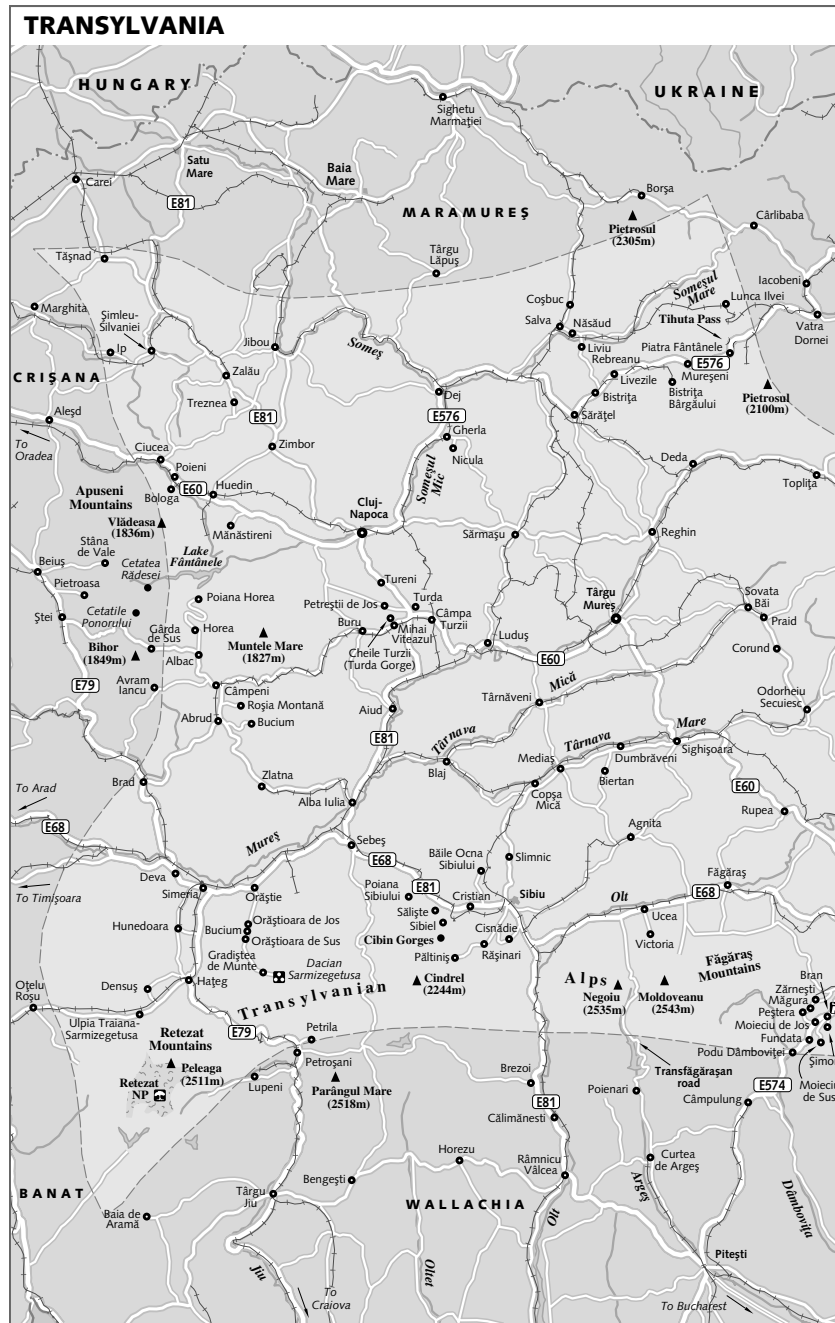
Sinaia Tourism Information Centre (☎ 315 656; CIP_T_sinaia@yahoo.com; B-dul Carol I 47; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 'optional' Sat) Snappy attendants soften with patience. Lots and lots of information and brochures and maps, but can't book rooms.

Dracula's Land (☎ 311 441; B-dul Carol I, 14; ☎ 9am–5pm or 6pm) It hides its tacky name for the street (sign merely says 'Tourist Office'), but some chummy blokes inside can help find a villa or hotel room for you, arrange hiking guides, or change money.

Sights

Full of pomp and brimming with confidence of the then new Romanian monarchy, King Carol I's magnificent **Peleş Castle** (☎ 310 205; compulsory tours adult/child €3.60/1.50; ☎ 11am–5pm Wed, 9am–5pm Thu–Sun), a 20-minute walk up from the centre, is really a palace, with its fairy-tale turrets rising above acres of green meadows and grand reception halls fashioned in Moorish, Florentine and French styles. Endless heavy wood-carved ceilings and gilded pieces practically overwhelm our wee mortal minds. Worthwhile tours take in the first floor only – note the central vacuuming system.

About 100m up the hill from the castle, the German-medieval **Pelişor Palace** (☎ 310 918; compulsory tours adult/child €2/0.65; ☎ 11am–5pm Wed, 9am–



5pm Thu-Sun) has a hard time competing with its neighbour. Built by King Carol to house his nephew (and future king) Ferdinand (1865–1927) and wife Marie (who didn't get on well with King C and loathed Peleş). Its Art Nouveau style is certainly less showy. The popular Marie died in the arched gold room upstairs.

Activities

Near the cable car, **Snow** (☎ 311 198; Str Cuza Voda 2a; ⏰ 9am-6pm) rents out skis and snowboards for €10.50 per day, and bikes for €12.

Skis can also be rented at Cota 1400; mountain bikes can be rented at the **bike outlet** (☎ 314 906; Str Octavia Goga 1; per hr/day €2.40/12; ⏰ 8am-7pm or 8pm).

Sleeping

Travel agencies around town can find you a room in one of the countless pensions starting from €22. In the Bucegi mountains there are several cabanas that, purportedly, always have a space for a hiker in need of winks. Some have no electricity.

Hotel Furnica (☎ 311 151; Str Furnica 50; s €19, d €30-38) Built by the Peleş architects, the century-old, faux-Jacobian 26-room Furnica (250m west of Peleş) gives you a sense of royalty for cheap. Rooms are clean but dated, with varied layouts, and some overlooking the interior courtyard with restaurant.

Hotel Caraiman (☎ 313 551; B-dul Carol I, 4; palace@rdslink.ro; s/d/apt €33/44/61) Of the faded-glorious century-old hotels – and Sinaia teems with the guys – we like the 1881 red-and-white Caraiman most, for being less royal ball and more rustic and laid-back.

Marami Hotel (☎ 315 560; www.marami.ro; Str Furnica 52; s/d/ste €50/55/60; ☎) The chalet-style frame looks a little cheap, but inside the Marami's 17 rooms are probably Sinaia's best midrange option. The vibe is slightly Art Deco, with pink-sand bedspreads and rust carpets.

Eating

There are a few fast-food stands and pizza places along B-dul Carol I.

Irish House (☎ 310 060; www.irishhouse.ro; B-dul Carol I, 80; mains €2-6; ⏰ 10am-midnight) Guinness is on tap (€1.65), ceilings are green, and a few token Irish dishes are on the menu, but the House's two-room rustic spot fills for its good Romanian food.

Snow (☎ 311 198; Str Cuza Voda; mains €3-6; ⏰ 8am-midnight) Snow gets busiest with ski and bike

BUCEGI MOUNTAINS

Sinaia and Buşteni, 5km north, are the principal gateways to this stunning (and popular) mountain range of dizzying skiing, mountain bike and hiking fun on a plateau situated high up on the border of Transylvania and Wallachia. Hikes are well-marked – some make for great biking. Things get harsh when winds and weather rush over the plateau. There are cabanas up here, but most visitors go as a day trip. Talk to Snow (see this box) in Sinaia about ski runs and biking trails or to get equipment.

From Sinaia, the 30-person **cable-car station** (☎ 311 764, 311 872; to Cota 1400/2000 €3/5.70, return €5.40/10.80; ⏰ 8.30am–4pm or 5pm Tue–Sun) leaves half-hourly with two station points marked by elevation, but lines stack for a couple of hours in summer (roughly mid-June to mid-September); get there by 7am.

Buşteni's cable-car station (☎ 320 306; one-way/return €5.70/11.40; ⏰ 8am–3.45pm Wed–Mon) is another access point.

It's possible to hike from the top to Bran – it's about five hours' hike from atop Cota 1200 to Cabana Omul, and another five downhill into Bran. It's a very rough hike going up from Bran. Day or overnight trips require the 1:70,000 Dimap trail map of Bucegi with trail marker details.

In town **Snow** (☎ 311 198; Str Cuza Voda 2a; ⏰ 9am–6pm) rents skis (€10 per day) and bikes in summer.

rentals, but it's outdoor-indoor Romanian restaurant is about as good as the centre gets.

La Brace (☎ 310 348; Str Coştileni 27; mains €3–9; ⏰ 10am–midnight Sun–Fri, 10–1am Fri) Amid trees, and near where the cable car passes, this fun multifloor place gets busy for pizza mostly – and the oven-baked pies are well done. It's a 15-minute walk from the centre; follow the many signs.

Getting There & Away

Sinaia is on the Bucharest–Braşov rail line – 126km from the former and 45km from the latter – so jumping on a train to Bucharest (1½ hours) or Braşov (€4, one hour) is a cinch.

Buses and maxitaxis run every 45 minutes between roughly 7am and 10pm from the central bus stop on B-dul Carol I to Azuga and Buşteni, some all the way to Bucharest or Braşov. Rates are less than the train, and they go quicker too; pay the driver when you board. There's little room for luggage usually.

BRAŞOV

☎ 0268 / pop 284,600

Transylvania's number-one hub is also the first Saxon town north of Bucharest, and its setting, ringed by mountains and verdant hills, ensures Braşov (Brassó in Hungarian) fills with tourists. But locals don't have that cynical jadedness some touristy towns get. Baroque façades and bohemian outdoor cafés spill onto brick sidewalks around the centre, particularly around lovely Piaţa Sfatului, one of Romania's finest squares. City strolls, good

food and day-trip potential – hiking or skiing in the Bucegi Mountains, castling in Bran, Râşnov and Sinaia – can easily fill a week.

Braşov started out as a German mercantile colony named Kronstadt. At the border of three principalities, it became a major medieval trading centre. The Saxons built some ornate churches and town houses, protected by a massive wall that still remains. Earlier this decade Braşov residents woke one morning to find a giant, rather tacky, 'Hollywood'-style Braşov sign on the facing Mt Tâmpa; one local laughed it off, 'Do they think I'm too old to remember where I am?'

Orientation

Several brick ped lanes lead from central Piaţa Sfatului, including Str Republicii, which leads north to B-dul Eroilor and Parcul Central. B-dul Eroilor also links two other main thoroughfares, Str Mureşenilor to its west and Str Nicolae Bălcescu to its east.

The train station is 3km northeast of the city centre. Braşov has a few bus stations – Autogară 1, next to the train station, is the most active.

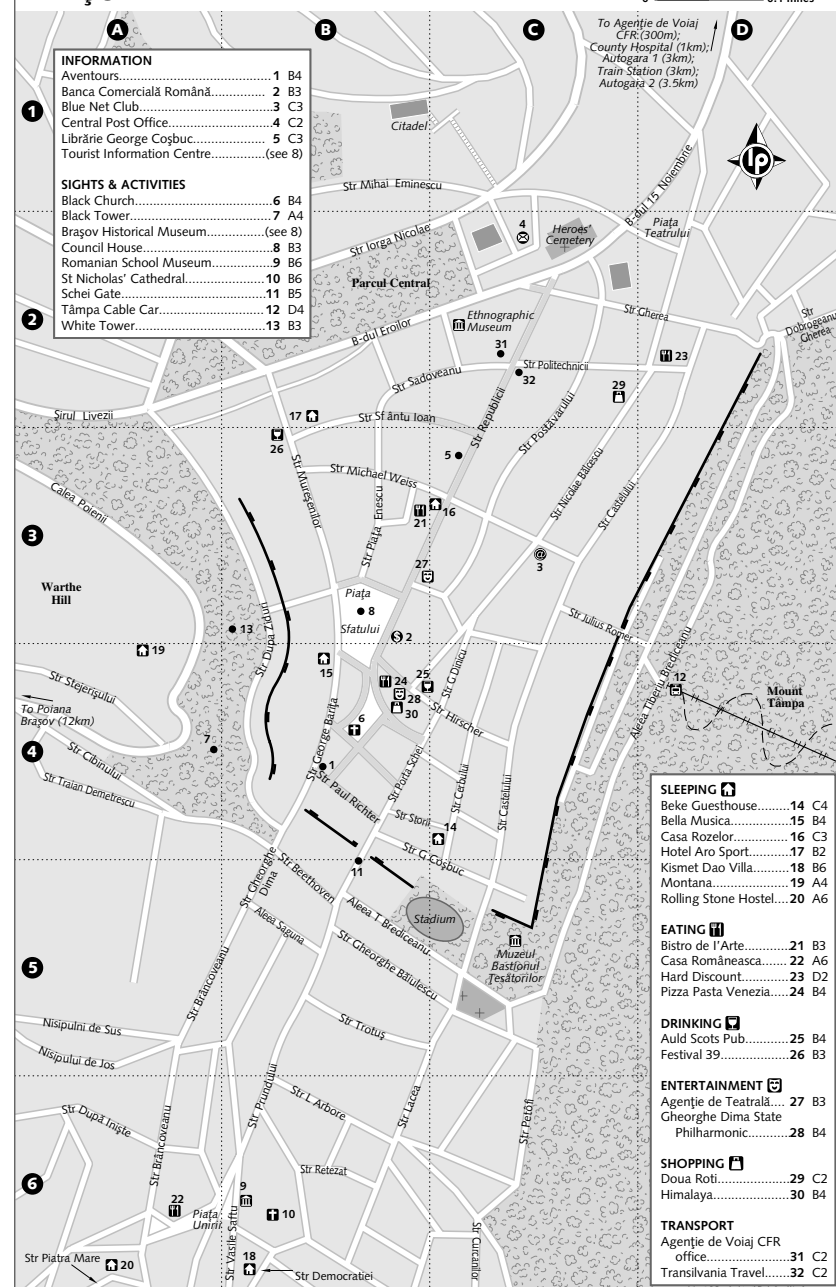
Information

BOOKSHOPS
Librărie George Coşbuc (☎ 444 395; Str Republicii 29; ⏰ 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat)

EMERGENCY

Salvamt (☎ 471 517, 0725-826 668; Str Varga 23) Does 24-hour emergency rescue for the mountains.

BRAŞOV



INTERNET ACCESS

Blue Net Club (☎ 0740-839 449; Str Michael Weiss 26; per hr €0.50; ☎ 24hr)

MEDICAL SERVICES

County Hospital (☎ 333 666; Calea Bucureşti 25-27; ☎ 24hr) Northwest of the centre.

MONEY

You'll find numerous ATMs, banks and exchange offices on and around Str Republicii and B-dul Eroilor. **Banca Comercială Română**, (Piaţa Sfatului 14; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat), charges 1.5% (US\$5 minimum) for changing travellers cheques and gives cash advances on Visa or MasterCard.

POST

Central post office (☎ 411 609; Str Iorga Nicolae 1; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist information centre (☎ 419 078; www.brasov.city.ro; Piaţa Sfatului 30; ☎ 9am-5pm) In the gold city council building, the English-speaking staff can point you to tour services, offer free brochures and track down hotel vacancies.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Aventours (☎ 472 718; www.discoveromania.ro; Str Paul Richter 1; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) This small agency, led by English-speaking guides, offers great tailor-made tours (particularly mountain-based ones) and oodles of information on the area.

Sights

Though many of the attractions (including a handful not mentioned here) hardly compete with Bucharest's, Braşov's sense of medieval glory still stands strong.

A good starting point for a walk is central **Piaţa Stafalui**, where witches were once burned and prisoners tortured in the gold **Council House** (Casa Sfatului), which dates from 1420; listen closely when passing (we hear a caretaker quit after hearing 'ghostly screams' from the tower at night). The building also houses the good tourist information centre and unmemorable **Braşov Historical Museum** (☎ 472 350; adult/student €0.85/0.57; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May).

Peeking up from the south, the Gothic **Black Church** (Biserica Neagră; adult/child €1/0.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, mass at 10am Sun), built between 1384 and 1477, gained its name after a 1689 fire blackened its walls. Inside the church (supposedly

the largest Gothic place of worship between Vienna and Istanbul) see apse statues moved from outside and 120 fabulous Turkish rugs, merchants' gifts after Ottoman shopping sprees. Organ recitals on the 4000-pipe instrument are usually held in July and August, at 6pm Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (4 lei).

A couple of blocks east, cobblestone **Str Sforii** is one of Europe's narrowest 'streets', with perfectly framed views of the 'Hollywood'-style Braşov sign that looks over town from Mt Tâmpa. To reach it, take the **Tâmpa cable car** (Telecabina; ☎ 478 657; one-way/return €0.90/1.80; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun), well worth it for the stunning views of town and access to a few hiking trails.

From the cable-car station, you'll notice that much of the town's original walls still encircle the town centre. At the south end, the neoclassical **Schei Gate** (1828) separated the centre with the Schei District, where – in Saxon days – the Romanians lived. Stop by the black-spired Orthodox **St Nicholas' Cathedral** (St Nicolae din Scheii; ☎ 6am-9pm), which dates from the 14th century and is home to the small **Romanian School Museum** (☎ 511 411; adult/student €0.90/0.60; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun). It's accessed from Piaţa Unirii.

Leave time to look out over the centre from the two towers on the hillside just west of the centre – it's popular when the setting sun puts a golden hue on Braşov; the **Black Tower** (Turnul Neagru) and **White Tower** (Turnul Alba), which are actually rather white, are reached on a lovely promenade alongside the western city walls and a rushing stream. A sideroad leads to the promenade from about 200m south of the Black Church.

Sleeping HOSTELS

Both hostels are near Piaţa Unirii, and reached by bus 4 from the train station (get out at last stop).

Kismet Dao Villa (☎ 514 296; www.kismetdao.ro; Str Democratiei 28; dm €10-11, d €24) Set up in a rather dorm-y type building, the four-floor, six-room villa is a good budget choice with video games on the TV, playful staff, and good-value day trips to Bran and area attractions.

Rolling Stone Hostel (☎ 513 965, 0744-876 970; www.rollingstone.ro; Str Piatra Mare 2A; dm/r from €10/28; ☎) Run by a long-time Braşov institution (Maria and Grig Bolea), the Stone is a welcoming hostel spot, with a small pool in the outside courtyard. Some guests have a hard time keeping up with the staff's energy. It's

homy and scenic, but skip the overpriced tours.

GUESTHOUSES & HOTELS

Hotel Aro Sport (☎ 478 800; Str Sfântu Ioan 3; s/d €11/16) Here's what Eastern Europe travel used to be about – old boxy rooms, a sink in the corner, a shower down the hall. It's quite clean though and the price is right. There's no breakfast.

Beke Guesthouse (☎ 511 997; Str Cerbului 32; r €11-14) Ever homy, this lovely Hungarian-speaking couple runs a handful of simple rooms (with shared bath) that look over a vine-covered courtyard. Often they'll bring by a jug of homemade wine. No breakfast, no sign, no English.

Montana (☎ 0723 614 534; Calea Poeniei; s €42-44, d €52-54) This super Brady Bunch-style Kermit-green six-room hillside guesthouse is up the hill from the White Tower. It has slanted cedar roofs and seriously pastel room themes. Pay €2 more for rooms with fridge and balcony.

Bella Musica (☎ 477 956; www.bellamusica.ro; Piaţa Sfatului 19; s/d €63/77; ☎ ☎) Opened in 2005, the terrific 22-room Musica has very stylish rooms with soft lighting, textured orange walls and old-style wood desks to write poems on.

Casa Rozelor (☎ 475 212; www.casarozelor.ro; Str Michael Weiss 20; r €88; ☎) In a central back alley, this lovely German-run three-room guesthouse mixes up themes (eg a loft with a red-leather sofa facing a 15th-century brick wall). There are no TVs.

Eating

Hard Discount (Str Nicolae Bălcescu; ☎ 24hr) Fully stocked supermarket next to the indoor-outdoor fruit and vegetable market.

Pizza Pasta Venezia (☎ 470 511; Str Hirscher 2; pastas & pizzas from €2.50; ☎ 11am-midnight or 1am) Wall-sized Venetian paintings and soft lighting – and cheaper prices – helps this cosy Italian restaurant fill before its similar-themed neighbours.

Bistro de l'Arte (☎ 0722 219 980; Piaţa Enescu 11; mains €2.50-4.50; ☎ 9am-1am Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) In the bottom of a cosy 15th-century building, the Bistro serves great meals – sandwiches, fish *filets*, breakfasts. There's excellent loose teas and wi-fi access.

Casa Româneasca (Piaţa Unirii; mains €3-6; ☎ noon-midnight) Deep in the Schei district, away from trolling tourists, this *casa* serves tasty *sarmalute cu mamaliguta* (boiled beef rolled with vegetables and cabbage).

Drinking

Auld Scots Pub (☎ 470 183; Str Hirscher 10; ☎ 11am-2am) Capturing local imagination, the kilts and Connery on the walls of this inviting bar can be forgiven because of its tasteful sitting areas, three-board dart room and far better-than-average pub fare.

Festival 39 (☎ 478 664; Str Mureşenilor 23; ☎ 10-1am) Cosy dark-lit room with happy locals filling the tables and bars when other bars are empty.

Entertainment

The **Gheorghe Dima State Philharmonic** (☎ 473 058; www.sfbv.home.ro; Str Hirscher 10) performs mainly between September and May. Tickets can be purchased at the **Agentie de Teatrală** (☎ 471 889; Str Republicii 4; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 2pm Sat).

Shopping

Himalaya (☎ 477 855; www.himalaya.ro; Piaţa Sfatului 17; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) A great sports store with ski and hiking boots, sleeping bags, rock-climbing gear. Staff double as guides.

Doua Roti (☎ 0740 125 984; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 55; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Bike shop with used bikes.

Getting There & Around BUS

Maxitaxis and minibuses are the best way to reach places near Braşov, including Bran, Râşnov and Sinaia. Otherwise it's generally better to go by train.

The most accessible station is **Autogară 1** (☎ 427 267), next to the train station (reached by bus 4 from the centre), a ramshackle lot with a booming maxitaxi business (hourly jobs go to-and-fro on the Târgu Mureş-Sighişoara-Braşov-Buşteni-Bucharest route) and some long-distance buses. From 6am to 7.30pm maxitaxis leave every half-hour for Bucharest (€5.25, 2½ hours), stopping in Buşteni and Sinaia. About four or five maxitaxis leave for Sibiu (€3.90, 2½ hours), stopping in Făgăraş town, and Iaşi (€10). Bus 4 reaches the centre from the train station (pre-buy ticket). From the centre, hail a bus at the corner of Str Nicolae Bălcescu and Str Gherea.

Autogară 2 (Bartolomeu; ☎ 426 332; Str Avram Iancu 114), a kilometre west of the train station, sends half-hourly buses to Râşnov (€0.45, 25 minutes) and Bran (€0.75, 40 minutes) from roughly 6.30am to 11.30pm. A dozen daily buses go to Zărneşti (€0.75, one hour), less

on weekends. Take bus 12 to/from the centre (it stops at the roundabout just north of the station).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Car-rental rates are more expensive than in Bucharest, Sibiu or Cluj. **Transilvania Travel** (☎ 477 623; www.transilvaniatravel.com; Str Republicii 62; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) rents cars from €45 daily; prices will drop by €10 daily if you rent for a week or more.

TAXI

Taxi drivers seem pretty honest in Braşov. A couple of good agencies include **Martax** (☎ 313 040) and **Tod** (☎ 321 111). Taking a taxi to the 'three castles' in Bran, Râşnov and Sinaia costs about €70.

TRAIN

Advance tickets are sold at the **Agenteie de Voiaj CFR office** (☎ 477 015; Str 15 de Noiembrie 43; ☹ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri).

Daily domestic train service includes the following (prices are for second-class seats on rapid trains): at least hourly to Bucharest (€7.50, 2½ hours), a dozen to Sighişoara (€6.50, 2½ hours), nine to Sibiu (€7, 2¾ hours), five to Cluj-Napoca (€11.70, six hours), one to Iaşi (€10.50, 8½ hours).

International links include three daily trains to Budapest (€40/70 seat/sleeper, 14 hours), two to Vienna (€75/100, 18 hours) and also one daily train to Prague (21 hours) and Istanbul (19 hours).

The **left-luggage office** (per day small/big bag €0.60/1.80; ☹ 24hr) is located in the underpass that leads out from the tracks.

AROUND BRAŞOV Bran & Râşnov

☎ 0268

No Dracula or vampires await, and in fact Vlad Ţepeş supposedly only dropped by once in the 15th century, but it's hard to skip so-called 'Dracula's castle', 30km south of Braşov. The (surprisingly) famous **Bran Castle** (☎ 238 332; www.brancastrlemuseum.ro; adult/students & child €3/1.50; ☹ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, noon-6pm Mon May-Sep, 9am-4pm Tue-Sun) dates from 1378. At first look, the 60m castle, set on a rocky outcrop between facing hills, certainly seems vampirific, but inside – elbowing past tour groups – it's a little bit of an anticlimax. Queen Marie made many summer retreats here in the 1920s, high-lighted with exhibits inside.

Râşnov, 12km toward Braşov, doubles the castle intake with its own appealing offer. The ruins of the 13th-century **Râşnov fortress** (Cetatea Râşnov; ☎ 230 255; adult/child €2.70/1.50; ☹ 9am-8pm May-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Apr). From the central square, steps lead up the hill where inclined alleys and a museum await.

SLEEPING

Generally Bran is a less appealing base than Braşov or other villages in the area. **Antrec** (☎ 236 340, 0788-411 450; www.antrec.ro; Str Principală 509; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) arranges private accommodation in the area. Cabana Bran

Castel, just 600m from the castle, was closed for renovation at research time.

Vila Bran (☎ 236 866; www.vilabran.ro; Str Principală 238; r €28-40) This 58-room five-building complex is a bit touristy – there are three restaurants, a zip line (flying fox) over a creek, an indoor BB court – but the view of the hills is worth it.

Casa Contelui (☎ 0723-005 378; www.casacontelui.ro; Str Bălcescu 16; r with shared/private bathroom €23/28) Green signs from Râşnov centre point to this lovely fenced-off six-room farmhouse-guesthouse with an English-speaking owner.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses marked 'Bran-Moeciu' (€0.70, one hour) depart every half-hour from Braşov's Autoară 2. Return buses to Braşov leave Bran every half-hour from roughly 7am to 6pm in winter, 7am to 10pm in summer. All buses to Braşov stop each way at Râşnov.

From Bran there are about a dozen buses daily to Zărneşti (€0.70, 40 minutes).

Poiana Braşov

Braşov's skiers prefer this **mountain** (www.poiana-brasov.ro), 14km from Braşov, over Sinaia's, reached by an easy bus trip. Skis can be rented for €12, an all-day pass is about €17. There are good intermediate runs, and a couple of advanced slopes, plus hiking trails in summer.

Cabana Cristianul Mare (☎ 0741 110 092; r with shared bathroom per person €10, d with private bathroom €34), just down from the top of the lift, is a super place to kick back over berry tea or beer; rooms are available.

Bus 20 leaves from B-dul Eroilor in front of the County Library in Braşov every half-hour for Poiana Braşov (€0.75), where it's a 20-minute walk to the slopes.

Zărneşti

☎ 0268

This windswept and rather down-and-out town at the edge of the lovely, rugged Piatra Craiului National Park gives off a bit of a *Twilight Zone* vibe. If only Nicole Kidman had hung around a little – or at all – when she was a couple of kilometres away filming *Cold Mountain*. Locals are particularly nice, and Zărneşti provides an excellent springboard to nearby hikes.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Buses stop at a roundabout, near the post office and about 100m past the city hall along

Str Metropolit Ion Meţianu. The train station is about 1km east of city hall.

The helpful **Piatra Craiului National Park Office** (☎ 223 165; www.pcr.ai.ro; Str Raului 27; ☹ 8am-5pm or 6pm Mon-Fri), about 2km towards the mountains (west) from the centre, offers guide maps and guides (from €22 per day).

HIKING

The 14,800-hectare Piatra Craiului and its twin-peaked Piatra Mică (Stone of the Prince; no jokes) rise southwest of town. Day-hike loops are an option. Follow the blue vertical-stripe signs along the road south of town, then the yellow vertical-stripe signs back, for a four- or five-hour trip that goes through the gorge where Jude Law got shot in *Cold Mountain*. More difficult hikes scale the peaks from the back (north) side; ask at the park office.

SLEEPING

Cabana Gura Raului (☎ 0722-592 375; s/d €8.50/17) A bit wobbly, but set at the outset of Zărneşti Canyon at the end of town (follow Str Raului 500m past the national park office), this fading cabana offers 17 boxy rooms and food.

Pensuine Fabius (☎ 0722-523 199; Str Dr Senchea 7; r €19) Run by a lovely family (which includes two priests), the five-room Fab, which is in town, offers semirustic rooms with TV and private bath. It's about 75m south from the bus stop.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are 14 buses leaving weekdays to Autoară 2 in Braşov (€0.70, one hour), and about half that at weekends. About five or six daily buses head to Bran (€0.70, 40 minutes).

By rail, five daily trains link Braşov with Zărneşti (€0.80, 50 minutes), stopping at Râşnov on the way.

SIGHIŞOARA

☎ 0265 / pop 32,300

He was born here. And for many visitors to this dreamy, medieval citadel town – with half-a-millennium-old townhouses of bright colours overlooking hilly cobbled streets and church bells that clang in the early hours – seeing where Dracula made his first steps is enough to justify a quick drop-by. But it's hardly the end of Sighişoara (Schässburg in German, Segesvár in Hungarian). Cute little museums uncover some colourful local history. The low hills that flank the town lead to pastures and forests that are home to traditional Saxon villages. Yes, bus

DRACULA VS VLAD!

We'll never know who'd win in a fight, but at least here's a comparison between the very-real Vlad Ţepeş (1431-76) and the very-fake wing-capable Dracula.

Lived in Transylvania?

Drac: Yes, Bram Stoker puts his home near Bistriţa, northeast of Cluj-Napoca.

Vlad: No, his real home is south of the Carpathians in Poienari, Wallachia.

Fearful feasts?

Drac: Yes, he ate people.

Vlad: Yes, he ate steaks while Turks wriggled on skin-piercing rectum-to-underarm stakes.

Bi-curious?

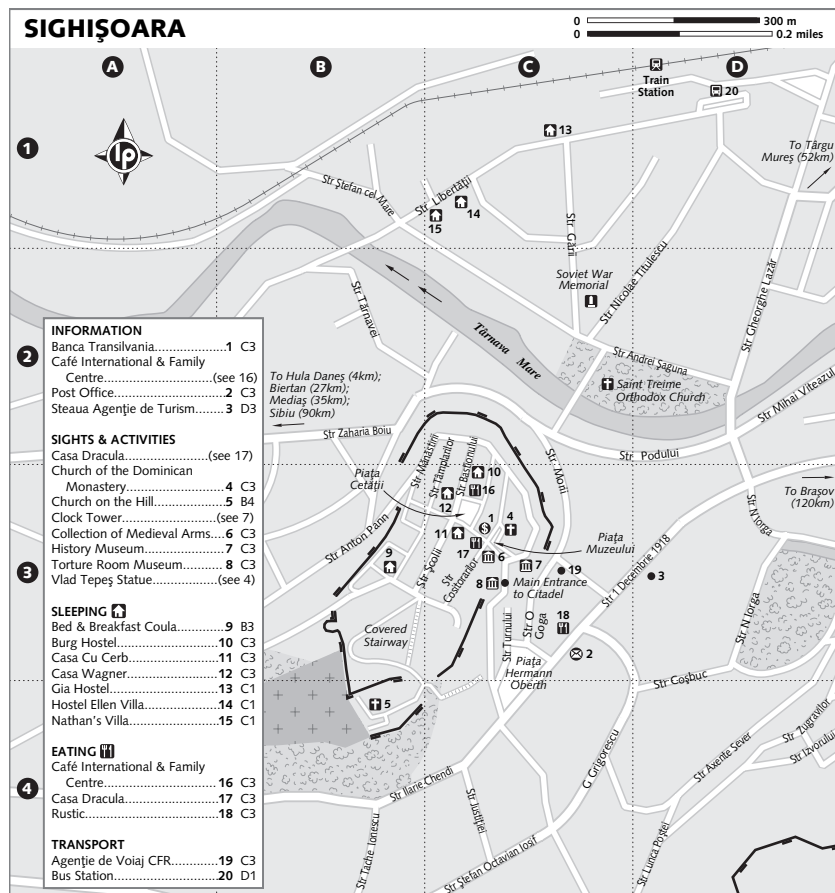
Drac: Yes! The giveaway is when the fanged fluid-changer stops female demons from devouring Jonathan Harker and cries out 'this man belongs to me!' – indeed.

Vlad: Probably (note his handle-bar moustache).

How did he die?

Drac: Wooden stake through the heart, followed by decapitation.

Vlad: No-one's sure, may have died in battle or assassinated by rival nobles; eventually Turks decapitated his body though!



tours come in n'out in summer, and even some backpackers feel one day's enough – but some days are better than others.

Good day-trips from here include Saxon Land towns (p648) or a day (or two) in the half-Hungarian town of Târgu Mureș (p652).

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Café International & Family Centre (Piața Cetății 8; per hr €0.60; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat Jun–Sep, 1–7pm Mon–Sat Oct–May) Christian pop accompanies your web-surf board.

MONEY

There are numerous exchange offices lining the city's main street, Str 1 Decembrie 1918.

Banca Transilvania has a 24-hour ATM in the citadel; between Piața Cetății and Muzeulul.

POST

Post office (Str 1 Decembrie 1918, 17; ☎ 7am–8pm Mon–Fri) In a funny yellow-panel building.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Sighișoara was hoping to finally open a tourist information centre at research time.

Steaua Agenție de Turism (☎ 772 499; Str 1 Decembrie 1918, 10; ☎ 9.30am–4pm Mon–Fri) Can find private accommodation (€10 per person per night) in the residential area northwest of the citadel.

Café International & Family Centre (☎ 777 844; Piața Cetății 8; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat Jun–Sep) Volunteer staff of this nonprofit agency double as a tourist office in

COMBO TICKET

It's not made clear, but you can visit the History Museum, the medieval arms collection, and the Torture Room Museum for a combo ticket price of €2.15 (about the same price as the student discounts for all three).

summer (only); they arrange walking tours, rent bikes, and can point you to area hikes.

Sights

Most of Sighișoara's sights are clustered in the compact old town – the delightful medieval **citadel** – perched on a hillock and fortified with a 14th-century wall, to which 14 towers and five artillery bastions were later added. Today the citadel, which is on the Unesco World Heritage list, retains just nine of its original towers (named for the guilds in charge of keeping them up) and two of its bastions.

Entering the citadel, you pass under the massive **clock tower** (Turnul cu Ceas), which dates from 1280. Inside is the great little **History Museum** (☎ 771 108; Piața Muzeului 1; adult/child €1.50/1.10; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon, 9am–6.30pm Tue–Fri, 9am–4.30pm Sat & Sun mid-May–mid-Sep, 9am–3.30pm Tue–Fri, 10am–3.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-May), with small rooms that tell Sigh's tale and are off the steps that wind up to the 7th-floor look-out above the clock for superb panoramic views.

Under the clock tower on the right (if heading out of the old town) is the small, dark **Torture Room Museum** (admission €0.60; ☎ same as History Museum), which shows how fingers were smashed and prisoners burned with coals. If it's closed, ask at the medieval arms collection for entry.

Towards Piața Cetății on the left, the small **Collection of Medieval Arms** (adult/student €0.90/0.60; ☎ same as History Museum) has four rooms devoted to medieval helmets, shields, crossbows and maces.

Hidden away behind the 15th-century **Church of the Dominican Monastery** (Biserica Mănăstirii), across from the museum, is a **Vlad Tepeș statue**, showing the legend with his trademark circa-1981 porno moustache.

Speaking of, continuing west towards Piața Cetății, you come to the renovated **Casa Dracula** (now a restaurant; see p648), in which Vlad Tepeș reputedly lived until the age of 40.

The quiet, miniscule **Piața Cetății** is the heart of old Sighișoara. It was here that markets and public executions were held.

From the square, turn left up Str Școlii to the 172 steps of the **covered stairway** (scara acoperită), to the 1345 Gothic **Church on the Hill** (Biserica din Deal; Bergkirche; ☎ mid-Apr–Oct), a 429m Lutheran church with an atmospheric German cemetery just behind.

Sleeping BUDGET

Burg Hostel (☎ 778 489; www.ibz.ro; Str Bastionului 4–6; dm/s/d €7.25/11.50/17.25) Perhaps more focused on its basement lounge (rock music, internet) and restaurant, this very clean, slightly sterile hostel has functional rooms of various bed counts – all with their own private bathroom. Breakfast is €2.80.

Gia Hostel (☎ 772 486; giahouse@myx.net; Str Libertății 41; dm from €7, r €18–23; ☎) It backs onto the railway line in a slightly dodgy area (about a 15-minute walk to the citadel) and the rooms are a bit of a rush job, but the nine-room hostel has lots of good services (bike rental, car rental for €35 per day, and an hour's free internet).

Nathan's Villa (☎ 772 546; www.nathansvilla.com; Str Libertății 8; dm/d €8/20) This traditionally popular choice (with free laundry and a bar) stays open from April to November only. It's 200m west of the train station.

Hostel Ellen Villa (☎ 776 402; www.elenvillahostel.com; Str Libertății 10; dm/r €10/20) This homy place, next to Nathan's, feels more guesthouse-y.

MIDRANGE

Casa Cu Cerb (Stag House; ☎ 777 349; Str Școlii 1; s €35, d €40–50; ☎) First thing you see walking into this all-restored 1693 building is Prince Charles' mug – he stayed here a few days in 2002. It's a good choice, with cast-iron bed frames and rattan rugs by the TV sitting area. No breakfast.

Casa Wagner (☎ 506 014; www.casa-wagner.com; Piața Cetății 7; s €40, d €45–50, ste €70) This 22-room beauty on the main square has a mix of rooms; singles

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bed & Breakfast Coula (☎ 777 907; Str Tămplariilor 40; r €15) Those looking for a homy budget base in the citadel will enjoy this unsigned 400-year-old home, run by an English-speaking family who can help arrange Saxon church trips and rent you bikes. There are six rooms (only one's in use in winter).

are a bit cramped, but some of the others sprawl. The ground-floor restaurant is quite good.

Eating

Café International & Family Centre (☎ 771 844; Piața Cetății 8; mains €2-3.50; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) This two-room café, with chairs in the square, is the perfect lunch spot, with daily-made mostly vegetarian fare, including quiches or lasagne, plus desserts.

Rustic (Str Decembrie 1, 7; mains €3-10; ☎ 8am-midnight) A wood-and-brick 'man's man' bar-restaurant down from the citadel; eggs served all day, plus the usual grilled meats.

Casa Dracula (☎ 771 596; Str Cositorarilor 5; mains €4.50-8.50; ☎ 10am-midnight) The food can't compete with Casa Wagner's restaurant (p647), but this three-room candle-lit restaurant is too tempting to pass by – juicy meats in Dracula's first home. It's OK to come for a red wine only.

Getting There & Away

About a dozen trains connect Sighișoara with Brașov (€3 to €8, two hours), nine of which go on to Bucharest (€8 to €12, 4½ hours). Five daily trains go to Cluj-Napoca (€7.40 to €10, 3½ hours). You'll need to change trains in Mediaș to reach Sibiu (€2.75, 2½ hours), but these are timed for easy transfers. Three daily trains go to Budapest (€38, nine hours); the night one has a sleeper (from €49). Buy tickets at the **train station** (☎ 771 886), or at the central **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 771 820; Str O Goga 6A; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri).

Next to the train station on Str Libertății, the **bus station** (☎ 771 260) sends buses of various size and colour to Budapest (€20, eight hours, two weekly), Făgăraș (€3.50, three hours, one daily), Sibiu (€3.50, 2½ hours, five daily). Maxitaxis pass by every couple of hours for Brașov.

SAXON LAND

Sighișoara, Sibiu and Brașov envelop the rolling hills that make up the heart of dozens of Saxon villages. These yester-century villages are generally dotted with impressive fortified churches dating from the 12th century. Some can be accessed by rather rough dirt roads. Even just a kilometre or two off the main highway towards Brașov or Sibiu opens up a world where horse carriages and walking is generally the only way anyone gets around, and a car – any car – gets wide stares.

Popular destinations include **Biertan** (28km southwest of Sighișoara) and **Viscri** (about 40km east). The latter misses some of the

tour buses, as the road south of Bunești is quite rough. Call **Carolina Fernolend** (☎ 0740 145 397) to arrange private accommodation in Viscri (about €18 to €20 per person including meals) and a look at the church.

Bus service is infrequent and unreliable. Renting a car is cheapest from Sibiu (p651) but Gia Hostel rents a car from Sighișoara, or you can arrange a taxi.

SIBIU

☎ 0269 / pop 154,890

Of the Transylvanian Saxon towns, Sibiu has always been the most important – the capital, the culturally most active – but has trailed Sighișoara, Brașov and Cluj in terms of travel appeal. Things look to change, as 2007 marks Sibiu as an EU-designated 'Capital of Culture' (along with Luxembourg), and year-long events will be putting Sibiu on the map for more visitors. The town is certainly enchanting enough on its own – with a just-scrubbed centre, newly cobblestoned squares and pedestrian malls – and the unique 'eyelid' rooftop windows looking over buildings painted in pastels.

Founded in the 12th century on the site of the former Roman village of Cibinium, Sibiu (Hermannstadt to the German Saxons, Nagyszében to Hungarians) served as the seat of the Austrian governors of Transylvania under the Habsburgs from 1703 to 1791, and again from 1849 to 1867.

Orientation

The adjacent bus and train stations are near the centre of town. Exit the station and stroll up Str General Magheru four blocks to Piața Mare, the historic centre.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Librăria Humanitas (☎ 211 434; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 16; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) Good map selection.

EMERGENCY

Salvamont (☎ 216 477, 0745-140 144; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 9; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Provides 24-hour mountain-rescue service.

INTERNET ACCESS

Click (Str Ocneci 11; per hr €0.45; ☎ 9-2am Mon-Fri, 10-2am Sat, 2pm-2am Sun)

Schuponet (Str Dr I Lupas 21; per hr €0.45; ☎ 24hr)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train Station (Piața 1 Decembrie 1918; per day €0.90; ☎ 24 hr)

MONEY

ATMs are located all over the centre as well as in most hotels.

Banca Comercială Română (Str Nicolae Bălcescu 11; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and gives cash advances.

POST

Central post office (Str Mitropoliei 14; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

Casa Luxemburg (☎ 216 854; www.kultours.ro; Piața Mică 16; ☎ 9am-9pm) Travel agent offering loads of city tours (€6 to €15) and day trips (€25 to €50); also has a useful free Sibiu map.

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 208 913; www.sibiu.ro; Piața Mare 2; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) A pioneer in self-organisation, this superb can-do office is slated to take over a primo spot on the ground floor of the new city hall for 2007. Staff help with bus schedules, and book accommodation.

Sights

CENTRE

The expansive Piața Mare was the very centre of the old walled city. A good start for exploring the city is to climb to the top of the former **Turnul Sfatului** (Council Tower; 1588; admission €0.30; ☎ 10am-6pm), which links Piața Mare with its smaller sister square, Piața Mică.

The **Brukenthal Museum** (☎ 217 691; Piața Mare 4-5; adult/child €1.80/0.90; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is the oldest and likely finest art gallery in Romania. Founded in 1817, the museum is in the baroque palace (1785) of Baron Samuel Brukenthal (1721–1803), former Austrian governor. There are excellent collections of 16th- and 17th-century Flemish, Italian, Dutch and Austrian paintings, including a giant painting of Sibiu from 1808.

The square's most impressive building, however, is the **Banca Agricola** (Piața Mare 2), which now houses the town hall. Just west of here is the lovely **Primăria Municipiului** (1470), now the **City History Museum** (Str Mitropoliei 2), which was closed at research time but should re-open by mid-2007.

Nearby, on Piața Huet, is the Gothic **Biserica Evanghelică** (Evangelical Church; ☎ 9am-3pm

Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun), which was built from 1300 to 1520, and has a great five-pointed tower that's visible from afar. Don't miss the four magnificent baroque funerary monuments on the upper nave on the north wall, and the 1772 organ with 6002 pipes (it's Romania's largest). The tomb of Mihnea Vodă cel Rău (Prince Mihnea the Bad), son of Vlad Țepeș, is in the closed-off section behind the organ (ask for entry). This prince was murdered in front of the church in 1510. You can climb the **church tower** (admission €0.90); ask for entry at Casa Luxemburg (left).

North of the centre is the interesting lower town, reached from under the photogenic **Iron Bridge** (1859) facing Piața Mică.

Also on Piața Mică, the **Pharmaceutical Museum** (☎ 218 191; adult/child €1.20/0.60; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) is a three-room collection packed with pills and powders and scary medical instruments.

It's worth walking along the 16th-century **city walls** and watchtowers, accessible a few blocks southeast of Piața Mare, along Str Cetății.

OUTSIDE THE CENTRE

Sibiu's top highlight is some 5km from the centre. The large **Museum of Traditional Folk Civilization** (Muzeul Civilizației Populare Tradiționale Astra; ☎ 242 599; Calea Rășinarilor 14; adult/child €3.60/1.80; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, to 8pm depending on the weather), is a sprawling open-air museum with 120 traditional dwellings, mills and churches brought from around the country. There's a **restaurant** with creek-side bench seats. Trolleybus 1 from the train station goes there (get off at the last stop and keep walking under 1km, or take the hourly Rășinari tram). A taxi is about €3 one way.

Sleeping BUDGET

Old Town Hostel (☎ 216 445; www.hostelsibiu.ro; Piața Mică 26; dm/d €12/27) In a 450-year-old building

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Pensiunea Ela (☎ 215 197; www.hotel-ela.as.ro; Str Novă 43; s/d €29/38) One of Sibiu's best bets, this Lower Town guesthouse has just nine rooms, all clean and comfy, if a little small. The owners care for every detail (and you're asked to remove your shoes in the room). The €4.50 breakfast is a bit disappointing. Laundry service is available.

with spacious dorms looking over a main square, this simple hostel actually boasts the most atmospheric location in Sibiu. Dorms have more light than the private room. There's no breakfast, but there is a kitchen. Laundry service costs €2.

Hotel Halemadero (☎ 212 509; Str Măsarilor 10; d/tr €24/32) Friendly, family-run four-room deal

in a slightly scrappy patch of Lower Town. Rooms are old-school, with TV, shared bathroom and three or four beds. The family runs a beery patio café. There's no breakfast.

Hotel Podul Minciunilor (☎ 217 259; www.hotel-ela.as.ro; Str Azilului 1; d/tr €27/36) Located half a block from Liar's Bridge in Lower Town, this six-room guest house is a bit cuter from outside

than in, but has basic clean rooms with TVs. No breakfast.

Casa Luxemburg (☎ 216 854; www.kultours.ro; Piața Mică 16; s/d/tr €33/57/77) It's a little dormy, but this six-room job overlooks the Evangelical Church and Piața Mică.

MIDRANGE

Unfortunately much of the hotel boom is on the highway outside town. A few other hotels in the centre were in the works, or under renovation, at research time.

Gasthof Clara (☎ 222 914; www.gastofclara.ro; s/d €45/56) It's on unappealing, dusty street, but that evaporates once inside this cheerful six-room guesthouse with a terrace restaurant.

Hotel Parc (☎ 424 455; www.hotelparcsibiu.ro; Str Școala de Înot 1-3; s/d €58/73; ☎ ☎) This former grey blob 1km southwest of the centre went and did itself up. It has a fresh gold exterior, with 59 fully modern, if slightly unexciting, interiors.

Hotel Continental (☎ 218 100; www.continentalhotels.ro; Calea Dumbrăvi 2-4; s/d €56/77; ☎ ☎) Grey grey grey on the outside, this 13-floor, 182-room hotel is plain but quite well kept inside.

Eating

Sandwich & More (Str Samuel Brukenthal; sandwiches €1; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) This window spot serves veggie sandwiches, and Asian-style pastas – by far Sibiu's best fast-food option.

Crama Sibiul Vechi (Str Ilarian; mains €2.50-6; ☎ noon-midnight) This popular, evocative brick-cellar spot off the main crawl reels in locals for its tasty Transylvanian armory of muttons, sausages, beefs and fish. There's live music most nights.

La Piazzetta (☎ 230 879; Piața Mică 15; pizza & pasta €3-6) This square pizza shop is livelier than most, with smoking couples and babies eating pizza at red-chequered tables.

Drinking

Piața Mică is the drinking headquarters.

Kulturkafe (Piața Mică 16; ☎ 10am-3am Mon-Fri, 1pm-3am Sat, 3am-3pm Sun) Good table spots on the square, slightly more adult-like inside.

Chill Out (Piața Mică 23; ☎ 10am-2am) Local students hightail it to this fun, loud, enigmatic spot with a well-lit room and a dark one, where themed nights and DJs rule the night.

Entertainment

Sibiu's International Astra Film Festival is held in May.

Agente de Teatră (☎ 217 575; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 17; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Tickets for major events are sold here.

Philharmonic (☎ 210 264; Str Filarmonicii 2) A big cultural player since 1949.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Sibiu airport (☎ 229 161; Sos Alba Iulia 73) is 5km west of the centre. **Tarom** (☎ 211 157; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 10; ☎ 9am-12.30pm, 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri) has three weekly flights to Bucharest (€60 to €100 one-way), daily service to Munich (€250) and five weekly to Vienna (€300). Trolleybus 8 runs between the airport and the train station.

Carpatair (☎ 229 161; www.carpatair.com), which has an office at the airport, flies to Germany and Italy via Timișoara.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 217 757; Piața 1 Decembrie 1918) is located opposite the train station. Daily bus and maxitaxi service includes 13 to Brașov (€4.50, 2½ hours), four or five services to Bucharest (€8.50, 5½ hours), nine to Cluj-Napoca (€6, 3½ hours), four to Sighișoara (€3.50 lei, two hours), as well as two to Timișoara (€9, six hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

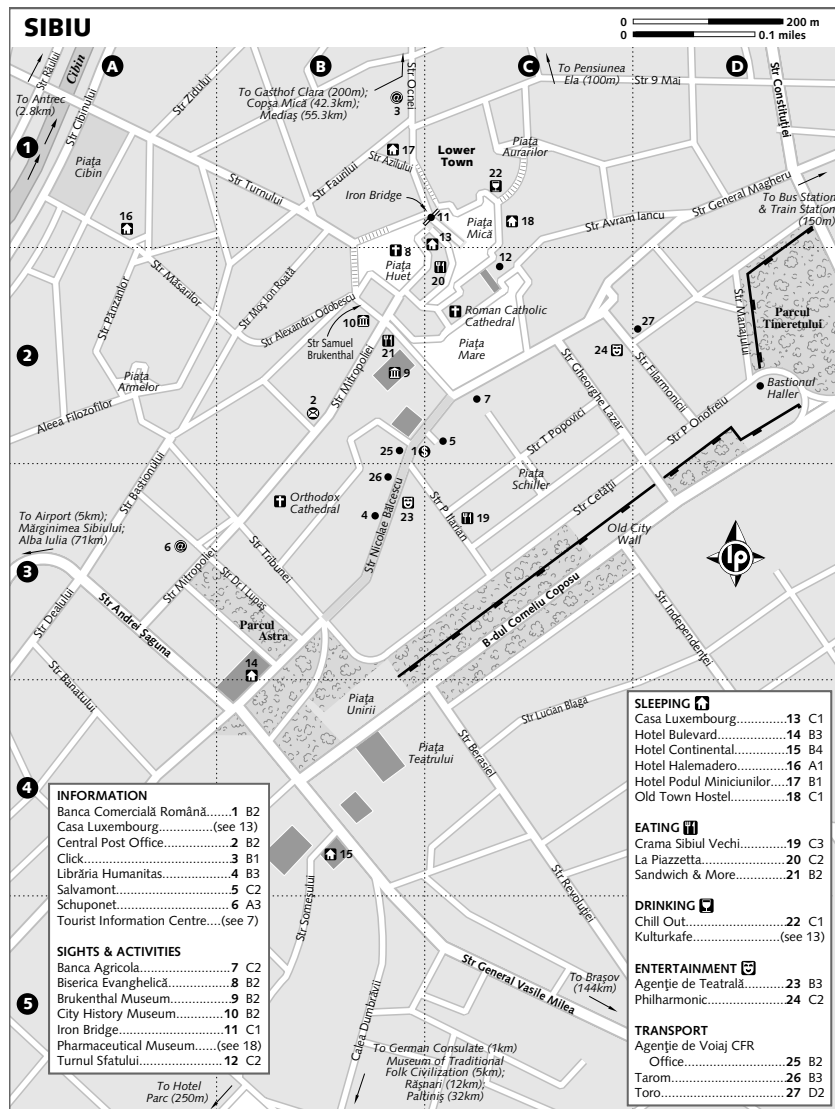
For a cheap rental option try **Toro** (☎ 232 237, 0745-425 441; Str Filarmonicii 5; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat), which has Dacias to rent from €30 to €38 per day.

TAXI

To call a taxi dial ☎ 953.

WORTH THE TRIP

About 20km west of Sibiu, and a serious world away, **Mioritica** (☎ 0740-175 287; Sibiul village; r from €15; ☎) is 'paradise' to Sorian, the English- and German-speaking owner of this remarkable stream-side four-room guesthouse. Three bridges go over the roaring stream, and a garden includes exhibits of found objects that Sorian, a local history teacher, rescues from the ages. Meals are provided, and they can point you to hiking trails, nearby villages, and an icon museum in town. It's hard to leave. Follow the stream towards the hills, west of the centre.



TRAIN

Sibiu lies at an awkward rail junction; sometimes you'll need to change trains. But there are three daily direct trains to Braşov (€6.75, 2½ hours), three to Bucharest (€14, five hours), Timişoara (€14, five hours). Buy tickets at the **Agentie de Voiaj CFR office** (☎ 216 441; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 6; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri).

Trolleybus 1 connects the train station with the centre, but it's only a 450m walk along Str General Magheru.

FĂGĂRAŞ MOUNTAINS

☎ 0268

The dramatic peaks of the Făgăraş Mountains cut a serrated line south of the main Braşov-Sibiu road and shelter dozens of glacial lakes. The famed **Transfăgăraşan road** (generally open only from June to August due to snow) cuts through the range from north to south. No buses ply the route.

Despite its name, Făgăraş town (pop 43,900) is not the prime access point to the Făgăraş Massif. Most hikers head south to the mountains from the commie-ho town Victoria.

TÂRGU MUREŞ (MAROSVÁSÁRHELY)

☎ 265 / pop 166,100

The clear boom town of Transylvania's Székely Land (home to the ethnic Hungarian population – sometimes a *buna ziua* gets a shrug), Târgu Mureş' Habsburg-styled architecture, pleasant centre and Hungarian accent gives it a distinctive feel from surrounding Transylvanian towns like Sighişoara 55km south. In 2006 Wizz Air began service from Budapest, making it a potentially cheaper hub to reach Romania from Western Europe.

Orientation & Information

Central Piaţa Trandafirilor runs several blocks in the busy commercial heart, where you can find ATMs, bars and food. At its northeastern

end stands the landmark Orthodox Church. Str Bernady György leads east from there past the 14th-century citadel. The train station is 1km south, the bus station 1.5km south.

Two blocks west of the Orthodox Church, **Complex Charis** (cnr Str Arany Ianoş & Str Aurel Filimon; per hr €0.60; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 3-9pm Sat, 6-9pm Sun) is a Christian organisation with a slick reading room that has computers on which you can check email.

Tourism Information Centre (☎ 365 404 934; www.cjmures.ro/turism; cnr Piaţa Trandafirilor & Str Enescu; ☎ 8am-8pm Tue-Thu, to 4pm Mon & Sat), in the Culture Palace, is a superbly run centre offering free maps and information on the region.

Sights

At the southwestern end of Piaţa Trandafirilor, the **Culture Palace** (Palatul Culturii; cnr Piaţa Trandafirilor & Str Enescu; adult/student €0.75/1.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) is Târgu Mureş' beloved landmark and top attraction. Inside its glittering, tiled, steeped roof is an often-used concert hall and several worthwhile museums (all included in the entry price). The best is the **Hall of Mirrors** (Sala Oglinzi), with 12 stained-glass windows lining a 45m hallway – a tape in various languages explains the folktales each portrays. The **Art Museum** (2nd floor) houses many large late-19th and early 20th-century paintings; the **Archaeological Museum** (1st floor) explains Dacian pieces found in the region in English.

Sleeping

Hotel Sport (☎ 231 913; Str Liviu Rebreanu 29A; r with shared/private bathroom €10/22) Crusty and a bit musty, this OK 44-room cheapie (five minutes north of the train station on foot) is for shoestringers only. No breakfast.

Pensiune Ana Maria (☎ 264 401; Str AL Papui Ilarian 17; s/d/apt €26/29/37) Something like a home for Elvis Habsburg, this playful eight-room guest-house mixes a bit of green Vegas garishness

and Austrian tradition – breakfasts are huge and superb. Go past the citadel and turn right at Str AL Papui Ilarian.

Hotel Concordia (☎ 260 602; Piaţa Trandafirilor 45; s/d €96/112; ☎ ☎) One of Romania's most chic boutique hotels; splurgers go for the stark and giant rooms (with zebra-print chairs and fashion prints on the walls).

Eating

Leo (Piaţa Trandafirilor 36-38; mains €2.75-4; ☎ 24hr) On the eastern side of the square, this outdoor-indoor spot gets busy with pizzas and quite tasty Romanian food.

Kebab (Str Bolyai 10; kebabs €1.50; ☎ 6.30am-10pm) A block north of the square, this budget spot has comfy indoor-outdoor seats plus pick-and-point eats, including kebab lunch specials.

Getting There & Away

Daily bus and maxitaxi service from the **bus station** (☎ 221 451; Str Gheorghe Doja) includes 18 or so to Sighişoara (€2, 1½ hours), continuing on to Braşov (€5.50; 3½ hours); plus five daily to Cluj-Napoca (€3.50 to €4, 2½ hours) and two to Sibiu (€3.50, three hours). Bus 18 connects the centre with the station.

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 266 203; Piaţa Teatrului 1; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri), facing Piaţa Trandafirilor near its northwestern corner, sells tickets for daily trains including two daily to Bucharest (€16, 8½ hours) and Sibiu (€4, 5½ hours), plus one to Cluj-Napoca (€6.75, 2½ hours), Timişoara (€9.25, 6½ hours) and Budapest (€37, 7½ hours). Bus 5 connects the station with the centre.

CLUJ-NAPOCA

☎ 0264 / pop 317,950

Just one letter away from 'club', Cluj-Napoca isn't as pretty or mountainous as the Saxon towns to the south, but it earns much of its nationwide fame and rep for its dozens of cavernous, unsnooty discos. Outside the clubs, though, Cluj (everyone calls it just 'Cluj') is one of Romania's most welcoming and energised cities – a 'real' city where there's everything going on (football, opera, espresso, heated politics, trams), regardless of who visits or not. Its attractions don't hit you over the head like Dracula's 'homes' do, but if you look closer, Cluj's are some of Transylvania's most arresting. It's also a great base for renting a car – it's far cheaper here than in Braşov – and

serves as a common shooting-off point for Maramureş (p663).

History

In AD 124, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius elevated the Dacian town of Napoca to a colony. From 1791 to 1848 and again after the union with Hungary in 1867, Cluj-Napoca served as the capital of Transylvania.

In the mid-1970s the old Roman name of Napoca was added to the city's official title to emphasise its Daco-Roman origin. In the 1990s, ex-mayor George Funar furthered that Romanian nationalist swipe (painting trash bins in Romanian colours) that embarrassed many locals.

Orientation

The *gară* (train station) is 1.5km north of the city centre. Walk left out of the station and cross the street to catch tram 101 or a trolleybus south down Str Horea. Most buses arrive and depart from Autogară 2, north of town.

MAPS

The best map for the city is Cartographia's 1:12,000 *Cluj-Napoca* (€3).

Information**BOOKSHOPS**

Gaudeamus (☎ 439 281; Str Iuliu Mariu 3; ☎ 10am-7pm, 11am-2pm Sat) Has some maps and many Hungarian titles.

Librăria Humanitas (Str Napoca 7; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat)

INTERNET ACCESS

Blade Net (Str Iuliu Maniu 17; per hr €0.60; ☎ 7am-midnight)

Net Zone (Piaţa Muzeului 5; per hr €0.40; ☎ 24hr 'approximately')

LANGUAGE COURSES

Access (☎ 420 476; www.access.ro; Str Tebei 21, 3rd fl; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon & Thu, 2-8pm Tue-Wed, 2-6pm Fri) Offers Romanian-language courses.

LAUNDRY

Perado Laundry (Str Calera Turzeii 13; per load €4.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) The ever-valuable wash-fold-and-dry service.

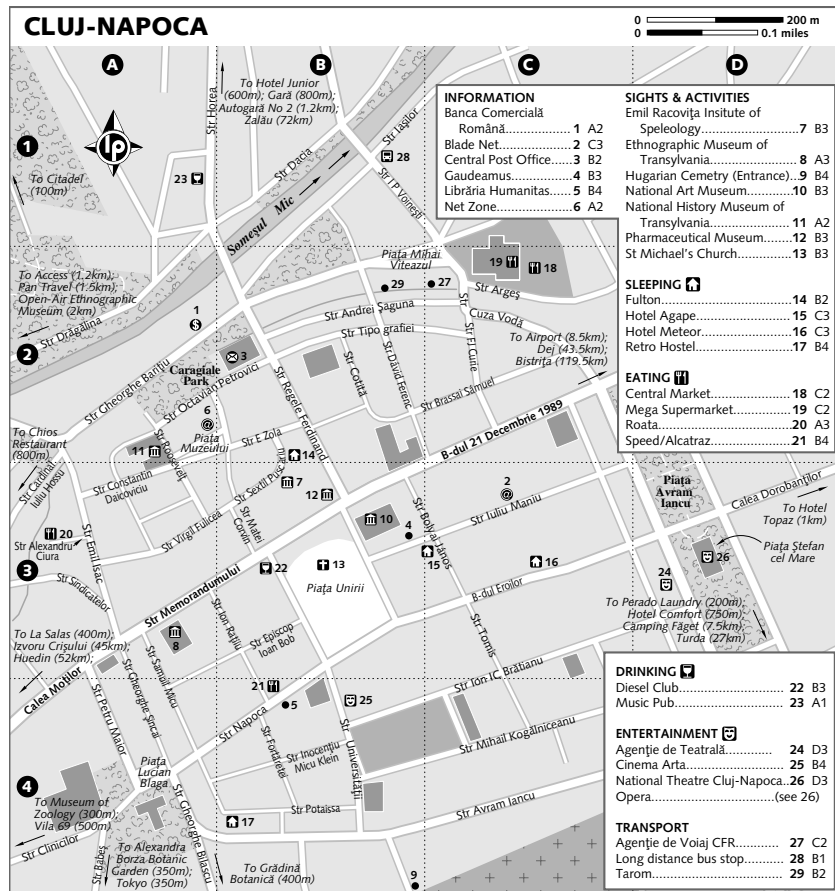
LEFT LUGGAGE

Plan ahead: the train station has no left luggage.

HIKING FROM VICTORIA

One of the best stations to get off is Ucea (59km from Sibiu), from where you can catch a bus (or walk the 7km) to **Victoria**. From here you can hike to **Cabana Turnuri** (1520m; 20 beds) in about six hours. The scenery is stunning once you start the ascent. The next morning head for **Cabana Podragu** (2136m; 68 beds), four hours south.

Cabana Podragu makes a good base if you want to climb **Mt Moldoveanu** (2544m), Romania's highest peak. It's a tough uphill climb, but the views from the summit are unbeatable. Otherwise, hike eight hours east, passing by Mt Moldoveanu, to Cabana Valea Sambetei (1407m). From Cabana Valea Sambetei you can descend to the railway in Ucea, via Victoria, in a day.

**MONEY**

Banca Comercială Română (Str Gheorghe Barițiu 10-12; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) Gives cash advances and changes travellers cheques.

POST

Central post office (Str Regele Ferdinand 33; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION & TRAVEL AGENCIES

Cluj still has no tourist information centre. See www.cjnet.ro for general information on the city, or try the following.

Green Mountain Holidays (☎ 0744-637 227; www.greenmountainholidays.ro) Terrific ecotourism agency providing activity-filled trips in the Apuseni Mountains.

Pan Travel (☎ 420 516; www.pantravel.ro; Str Grozavescu 13; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This top-notch outfit can book accommodation, car rental (from €30 per day), provide guides and arrange Maramureș trips. It's best to contact ahead of time.

Transylvania Ecological Club (Clubul Ecologic Transilvania; ☎ 431 626; www.greenagenda.org, www.cdtcluj.ro) Grass-roots environmental group focuses on eco-travel in the region. At research time it was looking for a new location.

Sights**CENTRAL CLUJ-NAPOCA**

The vast 14th-century **St Michael's Church** dom-inates Piața Unirii. The neo-Gothic tower (1859) topping the Gothic hall church creates a great landmark. Outside is a huge

equestrian statue (1902) of the famous Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus (r 1458-90), who was born in town. (At night compare the half-hearted lighting on this compared with the elaborate lighting of the namesake Romanian hero on **Piața Avram Iancu**, three blocks east.)

Facing Piața Unirii is the interesting **National Art Museum** (☎ 496 952; Piața Unirii 30; adult/child €1.50/0.75; ☎ noon-7pm Wed-Sun Jun-Oct, 11am-6pm Wed-Sun Nov-May), housed inside the baroque Banffy Palace (1791).

The small three-room **Pharmaceutical Museum** (☎ 597 567; Str Regele Ferdinand 1; adult/child €0.60/0.30; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat) is housed in Cluj's first apothecary (1573). Old glass cases housing grounded mummy dust, 18th-century aphrodisiacs and medieval alchemy symbols are brought to life by the hilarious guide, who ushers you around as if showing off game-show prizes.

A block north, the museum for the **Emil Racovița Institute of Speleology** (Str Sextil Pușcariu 10) should be open in its new location by the time you arrive. The much-travelled scientist Racovița opened the world's first cave institute in Cluj in 1920.

Just off lovely Piața Muzeului is the **National History Museum of Transylvania** (☎ 495 677; Str Constantin Daicoviciu 1; adult/child €0.60/0.30; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), filled with ghoulish remains of ancient tombs and many Roman pieces – the modern sections were under renovation at research time.

Closed for renovation at research time, the **Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania** (Muzeul Etnografic al Transilvaniei; ☎ 592 344; Str Memorandumului 21) runs an **open-air museum** (adult/student €1.20/0.6; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar, closed Apr), with 14 traditional buildings; take bus 27 to Hoia forest from the train station.

OUTSIDE THE CENTRE

In the 'student ghetto' west of the centre, inside the wooded **Biology and Geology Faculty**, you'll find the surprisingly rewarding **Museum of Zoology** (☎ 595 739; Str Clinicilor 5-7; adult/student €0.45/0.23; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun), an L-shaped lab that looks like it hasn't changed in five decades. From Str Clinicilor, veer left through the brick gate.

Just south, head past fast-food joints up Str Bogdan P Hașdeu to Str Pasteur to reach the fragrant 1930 **Alexandru Borza Botanic Gardens** (☎ 592 152; Str Republicii 42; adult/student €1.20/0.60;

☎ 9am-6pm), with shaded green lawns and a super Japanese garden.

Just east of here, most easily reached from Str Avram Iancu down the hill, is an immense, highly memorable **Hungarian cemetery** (Házsongárdi temető).

For an overall view of Cluj-Napoca, climb up the **citadel** (*cetatea*; 1715), northwest of the centre.

Sleeping BUDGET

Retro Hostel (☎ 450 452; www.retro.ro; Str Potaissa 13; dm from €10, r €15 per person; ☎) On a quiet lane amid 16th-century citadel wall fragments, the superbly run Retro is one of Romania's best hostels. It's a little tight – only a couple of bathrooms, and one private room is only accessible through the other private room. Staff offer good-value day trips. Breakfast is €2.50.

Camping Făget (☎ 596 234; tent sites €2.25, 2-person huts €15) This hill-top collection of OK cabanas and tent spots is 7km south of the centre. Take bus 35 to the end of the line, from where it's a 2km marked hike.

Hotel Junior (☎ 432 028; www.pensiune-junior.ro; Str Cări Ferate 12; s/d €23/27) Hot-pink building and simple rooms, on a dusty, unappealing street just down from the trains. No breakfast.

Vila 69 (☎ 591 592; vila69@email.ro; Str Hașden 69; s/d €28.50/37; ☎) Seventeen rather plain, modern rooms in a happy little place. Take Str Clinicilor, turn right on Str Piezișă – it's 200m up the street.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Meteor (591 060; www.hotelmetro.ro; B-dul Eroilor 29; s €35, d €40 & €44) Slightly faded modern hotel – some rooms are quite small, but staff are nice and there's laundry service. The restaurant's alley tables mean night-time noise in good weather.

Fulton (☎ 597 898; www.fulton.ro; Str Sextil Pușcariu 10; s €40-60, d €45-65; ☎) The closest to boutique style, this back-street central inn has earth-toned striped walls, wrought-iron bed frames, and a laid-back covered patio bar. Plug-in internet's free.

TOP END

Hotel Agape (☎ 406 523; www.hotelagape.ro; Str Iuliu Maniu 6; s/d €59/71; ☎) Run by Hungarian locals, this 40-room hotel has six restaurants and giant rooms.

Eating

Tokyo (☎ 598 662; Str Marinescu 5; sushi & rolls from €3; ☎ 11am-midnight) Japanese pop on the stereo and the Shinto gate out front are certainly a break from all the traditional Romanian restaurants around town. Go south on Str Babeș from the centre, turn right on Str Marinescu.

Roata (☎ 592 022; Str Alexandru Ciura 6A; mains €4.50-8.50; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sat, 1pm-midnight Sun-Mon) Housed in a back alley house, and with tasty traditional Romanian dishes served in clay plates. Best is sitting on the small terrace vying for space amid potted plants and moss-covered stones.

QUICK EATS

There are heaps of good pizza, hamburger and kebab options on Str Piezișă in the 'student ghetto' and more centrally on Piața Lucian Blaga and Str Napoca.

Speed/Alcatraz (Str Napoca 4-6; pizzas 11 lei, sandwiches €1.25-2; ☎ 24hr) Busy fast-food option with good seating options, including some in the 'Al Capone' jail cages.

SELF-CATERING

For fresh produce, stroll through the quite colourful **central market**, behind the Complex Commercial Mihai Viteazul shopping centre on Piața Mihai Viteazul, which also houses **Mega Supermarket** (☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat, 8am-7pm Sun).

Drinking

Piața Unirii is the site of many subterranean watering holes, but clubs and bars are spread out throughout the centre. It pays to explore.

Diesel Bar (☎ 493 043; Piața Unirii 17) Walk past the hipsters in the all-glass entry and go downstairs into a towering cavernous room, with red-spotlit tables, and giant rooms for 15-lein gin and tonics.

Music Pub (☎ 432 517; Str Horea 5; ☎ 9-3am Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat, 5pm-3am Sun) A little wild west up front, the sprawling pub is a great, more casual, place for buddy blokes and indie-pop flirts.

The 'student ghetto', found southwest of Cluj-Napoca's centre (on and off Str Piezișă, reached by Str Clinicilor about 300m from Piața Lucian Blaga), teams with lively open-air bars, including **La Salas** (Str Piezișă; ☎ 10-2am or 3am).

Entertainment

Șapte Seri (www.sapteseri.ro) and **24-Fun** are free biweekly booklets listing all the latest goings-on (in Romanian).

CINEMAS

Cinema Arta (☎ 596 616; Str Universității 3) screens Hollywood films in English. Tickets cost about €1.75.

THEATRE & CLASSICAL MUSIC

The **Agenție de Teatră** (☎ 595 363; Piața Ștefan cel Mare 14; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Fri) sells tickets for theatre, opera and the philharmonic, which hit the stage at the **National Theatre Cluj-Napoca** (☎ 590 272; Piața Ștefan cel Mare 2-4).

Getting There & Around

AIR

Air Tarom has at least two daily direct flights to Bucharest (one-way/return from €103/153). Tickets can be bought at the airport (8km east of town, reached by bus 8) or at the **Tarom city office** (☎ 432 669; Piața Mihai Viteazul 11; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

BUS

At research time, daily bus service from **Autogară 2** (Autogară Beta; ☎ 455 249), 350m northwest of the train station (take the overpass), included the following: two daily buses to Brașov (€8), four to Bucharest (€9.25), five to Budapest (€17), one to Chișinău (€20), one to Iași (€12 to €15) and three to Sibiu (€6, three hours). Note that there is no Autogară 1. Budapest-bound maxitaxis stop at the international bus station there and finish at the Budapest airport.

CAR

Cluj has some of the best car-rental rates in the country. Pan Travel (p654) rents Dacias for €30 per day. **Rodna** (☎ 416 773; www.rodna-trans.ro; Str Traian Vuia 62), towards the airport, rents newish Dacia Logans from €30 per day, and foreign cars for a bit more.

TAXI

Diesel Taxi (☎ 953, 946) is a well-regarded, meter-using local company.

TRAIN

The **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 432 001; Piața Mihai Viteazul 20; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri) sells domestic and international train tickets in advance. Sample fares for *accelerat* trains include:

Destination	Price (€)	Duration	No of daily trains
Brașov	8.60	4	6
Bucharest	11	7½	6
Budapest	34.50	5	2
Iași	10.50	9hr	4
Oradea	5.75	2¼-4	12
Sibiu	9	4	1
Sighișoara	7.30	3½	6
Suceava	8.60	7	4
Timișoara	8.60	7	6

AROUND CLUJ-NAPOCA

Turda

Amidst the rolling plains 27km south of Cluj, the unfortunately named Turda is a town of two massive drops – one natural, the other in a mine – which justify a nice day trip.

The **Cheile Turzii** (Turda Gorge) is 9km southwest, walked in a few hours in gently rising fields filled with sheep; the red-cross trail leads through the gorge, and a red-dot one up and over the peak. Ask for trail info at the **tourist information centre** (☎ 314 611; Piața 1 Decembrie 1918; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat), about 250m south of Piața Republicii, where buses to/from Cluj stop.

In town, about 1km north of Piața Republicii, is Turda's massive **salt mine** (☎ 311 690; Str Salinelor 54; adult/child €2.40/1.20; ☎ 9am-3.30pm summer, to 1.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3.30pm Sat & Sun winter), reached along a seemingly endless (500m) tunnel. One mine descends 13 stories down, where can peer farther down into a 'lake' far below.

Hotel Potaissa (☎ 312 691; Str Republicii 6; s/d €27/36, with shared bath €12/24) Clean and central hotel from 1947 with loud carpets.

Hunter Prince Castle (aka 'Dracula Hotel'; ☎ 316 850; www.huntercastle.ro; Str Suluțiu 4-6; r €51 & 65; ☎) Just off the main strip, this kitschy, fun 'castle' hotel plugs Dracula and hunting, with a good restaurant.

Maxitaxis leave frequently from the centre to Cluj-Napoca's Piața Mihai Viteazul (€1.20, 40 minutes) until 8.30pm or so. A taxi back is about €15.

CRIȘANA & BANAT

While flaunting three of Romania's most 'European' cities (Oradea, Arad and Timișoara), in both essence and crumbling Hapsburg architecture, the areas of Crișana (north of the Mureș River) and Banat (to the south) are also

sprinkled with tempting offerings like the soaring Apușeni Mountains, ski runs, deep caves, gorges, waterfalls and curative thermal waters. Zigzag from giddy excitement to recuperative leisure all within a few hours drive.

It was in Timișoara that the seeds of the 1989 revolution were sewn, a fact that has left these charming and proud people with a scarcely concealed perma-grin.

Crișana and Banat once merged imperceptibly into Vojvodina (Serbia) and Hungary's Great Plain. Until 1918 all three regions were governed jointly.

ORADEA

☎ 0259 / pop 209,571

Elegant Oradea lies a few kilometres east of the Hungarian border, in the centre of the Crișana region, at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains.

Of all the cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Oradea best retains its 19th-century romantic style. It was ceded to Romania in 1920 and has since taken on an air of faded grandeur, but it is a lovely place to stop.

Orientation

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

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

Information

24-hour pharmacy (☎ 418 242; cnr Str Libertății & Piața Ferdinand)

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

HVB Bank (☎ 406 700; Piața Unirii 24; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Has all services.

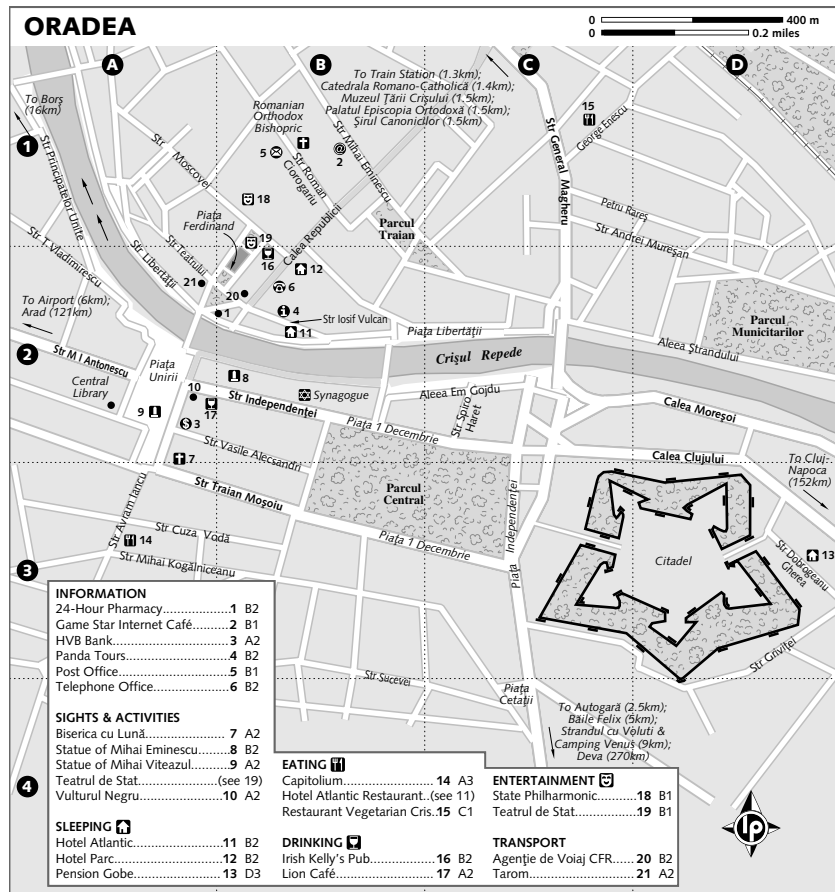
Panda Tours (☎ 477 222; Str Iosif Vulcan 6; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) There's no official tourist information.

Post office (☎ 136 420; Str Roman Ciorogariu 12; ☎ 7am-7.30pm Mon-Fri)

Telephone office (Calea Republicii 5; ☎ 8am-8pm)

Sights

Oradea's most imposing sights are on its two central squares, Piața Unirii and Piața Republicii.



PIAȚA UNIRII

The 1784 Orthodox **Biserica cu Lună** (Moon Church; Piața Unirii) has an unusual lunar mechanism on its tower that adjusts position in accordance with the moon's movement.

In the centre of Piața Unirii stands an equestrian **statue of Mihai Viteazul**, the prince of Wallachia (r 1593–1601), who is said to have rested in Oradea in 1600. East of this statue, overlooking the Crișul Repede River, you'll find the magnificent **Vulturul Negru** (Black Vulture; 1908) hotel and covered arcade, which links Piața Unirii with Str Independenței and Str Vasile Alecsandri. A **statue of Mihai Eminescu**, the 19th-century Romantic poet, overlooks the river's south-east bank.

Further east of Piața Unirii is **Parcul Central**, with a large monument, and a citadel, which was built in the 13th century, and now serves as government offices.

PIAȚA REPUBLICII & NORTH

Across the bridge the magnificent neoclassical **Teatrul de Stat** (State Theatre), designed by Viennese architects Fellner and Hellmer in 1900, dominates Piața Republicii. To its right begins the long, pedestrianised Calea Republicii, lined with bookshops and cafés.

A block southwest of the train station is **Șirul Canonilor** (Canon's Corridor), a series of archways that date back to the 18th century.

The **Catedrala Romano-Catolică** (Roman Catholic Cathedral; 1780) is the largest in Romania.

The adjacent **Palatul Episcopiei Ortodoxă** (Episcopal Palace; 1770), with 100 fresco-adorned rooms and 365 windows, was modelled after Belvedere Palace in Vienna. It houses the **Muzeul Țării Crișului** (Museum of the Land of the Criș Rivers; ☎ 412 725; B-dul Dacia 1-3; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), with history and art exhibits relevant to the region.

Sleeping

Strandul cu Voluti (cabins/camp sites per person €14.50/3; ☎ May–mid-Sep) Camping in Băile 1 Mai, 9km southeast of Oradea. Take a southbound tram 4 (black number) from the train station, or an eastbound tram 4 (red number) from Piața Unirii to the end of the line, then bus 15 to the last stop.

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

Hotel Parc (☎ 411 699; Calea Republicii 5-7; s with shared toilet €14, €d 23) Oradea's only budget option. Ignore the crumbling façade – these large rooms are worn, but reasonably clean.

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

Hotel Atlantic (☎ 426 911; www.hotelatlantic.ro; Str Iosif Vulcan 9; s/d/ste €45/50/60) These spacious, contemporary rooms sport *huge* marble bathrooms, some with spas, and your own private bar! The Blue Suite has a bed the size of a trampoline.

Eating & Drinking

Calea Republicii is lined with cheap and cheerful eateries and cafés.

Restaurant Vegetarian Cris (☎ 441 593; George Enescu 30; mains €1.5; ☎ 9am–9pm Sun–Thu, to 4pm Fri) This place is the only vegetarian restaurant in Romania! Choose from a tantalisingly cheap menu featuring soups, stuffed peppers, minced-pumpkin balls, lentils, macaroni and cabbage, celery schnitzel, mushroom haggis, and soy, soy, soy!

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

Hotel Atlantic Restaurant (☎ 414 953; Str Iosif Vulcan 9; mains €5) With an elegant interior, it has the best menu in town: hearty goulash, Mexican chicken and speciality steak dishes.

Most of Oradea's terrace cafés and restaurants double as bars in the evening.

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

Lion Café (Str Independenței 1; ☎ 7am–1am) Trendy by day, packed by night.

Entertainment

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

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tarom (☎ 131 918; Piața Ferdinand 2; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat) has three weekly flights to Baia Mare, daily flights to Bucharest and two weekly flights to Satu Mare from **Oradea airport** (☎ 416 082; www.oradea-online.ro/oradea/3/oradea_airport.htm; Calea Aradului km6). Note that Tarom accepts US dollars but not euros.

BUS

From Oradea **Autogară** (☎ 418 998; Str Râzboieni 81), south of the centre, there are daily services to Beiuș, Deva and Satu Mare. More than 20 maxitaxis run daily to and from Băile Felix.

A daily state bus runs to Budapest (€17, 10 hours) leaving from outside the train station. Purchase tickets from the driver.

Maxitaxis run daily to Budapest from outside the train station (€20).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

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

TRAIN

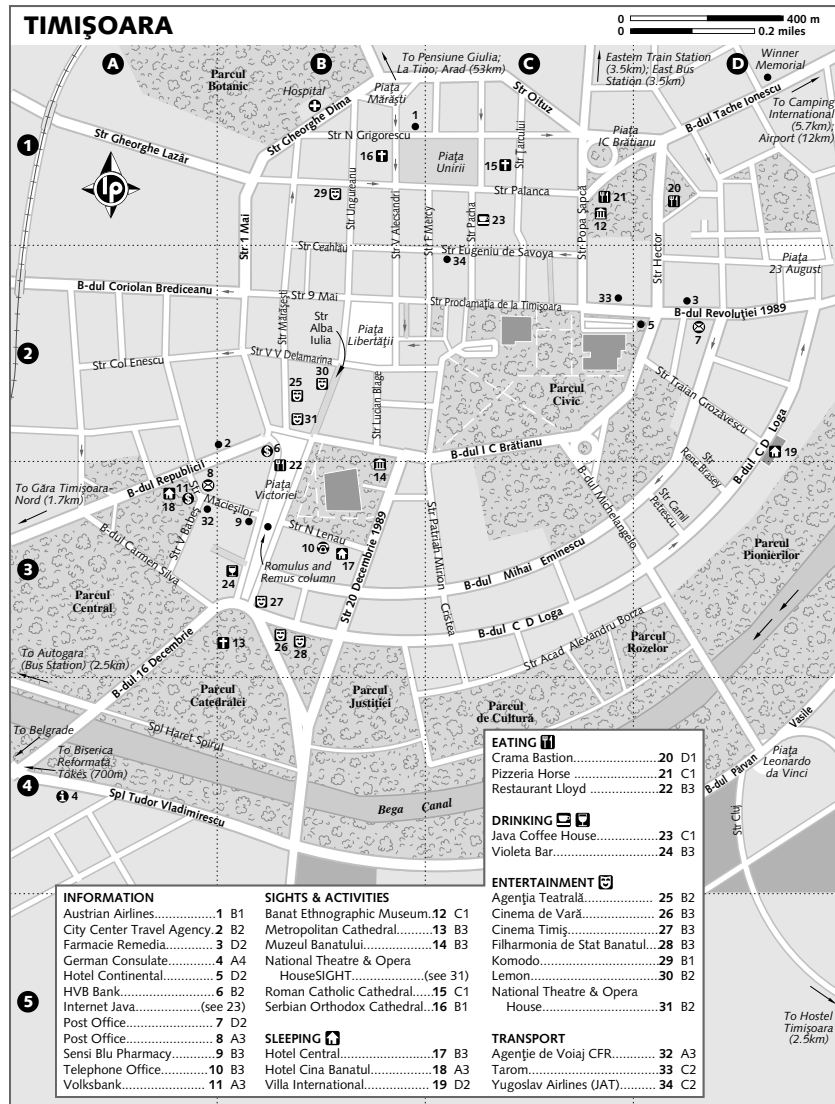
The **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 130 578; Calea Republicii 2; ☎ 7am–7pm Mon–Fri) sells advance tickets.

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

TIMIȘOARA

☎ 0256 / ☎ 321,930

In the Banat region, tenacious Timișoara stunned the world as the birthplace of the 1989 revolution. Romania's fourth-largest city is known by residents as **Primul Oraș Liber** (First Free Town). It's a city that's loved by residents and tourists alike, with a charming Mediterranean air, regal Habsburg buildings and thriving culture and sport. Timișoara



is the hub of Carpatair, Romania's thriving semibudget airline, and as such is an excellent entry point for international visitors.

Orientation

The Old Town has retained its circular orientation, with major streets and boulevards jutting out, pinwheel-like. Confusingly, Timișoara-

Nord (the northern train station) is west of the city centre. Walk east along B-dul Republicii to the Opera House and Piața Victoriei. To the north is Piața Libertății; Piața Unirii, the old town square, bookended by the Roman Catholic Cathedral and the Serbian Orthodox Church, two blocks further north. Timișoara's bus station is beside the Idesin Market, three

blocks from the train station. Take B-dul General Drăgălina south to the canal, cross the bridge and head west to the next bridge. Boulevard C D Loga, south of the centre, swoops past a series of lovely parks, as well as the Metropolitan Cathedral. To get to the Eastern Train Station and international bus terminal, follow Aleea Demetriade northeast of the Old Town.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

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

MEDICAL SERVICES

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

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

MONEY

City Centre Travel Agency (B-dul Republicii 4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) Has an ATM and currency exchange.

Hotel Continental (B-dul Revoluției 3; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Has a currency exchange.

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

Volsbank (☎ 406 101; Str Piatra Craiului 2)

POST

Post office B-dul Revoluției (☎ 491 999; B-dul Revoluției 2; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat); Str Macieșilor (Str Macieșilor; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri) The central post office on B-dul Revoluției can get busy; if so, try the branch on Str Macieșilor.

TELEPHONE

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

TOURIST INFORMATION

City Centre Travel Agency (tourism ☎ 292 960, plane tickets 292 961; www.aerotravel.ro; B-dul Republicii 4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) A dynamic agency with people dedicated to all varieties of domestic tourism, car rental and flight bookings.

Sights

The centre of town is Piața Victoriei, a beautifully landscaped pedestrian mall lined with shops, cinemas and cafés, with the **National Theatre & Opera House** (p662) at its head. Note the column topped with the classic scene of **Romulus and Remus** feeding from the mother wolf – a gift from the city of Rome. It was here

that thousands of demonstrators gathered on 16 December 1989 (see p622), following the siege on László Tökés' house. A memorial plaque on the front of the Opera House today reads: 'So you, who pass by this building, will dedicate a thought for free Romania.'

Just east of the piața is the 15th-century Huniades Palace, housing the **Muzeul Banatului** (Banat History Museum; ☎ 491 339; Piața Huniade 1; admission €0.60; ☎ 10am-4.30pm), which is worth visiting for its displays on natural history, geology, armour, weapons, archaeology, ceramics, tools and scale-model countryside shelters.

Towering over the mall's southwestern end is the 1946 Romanian Orthodox **Metropolitan Cathedral** with unique electrical bells. Next to the cathedral is Parcul Central, and just south of it the Bega Canal.

The 1989 revolution began on 15 December 1989 at the **Biserica Reformată Tökés** (Tökés Reformed Church; ☎ 492 992; Str Timotei Cipariu 1), off B-dul 16 Decembrie just southwest of the centre, where Father László Tökés spoke out against the dictator.

Piața Libertății and the Primăria Veche (Old Town Hall; 1734) lie north. Piața Unirii is Timișoara's most picturesque square featuring a baroque 1754 **Roman Catholic Cathedral**, and the 1754 **Serbian Orthodox Cathedral**. Housed in the oldest fortress in Timișoara, **Banat Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 434 967; Str Popa Șapcă 4; admission €0.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is within the city's remaining 18th-century bastion.

Sleeping

Camping International (☎ 208 925; campinginternational@yahoo.com; Aleea Pădurea Verde 6; camp sites per tent €2.50, chalets with central heating s/d/q €34/46/63) Nestled in the Green Wood forest on the opposite side of town from Timișoara-Nord train station. The main entrance of this excellent camping ground is on Calea Dorobanților. From the station catch trolleybus 11 to the end of the line. The bus stops less than 50m from the camping ground. The site has a restaurant.

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

Pensiune Giulia (☎ 283 102; www.pensiuneagiulia.go.ro; Str Etolia 3; s/d €29/34.50) A gorgeous pension with contemporary art on the walls and all mod-cons near the city limits. No public transport access.

Hotel Cîna Banatul (☎ 491 903; B-dul Republicii 3-5; s/d €29/40) The best-value pad with clean, ultra-modern rooms and a good restaurant.

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

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

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of lovely terrace cafés lining Piaț Unirii and Piața Victoriei, where you can while away the time or plot the next revolution. Hang out with sociable locals at night in the terrace café-bars on Piața Victoriei, downing bottles of the local Timișoreana Pils beer for around €1 a bottle.

Pizzeria Horse (☎ 229 666; Str Popa Șapcă 4; mains €5) Slabs of mouth-watering pizza starting at €1!

La Tino (☎ 226 455; Calea Aradului 14; mains €4) There's classy Italian food and scrummy pizzas at this place north of the city centre.

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

Restaurant Lloyd (☎ 294 949; Piața Victoriei 2; meals €8-12) Exquisite international-Romanian menu of shark, smoked salmon and a spit-roast joint.

Violeta Bar (Piața Victoriei) At the southern end of the square, this bar is particularly popular.

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

Entertainment

CINEMAS

Cinema Timiș (☎ 491 290; Piața Victoriei 7; tickets €2-3) Movies are screened in their original language.

Cinema de Vară (B-dul CD Loga 2) Tickets at this brilliant outdoor cinema cost the same but it's far more fun!

NIGHTCLUBS

Be seen in these funky haunts.

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

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

THEATRE & CLASSICAL MUSIC

Buy tickets (starting at €1) from **Agenția Teatrală** (☎ 499 908; Str Mărășești 2; ☎ 10am-1pm, 5-7pm Tue-Sun) for performances at the following venues.

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

The **National Theatre & Opera House** (Teatrul Național și Opera Română; ☎ 201 284; Str Mărășești 2) is highly regarded.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 12km east of the centre. **Tarom** (☎ 200 003; B-dul Revoluției 1989 3-5; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 7am-1pm Sat) has four daily flights to Bucharest (US\$75 plus tax US\$5; note Tarom does not accept euros) and several weekly international flights.

Timișoara is the hub of **Carpatair** (www.carpatair.ro), Romania's thriving semibudget airline, with service to nine key cities as well as a growing list of international destinations. Strangely Carpatair doesn't have an office in its hub city, only out at the airport.

Yugoslav Airlines (JAT; ☎ 495 747; Str Eugeniu de Savoya 7) runs daily international flights to Europe.

Austrian Airlines (☎ 490 320; all-usr-to@aua.com; Piața Unirii 6) has daily flights to Vienna costing about €200.

BUS

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

International buses leave from the **East Bus Station** (Autogară Est), which is merely a few kiosks cluttered outside the east train station. **Atlasib** (☎ 226 486) goes to Italy, Spain and even Sweden. **Eurolines** (☎ 288 132; timisoara.ag@eurolines.ro) goes to Budapest, Greece, Switzerland and Portugal, among others. **Murat** (☎ 0744-144 326, in Romanian) goes to Istanbul (€100).

TRAIN

All major train services depart from **Gară Timișoara-Nord** (Northern Train Station; ☎ 491 696; Str Gării 2). Purchase tickets in advance from the

Agenție de Voiaj CFR (☎ 491 889; cnr Strs Măcieșilor & V Babeș; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, international tickets 9am-7pm Mon-Fri). Daily trains include eight to Bucharest (€22.50), one to Cluj-Napoca (€11.50), five to Băile Herculane (€8.40), one to Baia Mare via Arad (€12.60) and three sadiistically slow runs to Iași (16 hours). Additionally, three go to Budapest (€38) and one to Belgrade (€14).

MARAMUREȘ

Dismount from the horse-drawn cart and tip your chauffeur in cigarettes. You've found one of the last places where rural European medieval life remains intact. Where peasants live off the land as countless generations did before them. Even Romanians joke that nothing has changed here for 100 years – welcome to Maramureș.

The last peasant culture in Europe is thriving here, with hand-built wooden churches, traditional music, colourful costumes and ancient festivals. Villagers' homes are still fronted with traditional, giant, ornately carved wooden gates. Ear-smoking, 100-proof plumbrandy (*țuica*) stills percolate in the garden, usually tended by a rosy-cheeked patriarch. Discovering this part of the world is a time-travel adventure, verily stunning Western visitors.

The region was effectively cut off from Transylvania by a fortress of mountains and has remained untouched by the 20th-century (and the 19th century, and the 18th century...). It escaped the collectivisation of the 1940s, systemisation of the '80s and the Westernisation of the '90s and as such is living history.

SIGHET PRISON

In May 1947 the Communist regime embarked on a reign of terror, slaughtering, imprisoning and torturing thousands of Romanians. While many leading prewar figures were sent to hard-labour camps, the regime's most feared intellectual opponents were interned in Sighet's maximum-security prison. Between 1948 and 1952, about 180 members of Romania's academic and government elite were imprisoned here.

Today four white marble plaques covering the barred windows of the prison list the 51 prisoners who died in the Sighet cells, notably the academic and head of the National Liberal Party (PNL), Constantin Brătianu; historian and leading member of the PNL, Gheorghe Brătianu; governor of the National Bank, Constantin Tătăranu; and Luliu Maniu, president of the National Peasants' Party (PNT).

The prison, housed in the old courthouse, was closed in 1974. In 1989 it re-opened as the **Muzeu al Gândirii Arestate** (Museum of Arrested Thought; ☎ 314 224, 316 848; Str Corneliu Coposu 4; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm, to 4.30pm 15 Oct-15 May). Photographs are displayed in the torture chambers and cells.

SIGHETU MARMĂȚIEI

☎ 0262 / pop 41,425

Sighetu Marmăției is the northernmost town in Romania, almost touching the Ukrainian border. Its name is derived from the Thracian and Dacian word *seget* (fortress).

Sighet (as it's known locally) is famed for its vibrant **Winter Festival**. Its former maximum-security prison is now open as a museum and is a sobering and informative highlight of any visit to northern Romania.

Information

ATM (Piața Libertății 8) Outside Hotel Tisa.

Banca Română (Calea Ioan Mihaly de Apșa 24; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) ATM, and cash transfer and exchange facilities.

Fundația OVR Agro-Tur-Art (☎ 330 171; www.vaduizei.ovr.ro) In Vadu Izei (6km south) is the region's best source of beds, books and information.

Millennium (Str Corneliu Coposu; per hr €1.40; ☎ 9am-10pm Tue-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Internet access.

MM Pangaea Project Tourism (☎ 312 228; www.pangaeaturism.ro; Piața Libertății 15; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) Offers simple maps and group tours.

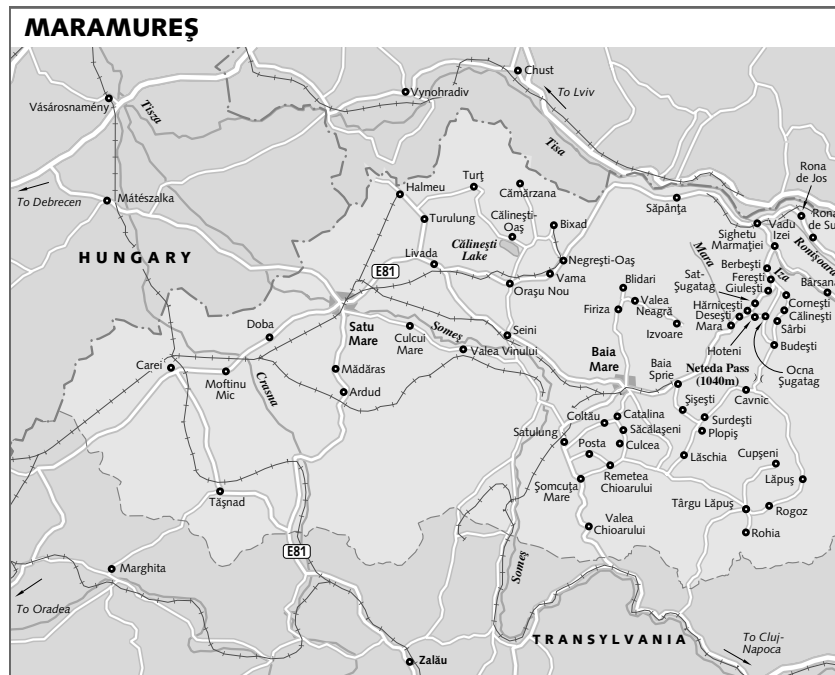
Post & telephone office (Str Ioan Mihaly de Apșa 39) Opposite the Maramureș Museum.

Sights

On Piața Libertății, the **Hungarian Reformed Church** was built during the 15th century. Close by is the 16th-century **Roman Catholic Church**.

Nearby, the **Maramureș Museum** (Piața Libertății 15; admission €0.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) displays colourful folk costumes, rugs and carnival masks.

Just off the square is Sighet's only remaining **synagogue** (Str Bessarabia 10). Before WWII there were eight synagogues serving a large



Jewish community, which comprised 40% of the town's population.

The Jewish writer and 1986 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel, who coined the term 'Holocaust', was born in (and later deported from) Sighet. His **house** is on the corner of Str Dragoș Vodă and Str Tudor Vladimirescu. Along Str Gheorghe Doja, there is a **monument** (Str Mureșan) to the victims of the Holocaust.

Visit traditional peasant houses from the Maramureș region at the open-air **Muzeul Satului** (Village Museum; ☎ 314 229; Str Dobâieș 40; adult/child €0.90/0.50; ☎ 9am-4pm), southeast of Sighet's centre. Allow at least half a day to wander through the incredible constructions. Children love the wood dwellings, cobbled pathways and 'mini' villages. You can even stay overnight in tiny wooden cabins (€5.50).

Sleeping & Eating

For homestays in the area check out www.ruraltourism.ro and www.pensiuni.info.ro.

Hotel Tisa (☎ 312 645; Piața Libertății 8; d/tr €24/29) Smack-bang in the centre of Sighet, the ailing

rooms here were enjoying renovation at the time of writing.

Motel Buți (☎ 311 035; Str Ștefan cel Mare 6; s/d/tr €21/28/41) This charming villa has spotlessly clean but small rooms, as well as a bar and pool table downstairs.

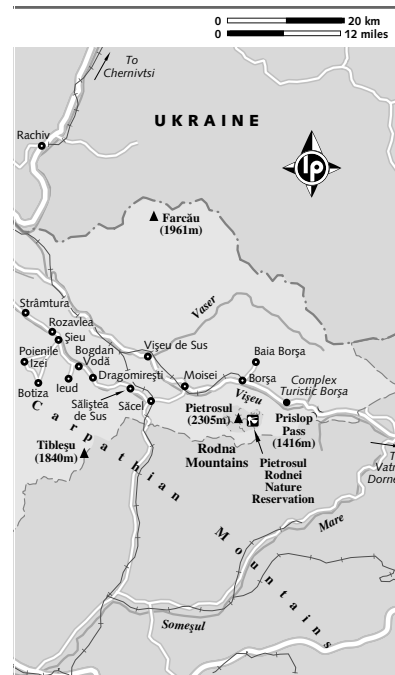
David's (Str Ioan Mihalay de Apșa 1; ☎ 7am-10pm; mains €3) is the lively bar-of-the-moment, with a menu long on drinks and short on food.

Getting There & Away

BUS
The **bus station** (Str Gării) is opposite the train station. There are several local buses daily to Baia Mare (€2, 65km), Satu Mare (€2.50, 122km), Borșa (€1), Budești (€1), Călinești (€1), Vișeu de Sus (€1.50), and one bus daily to Bârsana, Botiza, Ieud and Mara.

TRAIN

Tickets are sold in advance at the **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 312 666; Piața Libertății 25; ☎ 7am-2pm Mon-Fri). There's one daily fast train that runs to Timișoara (€20), Bucharest (€20, 12 hours), Cluj-Napoca (€12.50, six hours) and Arad (€18).



SĂPÂNȚA

☎ 0262

Săpânța village has a unique place in the hearts of Romanians. It boasts the **Merry Cemetery**, which is famous for the colourfully painted wooden crosses that adorn its tombstones. Shown in art exhibitions across Europe, the crosses attract coachloads of visitors who marvel at the gentle humour and human warmth that created them.

Five hundred metres off the main road, a new wooden church claiming to be the **tallest wooden structure in Europe** (75m) is being built with a controversial stone base.

The village itself lies 12km northwest of Sighetu Marmăției, just 4km south of Ukraine. Find rooms at **Pensiunea Stan** (☎ 372 337; d €20), opposite the cemetery entrance, and **Pensiunea Ileana** (☎ 372 137; d €14), a green-tiled house to the right of Pensiunea Stan.

Camping Poieni (☎ 372 228; camp sites €1.50, cabins per person €3; ☎ 1 Jun-31 Aug), 3km south of Săpânța, and has an excellent trout restaurant.

A bus leaves for Săpânța from Sighetu Marmăției every hour (8am to 2pm), returning at 4pm and 5pm.

VALEA IZEI

☎ 0262 / pop 3000

The Valea Izei (Izei Valley) follows the Iza River eastward from Sighetu Marmăției to Moisei. The valley is lined with small peasant villages that are renowned for their elaborately carved wooden gates and tall wooden churches.

Tourism is gradually developing in this region, providing visitors with the opportunity to sample traditional cuisine or try their hand at woodcarving, wool weaving and glass painting.

In mid-July, Vadu Izei, together with the neighbouring villages of Botiza and Ieud, hosts the **Maramuzical Festival**, a lively four-day international folk-music festival.

Vadu Izei

Vadu Izei is at the confluence of the Iza and Mara Rivers, 6km south of Sighetu Marmăției.

Fundația OVR Agro-Tur-Art (☎ 330 171; www.va.duizei.ovr.ro; house No 161) is an unrivalled source of local information and has rooms for rent in private homes (€15 to €20). **Nicolae Prisăcaru** (☎ 0721-046 730; prisnic@conseco.ro) and the lovely **Ramona Ardelean** (☎ 0744-827 829; aramona@gmx.de) arrange excellent guided tours in French or English (€13/25 per half-/full day plus €0.25 per kilometre), as well as picnics, woodcarving or icon-painting workshops, and homestays.

Bârsana

From Vadu Izei continue southeast for 12km to Bârsana. Dating from 1326, the village acquired its first church in 1720 (its interior paintings were done by local artists). The Orthodox **Bârsana Monastery** is a popular pilgrimage spot in Maramureș. It was the last Orthodox monastery to be built in the region before Serafim Petrovai, head of the Orthodox church in Maramureș, converted to Greco-Catholicism in 1711.

Maria Pașca (☎ 331 165; house No 377; bed €20, with full-board €30) has rooms to rent at her home.

Rozavlea

Continue south though Strâmtura to Rozavlea, first documented under the name of Gorzohaza in 1374. Its fine **church**, dedicated to the archangels Michael and Gabriel, was built between 1717 and 1720 in another village, then erected in Rozavlea on the site of an ancient church destroyed by the Tatars.

Botiza

From Rozavlea continue south for 3km to Șieu, then turn off for Botiza. Botiza's **old church**, built in 1694, is overshadowed by the large **new church** constructed in 1974 to serve the 500 or so devout Orthodox families.

Opération Villages Roumains (OVR) runs an efficient agrotourism scheme in Botiza. Bookings can be made with local representative **George Iurca** (☎ 334 110, 0722-942 140; botizavr@sintec.ro; house No 742; ☎ 8am-10pm), whose house is signposted. George also runs German-, French- and English-speaking tours of Maramureș (€10 to €15 per day) and Transylvania, rents out mountain bikes (€5 per day) and organises fishing trips.

Ieud

The oldest wooden church in Maramureș, dating from 1364, is in Ieud, 6km south of the main road from Șieu. Ieud was first documented in 1365. Its fabulous Orthodox **Church on the Hill** was built from fir wood and used to house the first document known to be written in Romanian (1391-92), in which the catechism and church laws pertaining to Ieud were coded. The church was restored in 1958 and in 1997.

Ieud's second **church** is Greco-Catholic, and was built in 1717. It is unique to the region as it has no porch. At the southern end of the village it houses one of the largest collections of icons on glass found in Maramureș.

OVR runs a small agrotourism scheme in Ieud. You can make advance bookings through the office in Vadu Izei (p665) or go straight to local representatives **Vasile Chindris** (☎ 336 197; house No 201; bed €12, with full-board €25), **Liviu Ilea** (☎ 336 039; house No 333; bed €12, with full-board €18) or **Vasile Rîșco** (☎ 336 019; house No 705; r with half-/full-board €12/18).

Moisei

Moisei lies 7km northeast of Săcel, at the junction of route 17C and route 18. A small town at the foot of the Rodna Massif, Moisei is known for its traditional crafts and customs. It gained fame in 1944 when retreating Hungarian (Horthyst) troops gunned down 31 people before setting fire to the village.

In 1944, following the news that the front was approaching Moisei, villagers started to flee, including those forced-labour detachments stationed in the village. Occupying Hungarian forces organised a manhunt to track down the deserters. Thirty-one were captured and detained in a small camp in nearby

Vișeu de Sus without food or water for three weeks. On 14 October 1944 Hungarian troops brought the 31 prisoners to a house in Moisei, locked them inside, then shot them through the windows – 29 were killed. Before abandoning the village, the troops set it on fire, leaving all 125 remaining families homeless.

Only one house in Moisei survived the blaze: the one in which the prisoners were shot. Today it houses a small **museum** in tribute to those who died in the massacre. Opposite, on a hillock above the road and railway line, is a circular **monument** to the victims. The 12 upright columns symbolise sun and light. Each column is decorated with a traditional carnival mask, except for two that bear human faces based on the features of the two survivors.

The museum and monument are at the eastern end of the village. If the museum is locked, knock at the house next door and ask for the key.

BORȘA

☎ 0262

Ore has been mined at Borșa, 12km east of Moisei, since the mid-14th century. The area was colonised in 1777 by German miners from Slovakia; later, Bavarian-Austrian miners moved to Baia Borșa, 2km northeast of the town, to mine copper, lead and silver.

The **Complex Turistic Borșa**, a small ski resort and tourist complex 10km east of Borșa town, is a main entry point to the **Rodna Mountains**, part of which form the Pietrosul Rodnei Nature Reservation (5900 hectares). For useful information on the hiking trails leading into the massif talk to staff at the two-star **Hotel Cerbal** (☎ 344 199; Str Fântâna; s/d/tr ind breakfast €31/37/47).

In winter, you can ski down the 2030m-long ski run at the complex (beginner to intermediate). There's a **ski lift** (Str Brădet 10; ☎ 7am-6pm), but ski hire is not available.

PRISLOP PASS

Famed for its remoteness, the Prislop Pass is the main route from Maramureș into Moldavia. Hikers can trek east from Borșa across the pass.

From Moldavia you can head northeast to Cămpulung Moldovenesc and on to the monasteries of southern Bucovina; or south to the natural mineral waters of Vatra Dornei and through to the fantastic Bicăz Lake.

At 1416m a roadside monument marks the site of the last Tartar invasion prior to their

final flight from the region in 1717. Nearby is the Hanul Prislop, site of the Hora de la Prislop, the major Maramureș festival, held yearly on the second Sunday in August.

MOLDAVIA

With thickly forested hills and tranquil valleys undulating off into the horizon, Moldavia mixes the rich folklore, natural beauty and turbulent history of Transylvania and the quietly appealing, bucolic paradise of Maramureș into its own lovely hybrid of the best of Romania. Cavort through the countryside, then urbanise in Iași and Suceava, where the first generation to have no vivid memories of Ceaușescu is rapidly developing a taste for food, shopping and late-night debauchery.

IAȘI

☎ 0232 / pop 326,502

Iași (pronounced 'yash') has an energy and depth of character that would be instantly giddy if one had the power to see through concrete. Those without this endowment will need a few days to pinpoint the numerous joys of Romania's second-largest city.

Iași's past as Moldavia's capital since 1565 has resulted in a city scattered with fabulous buildings, important monasteries, parks and unpretentious cultural treasures. Moreover, it's the perfect staging area for travellers heading to the Moldovan border, 20km away.

Modern Iași is among Romania's most vibrant cities, teeming with beautiful people, restaurants, bars and hot night spots. **Iași Days** (second week in October) is an unhinged street party, fuelled by a river of *must* (a sweet, fermented not-quite-wine brew).

Orientation

Iași's street design was seemingly laid out by a crayon-wielding two-year-old. To reach Iași's bus station (Autogara Iași Vest) from Gară Centrală train station, walk northwest along Str Străpungerea Silvestru for about 1km. To reach Piața Unirii from Gară Centrală train station, walk northeast along Str Gării for two blocks, then turn right onto Șos Arcu. From Piața Unirii, B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt runs southeast past the Mitropolia Moldovei (Moldavian Metropolitan Cathedral) and the Church of the Three

Hierarchs, ending at the Palatul Culturii (Palace of Culture). B-dul Carol I starts at Piața Mihai Eminescu and runs northwest, past the university, Parcul Copou and the Botanical Gardens.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Bar-Cafe Internet (B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt 8, per hr €1.50; ☎ 24hr) Inside the mall.

Take Net (Șos Arcu 1; per hr €0.60; ☎ 24hr)

EMERGENCY

For any emergency within the city, dial ☎ 112.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Sfântu Spiridon University Hospital (☎ 210 690; B-dul Independenței 1) The city's largest, most central hospital.

MONEY

Raiffeisen Bank (B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt 2; ☎ 8.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

POST

Post office (☎ 212 222; Str Cuza Vodă 10; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

TELEPHONE

Telephone centre (Str Alexandru Lăpușeanu; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Iași has no official tourist office.

Cliven Tourism (☎ 258 326; www.reservation.ro; B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt 8-12; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) As agents for Antrec, these adept English-speakers can arrange rural accommodation, city tours and car rental.

Sights

B-DUL ȘTEFAN CEL MARE ȘI SFÂNT & AROUND

Start your city tour on Piața Unirii, the main square, with a trip to the 13th floor restaurant of **Hotel Unirea** for a bird's-eye view of Iași.

Eastwards the tree-lined B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt leads to the **Moldavian Metropolitan Cathedral** (Mitropolia Moldovei; 1833-39) with its cavernous interior painted by Gheorghe Tattarescu. In mid-October thousands of pilgrims flock here to celebrate the day of St Paraschiva, the patron saint of the cathedral and of Moldavia.

Opposite is a park and at the northeastern end is the **Vasile Alecsandri National Theatre**

(1894–96). In front of it is a statue of its founder Vasile Alecsandri (1821–90), a poet who single-handedly created the theatre's first repertoire with his Romanian adaptation of a French farce.

The boulevard's shining pearl is the fabulous **Biserica Sfinților Trei Ierarhi** (Church of the Three Hierarchs; 1637–39), unique for its rich exterior, which is embroidered in a wealth of intricate patterns in stone. Built by Prince Vasile Lupu, the church was badly damaged by Tatar attacks in 1650 but later restored. Inside are the marble tombs of Prince Vasile Lupu and his family, as well as Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza and Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir.

At the southern end of B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt stands the giant neo-Gothic

Palatul Culturii (Palace of Culture; ☎ 218 383; adult/child each museum €0.70/0.50, all 4 museums €2.25/1.50; 🕒 10am–4.30pm Tue–Sun), built between 1906 and 1925 on the ruins of the **old princely court**, founded by Prince Alexandru cel Bun (r 1400–32) in the early 15th century.

The main attraction of the 365-room building today is the four first-class museums it houses: the **Ethnographic Museum**, which has exhibits ranging from agriculture, fishing and hunting to wine-making, as well as traditional costumes and rugs; the **Art Museum** containing works by Romanian artists including Nicolae Grigorescu and Moldavian-born Petre Achițemiu; the **Muzeul de Istorie** (History Museum), where the exhibits include portraits of all of Romania's rulers from AD 81; and

the **Science & Technical Museum** which displays various mechanical creations and musical instruments.

A few blocks north, past the central market, is the fortified **Golia Monastery** (admission free; Str Cuza Vodă), which was constructed in a late-Renaissance style. The monastery's walls and the 30m Golia tower at the entrance shelter a 17th-century church, noted for its vibrant Byzantine frescoes and intricately carved doorways.

PARCUL COPOU

To get to **Parcul Copou** (Copou Park; laid out between 1834 and 1848) catch tram 1 or 13 north from Piața Unirii. The park, which was established during the princely reign of Mihail Sturza, is famed as being a favourite haunt of the legendary poet Mihai Eminescu (1850–89). He allegedly penned some of his best works beneath his favourite linden tree in this park.

The tree is still standing, behind a 13m-tall **monument of lions**, and opposite the main entrance to the park. A bronze bust of Eminescu stands in front of it. Here is the **Mihai Eminescu Museum of Literature** (☎ 0747-499 405; admission €0.30; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), which recalls the life and loves of Eminescu, Romania's most cherished writer and poet.

Sleeping

Casa Bucovineana Hostel (☎ 222 913; Str Cuza Voda 30; s/d/ste with shared bathroom €19.60/30/56) Recent renovations have made the rooms here much more palatable. Some doubles have in-room showers. All rooms have TVs and phones. Breakfast not included.

Hotel Continental (☎ 211 846; Piața 14 Decembrie 1989) The rooms here have been freshened, but so have the prices. The shared bathrooms are clean and private bathrooms are new and immaculate – very much worth the upgrade. Try to get a room away from the noisy street.

Hotel Traian (☎ 266 666; Piața Unirii 1; s/d/ste €63/79/97) The multilingual staff here will make you feel at home in this elegant hotel, designed by Gustave Eiffel. The high-ceiling rooms are awash in old-world comfort, with large, modern bathrooms.

Casa Universitatilor (☎ 340 029 B-dul Carol I, 9; mains €1–3) Meals are geared for destitute students, but the lime tree-festooned terrace is great for a lazy beer.

Eating & Drinking

Family Pizza (☎ 262 400; Str Gl Brătianu; mains €2–4; 🕒 24hr) This lively, brightly lit parlour has 25 types of pizza, plus pasta and a week's worth of pastries to choose from. They also deliver.

Pub Baron (☎ 206 076; Str Sfântu Lazăr 52; mains €2–4; 🕒 24hr) Cosy wooden interiors and a great eating option. They're heavy on fresh grills, cooked in brick ovens in the dining room, but there are many salads and fish dishes too.

Casa Pogor (☎ 243 006; Str Vasile Pogor 4; mains €2–4; 🕒 11am–midnight) Where to sit? In the insanely cosy basement that used to house the famed Junimea wine cellar, the main dining hall furnished with antiques or on the multitiered terrace looking out onto a quiet square? Iași's most pleasant restaurant (with the patchiest wait-staff) also has vegetarian choices.

Ginger Ale (☎ 276 017; Str Săulescu 23; mains €2–5; 🕒 11–1am) This place feels like an oversized, old-fashioned café with its antique furniture and cosy dining room. A great place for drinks or a full meal, they also offer 20% to 50% discounts daily from noon to 4pm.

Trei Sarmale (☎ 237 255; Str Bucium 52; mains €2–5; 🕒 9–2am) This traditional Romanian restaurant teeters on the edge of kitsch with its folkier-than-thou décor, but the food is mouthwatering. Check before you head out there as it is often booked by tour groups. Take a €3 taxi or bus 30 or 46 from Piața Mihai Eminescu; ask the driver for 'Tre Sarmale'.

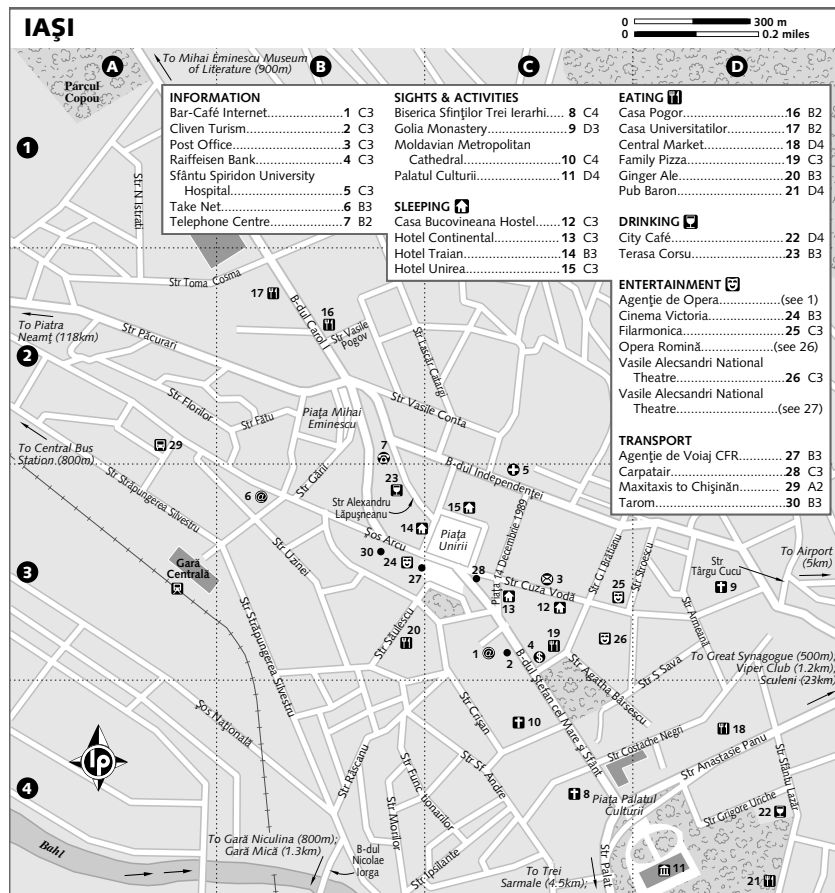
City Café (Str Sfântu Lazăr 34; 🕒 11–1am) This is where Iași's beautiful, moneyed people come for relaxed posing sessions. A high-tech, blue-lit, ultracool bar, it's known for its many cocktails.

Terasa Corso (☎ 276 143; www.corsoterasa.ro; Str Alexandru Lăpușeanu 11; 🕒 11am–midnight Mon, 9–1am Tue–Sun) The concept of a 'bar' is stretched in this huge, amphitheatre-shaped pub with a well-tended garden in the middle.

Central market (🕒 8am–4pm) Get fresh fruit and vegetables at this indoor market, with entrances on Str Costache Negri and Str Anastasie Panu.

Entertainment

Viper Club (Iulius Mall; 🕒 24hr, disco 11pm–4am) This rainy-day, entertainment emporium about a kilometre out of the centre, features bowling alleys, billiards and video games, and transforms itself into a House-music haven come night-time.



Cinema Victoria (☎ 312 502; Piața Unirii 5) See your favourite Hollywood schlockbuster with Romanian subtitles here!

Filarmonica (Philharmonic; ☎ 212 509; www.filarmonica.ro; Str Cuza Vodă 29; box office ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri) When the much-revered Iași State Philharmonic Orchestra is in town, its concerts are massively popular. Tickets cost from €2 with 50% student discounts.

Vasile Alecsandri National Theatre (☎ 316 778; Str Agatha Bârescu 18) and the **Opera Română** (☎ 211 144) are located in the same impressive neo-baroque building. For advance bookings go to the **Agenția de Opera** (☎ 255 999; B-dul Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt 8; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat). Tickets cost from €1.50, with 50% student discounts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Tarom (☎ 267 768; Șos Arcu 3-5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) has daily flights to Bucharest (about US\$75 plus tax US\$5; note Tarom does not accept euros). **Carpatair** (☎ 215 295; www.carpatair.com; Str Cuza Vodă 2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) has flights to Timișoara Monday to Saturday, from where you can catch connecting flights to Italy, Germany and Paris.

BUS

The **central bus station** (Autogara Iași Vest; ☎ 214 720), behind the large building labelled 'Auto Center', has four daily maxitaxis each to Târgu Neamț (€2.85) and Suceava (€5.15), eight to Bucharest (€11.40), 18 to Bacău and almost 20 to Piatra Neamț (€4.30). Slower buses run to Vatra Dornei, Tulcea and Brașov.

Maxitaxis to Chișinău leave from outside the Billa supermarket three to four times daily while up to six daily (slower) buses to Chișinău depart from the bus station.

TRAIN

Nearly all trains arrive and depart from the Gară Centrală (also called Gară Mare and Gară du Nord) on Str Garii. Trains to Chișinău depart from the Gară Niculina (also called Gară International) on B-dul Nicolae Iorga about 800m south of the centre, and tickets for the trip must be bought from Gară Mică (the one with the sign saying 'Niculina' on it!), 500m south on Aleea Nicolina. The **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 242 620; Piața Unirii 10; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri) sells advance tickets.

There are five daily trains to Bucharest (€14.50, seven hours), one service daily to each of Oradea, Galați, Mangalia and three

to Timișoara (via Oradea, affectionately called the 'horror train' by locals).

SOUTHERN BUCOVINA

Southern Bucovina is a rural paradise as magical and deeply revered as Maramureș. Its painted churches are among the greatest artistic monuments of Europe – in 1993 they were collectively designated World Heritage sites by Unesco. Apart from religious art and fantastic churches, southern Bucovina is well worth visiting for its folklore, picturesque villages, bucolic scenery and colourful inhabitants, all as memorable as you'll find elsewhere in Romania.

Southern Bucovina embraces the north-western region of present-day Moldavia; northern Bucovina is in Ukraine.

SUCEAVA

☎ 0230 / pop 111,200

Suceava, the capital of Moldavia from 1388 to 1565, was a thriving commercial centre on the Lviv–Istanbul trading route. Today it's the seat of Suceava County and gateway to the painted churches of Bucovina.

Orientation

Piața 22 Decembrie is the centre of town, with most sites of note being within a 400m radius. Suceava has two train stations, Suceava and Suceava Nord, both north of the city centre and easily reached by trolleybus or maxitaxi. From Suceava station, cross the street, buy a ticket at a kiosk and take trolleybus 2 or 3 to the centre of town. From Suceava Nord take trolleybus 5 or maxitaxi 1 (pay the driver). From Piața 22 Decembrie, walk south along Str Ștefan cel Mare past Central Park and Bucovina Mall to the Bucovina History Museum. Or head north for St Dimitrie's Church and the Central Market. The City of Residence citadel is east of the centre, down Str Cetății, over the creek and through Parcul Șipote.

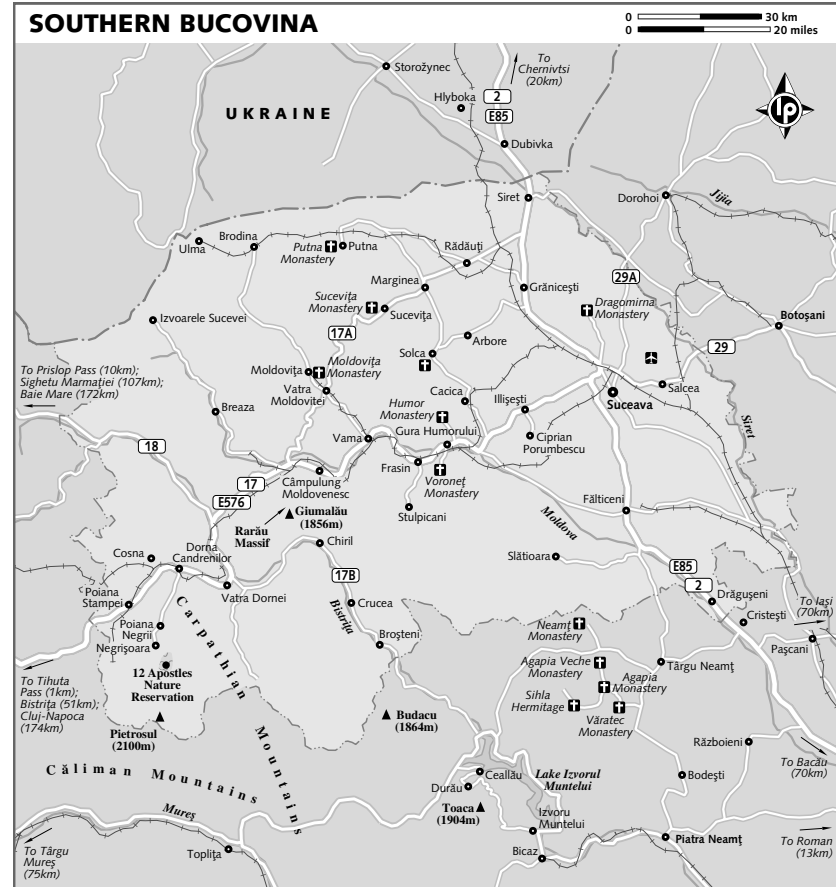
Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Assist (☎ 523 044; Piața 22 Decembrie; per hr €0.50; ☎ 9am-11pm)

MONEY

There are several ATMs on Piața 22 Decembrie and along Str Ștefan cel Mare.



Raiffeisen Bank (Str Nicolai Bălcescu 2; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat)

POST

Post office (☎ 512 222; Str Dimitrie Onciul; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

TELEPHONE

Telephone centre (cnr Str Nicolae Bălcescu & Str Dimitrie Onciul; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Not surprisingly, Suceava is bursting with tourist resources. Start while you're still at home by visiting www.lasuceava.ro.

Unita Tour Suceava (☎ 523 024; unitatour.sv@unita-turism.ro; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 2; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri,

to 5pm Sat) Inside Hotel Suceava, this small office can arrange monastery tours with multilingual guides for between €80 and €90 (€20 to €25 extra for guide) per group. **Ciprian Slemcho** (☎ 0744-292 588; www.mtour.go.ro) This highly recommended private tour guide is a specialist in both religion and history. He's also a can-do kind of guy and arranges tours to suit your schedule.

Infoturism (☎ 551 241, 0722-331 502; infoturism@suceava.rdsnet.ro; Str Mihai Eminescu 8; ☎ 8am-8pm) This is the official tourism office of Suceava county.

Sights

The bulky **Casa de Cultură** (House of Culture) is at the western end of Piața 22 Decembrie, the city's main square. West of Piața 22 Decembrie is Hanul Domnesc, a 16th-century guesthouse that now houses an **Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 214

081; Str Ciprian Porumbescu 5; adult/child €0.60/0.30; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), with a good collection of folk costumes and typical household items.

North of the bus stop along B-dul Ana Ipătescu lie the foundations of the 15th-century **Princely Palace**. To the west is **Biserica Sfântul Dumitru** (St Dimitru's church; 1535) built by Petru Rareș.

Return to Piața 22 Decembrie and follow Str Ștefan cel Mare south past Parcul Central (Central Park) to the informative **Muzeul Național al Bucovinei** (Bucovina History Museum; ☎ 216 439; Str Ștefan cel Mare 33; adult/child €0.90/0.30; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun). The presentation comes to an abrupt end at 1945 and old paintings now hang in rooms that formerly glorified the communist era.

The **Mănăstirea Sfântu Ioan cel Nou** (Monastery of St John the New; 1522), off Str Mitropoliei, is well worth visiting. The paintings on the outside of the church are badly faded, but they give you an idea of the painted churches that Bucovina is famous for.

Continue along Str Mitropoliei, keeping left on the main road out of town, until you see a large wooden gate marked 'Parcul Cetății' on the left. Go through it and, when the path divides, follow the footpath with the park benches around to the left to the huge **equestrian statue** (1966) of the Moldavian leader, Ștefan cel Mare. Twenty metres back on the access road to the monument is a footpath on the left, which descends towards the **Cetate de Scaun** (City of Residence; adult/child €0.45/0.30; ☎ 9am-6pm), a citadel

fortress that held off Mehmed II, conqueror of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1476.

Sleeping

High Class Hostel (☎ 525 213, 0723-782 328; www.classhostel.ro; Str Aurel Vlaicu 195; per person €14.50; ☎) This hostel is on the edge of the city, but you'll feel as if you're in the country in this peaceful, spacious and ultra-modern two-floor house. Monica, your interminably good-natured host, can arrange monastery tours if you like, or show you around the city too. It's a super-friendly hostel, and one of the country's best, 1km west of Gară de Nord.

Giardino Pensiune (☎ 531 778, www.giardino.ro; Str Dobrogeanu Gherea 2; s/d €28/35; ☎) Opened in 2005 this three-star pension still reeks of brand new everything. The breakfast (included), is overwhelming. Just 200m from the bus station. Psst! Prices are negotiable for backpackers!

Hotel Suceava (☎ 521 079; www.unita-turism.ro; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 2; unrenovated s/d €25/34, renovated s/d/tr €32/43/52) Smack in the city centre and featuring old-fashioned but perfectly comfortable rooms, with new bathrooms, this is a very pleasant place. Refrigerators are available upon request.

Hotel Balada (☎ 520 408; www.balada.ro; Str Mitropoliei 3; s/d/ste €59/70/111.50; ☎) One of the top hotels in the region, this three-storey hotel offers elegance and comfort over pure luxury; rooms have everything you need but are simply furnished. It's on a lovely, quiet street.

Eating & Drinking

Latino (☎ 523 627; Str Curtea Domnească 9; mains €2-8; ☎ 11am-midnight) The classy, subdued décor is accentuated by impeccable service and a dazzlingly varied menu that runs the gamut from over 25 kinds of pizza (with real mozzarella!; €5), to a dozen first-rate pasta dishes (€4) and steaming, fresh fish dishes (€5 to €8).

Markiz (☎ 520 219; Str Vasile Alecsandri 10; mains €2-4; ☎ 8am-11pm) Its once grand reputation diminished, this budget-friendly Middle Eastern restaurant may nevertheless be your best chance at culinary diversity until you get back to Bucharest. The terrace remains a pleasant and favoured place to have a few drinks.

The **central market** (nr Strs Petru Rareș & Ștefan cel Mare) is close to the bus station.

Pub Chagall (☎ 0723 961 127; Str Ștefan cel Mare; mains €3-7; ☎ 11am-1am) Cosy cellar pub and diner.

Though it has a full menu of tasty meals (€1 to €3), it's mostly used as a drinking hole.

Club 60 (☎ 209 440; Str Ștefan cel Mare; ☎ 1pm-1am) Enter here at your own risk: you may never want to leave! Emanating some of the smoothest vibes of any club in the country is this vast, loft-style lounge-bar with wooden floors, antique furnishings, comfy sofas and billiard tables. Enter from the back of the Universal Department Store and climb the stairs to the 2nd floor.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Suceava's **Ștefan cel Mare airport** (www.aeroportsuceava.ro) is about 15km northeast of the centre.

Tarom (☎ 214 686; www.tarom.ro; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 2; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) has four weekly flights to Bucharest (US\$104 plus tax US\$5; Tarom does not accept euros).

Carpatair (☎ 529 559; www.carpatair.com) doesn't have an office in Suceava, but it does fly to Timișoara and points beyond there, three times a week.

BUS

The **bus station** (☎ 216 089) is in the centre of town at Str Armenească.

Bus and maxitaxi services include 13 daily to Gura Humorului (€1.40), eight to Botoșani (€1.40), six to Rădăuți (€1.40), five to Iași (€4.50) and Vatra Dornei (€3), four to Bucharest (€9.20) and three to Târgu Neamț (€2.30). Five daily buses go to Chernivtsi (Cernăuți) in Ukraine (€5.70) and three a week to Chișinău in Moldova (€8.60).

TRAIN

The bus stop to the train station is east of Piața 22 Decembrie, across B-dul Ana Ipătescu, next to McDonald's. The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 214 335; Str Nicolae Bălcescu 8; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri) sells advance tickets. Trains that originate or terminate in Suceava arrive and depart at Suceava Nord. Most trains arrive and depart from the newly spruced Gară Burdujeni (also known as Gară Sud or Gară Principala), which is a half-scale replica of Milan's stunning Central Station.

Train service includes nine to Gură Humorului (€2.10, 70 minutes), seven to Vatra Dornei (€7, 3¼ hours), three to Iași (€4.40, 2½ hours) and Timișoara (€18, 13½ hours) and one daily to Bucharest (€15.50, seven hours). To get to Moldovița, change at Vama.

SUCEAVA

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INFORMATION

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BUCOVINA MONASTERIES

☎ 0230

Voroneț

The *Last Judgment* fresco, which fills the entire western wall of the **Voroneț Monastery** (adult/child €1.20/0.60; ☎ 8am-8pm), is perhaps the most marvellous Bucovine fresco. At the top, angels roll up the signs of the zodiac to indicate the end of time. The middle fresco shows humanity being brought to judgment. On the left, St Paul escorts the believers, while on the right Moses brings forward the nonbelievers. Below is the *Resurrection*.

On the northern wall is *Genesis*, from Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel. The southern wall features a tree of Jesse (see opposite for details of the Sucevița Jesse tree) with the genealogy of biblical personalities. In the vertical fresco to the left is the story of the martyrdom of St John of Suceava (who is buried in the Monastery of Sfântu Ioan cel Nou in Suceava). The vibrant, almost satiny blue pigment used throughout the frescoes is known worldwide as 'Voroneț blue'.

In the narthex lies the tomb of Daniel the Hermit, the first abbot of Voroneț Monastery. It was upon the worldly advice of Daniel, who told Ștefan cel Mare not to give up his battle against the Turks, that the Moldavian prince went on to win further victories against the Turks and then to build Voroneț Monastery out of gratitude to God.

In 1785 the occupying Austrians forced Voroneț's monks to abandon the monastery. Since 1991 the monastery has been inhabited by a small community of nuns.

SLEEPING & EATING

The town of Gura Humorului is a perfect base to visit Voroneț. Every second house takes in tourists. The usual rate per person per night in a so-called 'vila' is about €15 to €20. There's wild camping possible on the south bank of the Moldova River, 500m south of the bus station; follow the only path and cross the river.

Pensiunea Lions (☎ 235 226; www.motel-lions.ro, in Romanian, Str Ștefan cel Mare 39; s/d €23/29) This three-star *pension*-restaurant minicomplex is warm, homy and clean. Beds are decent and all rooms have a balcony.

Hotel Simeria (☎ 230 227; Mihail Kogalniceanu 2; s €27, d per person €30) This is a modern, impeccably clean and pleasant three-storey hotel. Some rooms have balconies, all have refrigerator and TV.

Casa Elena (☎ 230 651; www.casaelena.ro; s/d €44/59)

A quick 3.5km trip from Gura Humorului on the northern edge of Voroneț Monastery, this four-star option has 31 rooms in five different villas, all in a large, luxurious complex. The hotel also has a billiard room, sauna and 24-hour restaurant.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p673 for bus and train services from Suceava to Gura Humorului. There are buses on weekdays from Gura Humorului to Voroneț, departing at 7am, 12.30pm and 2.45pm. A lovely option is to walk the 4km along a narrow village road to Voroneț. The route is clearly marked and it's impossible to get lost.

Humor

Of all the Bucovina monasteries, **Humor Monastery** (Mănăstirea Humorului; adult/child €1.20/0.60; ☎ 8am-8pm) has the most impressive interior frescoes.

On the church's southern exterior wall (AD 1530) the 1453 siege of Constantinople is depicted, with the parable of the return of the prodigal son beside it. On the porch is the *Last Judgment* and, in the first chamber inside the church, scenes of martyrdom.

Aside from hitching a ride the 6km from Gura Humorului, there are regular maxitaxis that depart from next to the towering Best Western Hotel, at the start of the road towards the monastery.

Moldovița

Moldovița Monastery (adult/child €1.20/0.60; ☎ 10am-6pm) is in the middle of a quaint village. It's a fortified enclosure with towers and brawny gates, and a magnificent painted church at its centre. The monastery has undergone careful restoration in recent years.

The fortifications here are actually more impressive than the frescoes. On the church's southern exterior wall is a depiction of the defence of Constantinople in AD 626 against Persians dressed as Turks, while on the porch is a representation of the *Last Judgment*, all on a background of blue. Inside the sanctuary, on a wall facing the original carved iconostasis, is a portrait of Prince Petru Rareș (Moldovița's founder) and his family offering the church to Christ. All these works date from 1537. In the monastery's small museum is Petru Rareș' original throne.

SLEEPING & EATING

See www.ruraltourism.ro for some great homestays in Vama, a small village 14km south of Moldovița on the main Suceava-Vatra Dornei road.

Mărul de Aur (☎ 336 180; camping free, cabins €3.50) Located in Moldovița between the train station and the monastery, Mărul de Aur has pitiable rooms that are not recommended, however it operates a camping ground, 3km out of town on the road to Sucevița.

Letitia Orsvișchi Pension (☎ 745 869 529; orsvișchiletita@yahoo.fr; Str Gării 20; per person €25; ☎) This large, two-house property in Vama has a massive painted-egg exhibit and a private ethnographic museum. Rooms are simple, but clean, with shared bathroom. Breakfast, dinner *and* internet included! Follow the signs with painted eggs. No English is spoken.

Casa Alba (☎ 340 404; www.casa-alba.suceava.ro; s/d/ste €46/54.50/77) You certainly won't feel a monastic asceticism in this lush, ultra-modern and very comfortable villa. Follow the one road heading south 5km west of Frasin about 3km east of Vama.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Moldovița Monastery is right above Vatra Moldoviței's train station (be sure to get off at Vatra Moldoviței, not Moldovița). From Suceava there are nine daily trains to Vama (1E hours), and from Vama three trains leave daily for Vatra Moldoviței (35 minutes).

Sucevița

Sucevița Monastery (adult/child €1.20/0.60; ☎ 8am-8pm) is perhaps the largest and finest of the Bucovina monasteries.

The church inside the fortified quadrangular enclosure (built between 1582 and 1601) is almost completely covered in frescoes. As you enter you first see the *Virtuous Ladder* fresco covering most of the northern exterior wall, which depicts the 30 steps from hell to paradise. On the southern exterior wall is a tree symbolising the continuity of the Old and New Testaments. The tree grows from the reclining figure of Jesse, who is flanked by a row of ancient philosophers. To the left is the Virgin as a Byzantine princess, with angels holding a red veil over her head. Mysteriously, the western wall remains blank. Legend has it that the artist fell off his scaffolding and died, leaving artists of the time too scared to follow in his footsteps.

SLEEPING & EATING

It's worth spending a night here and doing a little hiking in the surrounding hills. Wild camping is possible in the field across the stream from the monastery, as well as along the road from Moldovița. The road from Marginea to Sucevița is littered with *cazare* (room for rent) signs.

Pensiunea Emilia (☎ 0740 117 277; Str Bercheza 173; s/d €14.50) Of the handful of *pensions* in the immediate area, this one is most appealing. It has only five rooms, but all feel like home. Walk 700m up the road opposite the monastery.

Pensiunea Silva (☎ 0230 417 019; www.pensiuneasilva.ro; Sucevița 391; r per person incl full-board €24; ☎) The hunting-lodge motif here is punctuated by a gaggle of taxidermied critters inside the front door. Located on the western edge of nearby Sucevița village by the Info-Tur office, it's an easy 3km walk to the monastery.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sucevița is the most difficult monastery to reach on public transport. There are only two daily buses from Rădăuți (six maxitaxis daily travel to Rădăuți from Suceava; €1.40). Hitching or biking are your best bets.

NORTHERN DOBROGEA

Northern Dobrogea is undeniably a kingdom unto itself within Romania. Although it lacks prevailing Romanian icons (breathtaking mountains, ancient churches, the undead), both the Danube River (Râul Dunărea) and the Black Sea coast (Marea Neagră) contain offerings ranging from all nature to *au natural*.

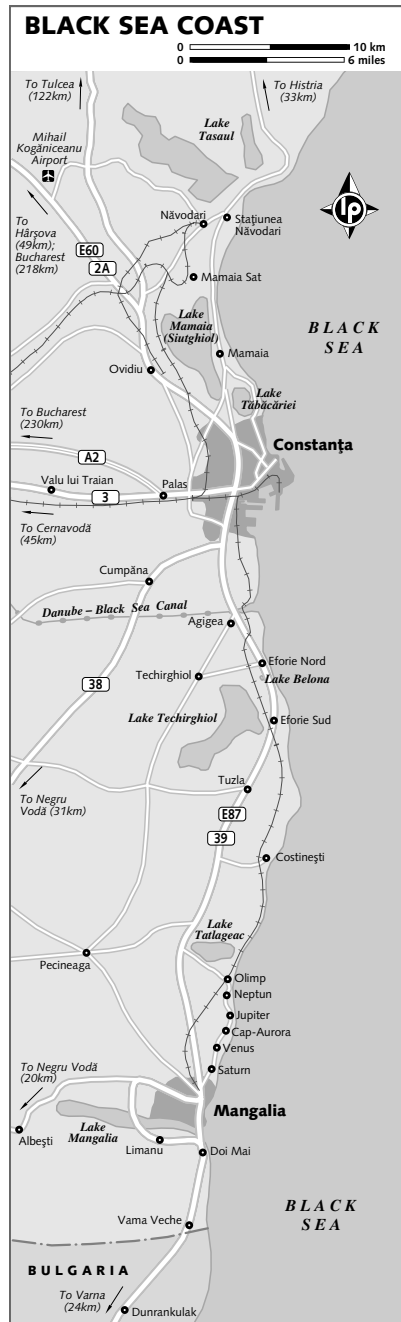
Though widely considered to be the least 'Romanian' part of the country, this is ironically where the strongest evidence of Romania's conspicuously proud connection to ancient Rome can be found in the form of statues, busts, sarcophagi and other archaeological finds.

In Mamaia humans converge in beach resort towns to sooth their bodies with sunshine and curative mud. Alternatively, the calming and less opulent Danube Delta draws bird-lovers and seekers of solitude into a tangled web of ever-eroding canals, riverbeds and wetlands.

CONSTANȚA

☎ 0241 & 0341 / pop 314,490

Constanța is the gateway to Romania's seaside activities. Sadly, sharp annual price hikes have



made a trip here fairly expensive, even by Western European standards, though staying in private homes, camping or hotel-room stuffing can ease expenses (see opposite).

Old Constanța evokes romantic notions of ancient seafarers, the Roman poet Ovid and even the classic legend of Jason and the Argonauts (they fled here from King Aietes). Constanța's original name Tomis means 'cut to pieces', in reference to Jason's beloved Medea, who cut up her brother Apsyrtus and threw the pieces into the sea near the present-day city.

After Constanța was taken by Romania in 1877 a railway line was built to Bucharest. By the early 1900s it was a fashionable seaside resort frequented by European royalty.

The city offers a bit of everything: beaches, a picturesque Old Town, archaeological treasures and a few excellent museums.

Orientation

Constanța sprawls up the Black Sea coast from the port in the south to Mamaia in the north. The train station is about 2km west of the centre. To reach Constanța's centre, exit the station, buy a ticket from the kiosk to the right and take trolleybus 40, 41 or 43 down B-dul Ferdinand to Parcul Arheologic (Archaeological Park) four stops from the station; or just walk along B-dul Ferdinand. North of B-dul Ferdinand is Constanța's business district and many of its best restaurants. The area around Str Ștefan cel Mare is lined with shops, restaurants and theatres. South of B-dul Ferdinand are the tiny streets of the Old Town, sporting the city's best museums, churches and neglected buildings.

Information

Most hotels and travel agencies have exchange outlets, and there are numerous exchange offices, several of which are open around the clock and line B-dul Tomis south of B-dul Ferdinand.

Banca Comercială Română (☎ 638 200; Str Traian 1; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques, gives unlimited cash advances on Visa and MasterCard and has an ATM.

Central post office (☎ 552 222; B-dul Tomis 79-81; 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

County Hospital (Spitalul Județean; ☎ 662 222; B-dul Tomis 145) North of the centre.

Latina Tourism (☎ 639 713; latina@latina.ro; B-dul Ferdinand 70; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) A recommended travel agency with all the normal services.

Planet Games (☎ 552 377; cnr Str Ștefan cel Mare & Str Râscoala din 1907; per hr €0.65; ☎ 24hr)

Telephone office (B-dul Tomis 79-81; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) Shares the same building as the central post office.

Sights

Constanța's most renowned attraction is the **History & Archaeological Museum** (☎ 618 763; Piața Ovidiu 12; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-May). There's something here for everyone. Kids will be impressed by the bones of a 2nd-century woman and the mammoth tusks.

The archaeological fragments of Roman Tomis spill over onto the surrounding square. Facing this is a glass museum, which shelters a gigantic 3rd-century **Roman mosaic** discovered in 1959. The **statue of Ovid**, erected on Piața Ovidiu in 1887, commemorates the Latin poet who was exiled to Constanța in AD 8; rumour has it that he hated the place.

A block south is **Moscheia Mahmudiye** (Mahmudiye Mosque; Str Arhiepiscopiei), dating from 1910, and with a 140-step minaret you can climb when the gate is unlocked. Two blocks further down the same street is an Orthodox **Catedrala** (1885). Along the promenade is the **Genoese lighthouse** (1860) and pier, with a fine view of old Constanța.

Another museum in town worth checking out is the **Muzeul de Artă Populară** (Folk Art Museum; ☎ 616 133; B-dul Tomis 32; adult/child €1.25/0.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Sep-Jun), which has handicrafts and costumes. Further north along the boulevard is the **Art Museum & Gallery** (☎ 617 012; B-dul Tomis 84; adult/child €1.75/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), with mostly still-life and landscape paintings and sculptures. Contemporary exhibits are held in an adjoining art gallery. The **Muzeul Marinei Române** (Naval History Museum; ☎ 619 035; Str Traian 53; adult/child €1.50/0.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) is housed in the old Navy high school. The captions are in Romanian.

Near the city's main intersection, B-dul Ferdinand and B-dul Tomis, is Parcul Victoriei, which has remains of the 3rd-century **Roman city wall** and the 6th-century Butchers' tower, loads of Roman sculptures and the modern **Victory monument** (1968).

Heading north towards Mamaia, you pass Constanța's **Planetarium** (☎ 831 553; B-dul Mamaia; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 8am-9pm Jun-mid-Sep, to 4pm mid-Sep-May), on the southeastern shores of Lake Tabăcării.

Activities

You can sail on the **Condor** (☎ 0744-689 228; tours per person per hr for groups of 14 €5; ☎ at around 9am May-Sep), moored at the Tomis Tourist Port, at the east end of Str Remus Opreanu.

Delphi (☎ 0722-336 686) provides a flexible range of scuba-diving opportunities.

Sleeping

A small legion of people with spare rooms meet every arriving train offering very cheap accommodation. Prices range from 20 to 40 lei (€5.75 to €11.50). The rooms are always plain, with shared bath, but acceptable, though privacy is non-existent.

The nearest camping ground is north of Mamaia (see p680).

Hotel Tineretului (☎ 613 590; fax 611 290; B-dul Tomis 24; s/d €24/26.50) Cheap for good reason; the rooms are worn, the bedding half-heartedly laundered, the bathrooms woeful and the reception indifferent.

Hotel Maria (☎ /fax 616 852; B-dul 1 Decembrie 1918; s/d €40/51.50; ☎) This more modern option, across from the park that faces the train station, has lots of glass, chrome and deep blue to soothe your sun-withered nerves. There's only 12 rooms, so it's cosy and quiet.

Hotel Class (☎ 660 766; www.hotelclass.ro; Str Râscoala din 1907 1; s/d/st €57.50/68.50/86; ☎) Opened in January 2006, everything here is new or new-looking enough to make it worth the price.

Hotel Guči (☎ /fax 695 500; www.blackseahotels.ro; Str Râscoala din 1907, 23; s/d/st €60/67/85; ☎) Modern, moderately luxurious three-star hotel offering a Jacuzzi, laundry, massage and a gym.

Eating

Café D'Art (☎ 612 133; B-dul Tomis 97; mains €1-3; ☎ 9-1am) This is an intimate place snuggled up to the Drama Theatre. Especially popular as an evening drinking hole (cocktails €2), it's also packed during the day with those seeking a good place to people-watch while enjoying a light meal.

Pizzico (☎ 615 555; Piața Ovidiu 7; mains €3-5; ☎ 24hr) While the wood-fire pizza and summer terrace are its main draw, Pizzico has a menu that offers truffles, pasta, buffalo wings, fish (summer only), salads and a large, inexpensive wine list.

Beta (☎ 673 663; www.la-beta.ro; Str Ștefan cel Mare 6A; mains €3-6; ☎ 7-1am) This modern food emporium and bar with a sprawling terrace is sure to satisfy all. Menu items include full

breakfast, vegetarian dishes, pizza, salad and children's meals.

Marco Polo (☎ 617 537; Str Mircea cel Bătrân 103; mains €2-5; ☎ 11am-midnight) A splendid Italian restaurant where tables are separated from each other by plants, making you feel like you're in a private garden, only one with dotting waiters! Portions are generous, and the service kind and attentive. The pizza, pasta, meat, fish and veg dishes are delicious.

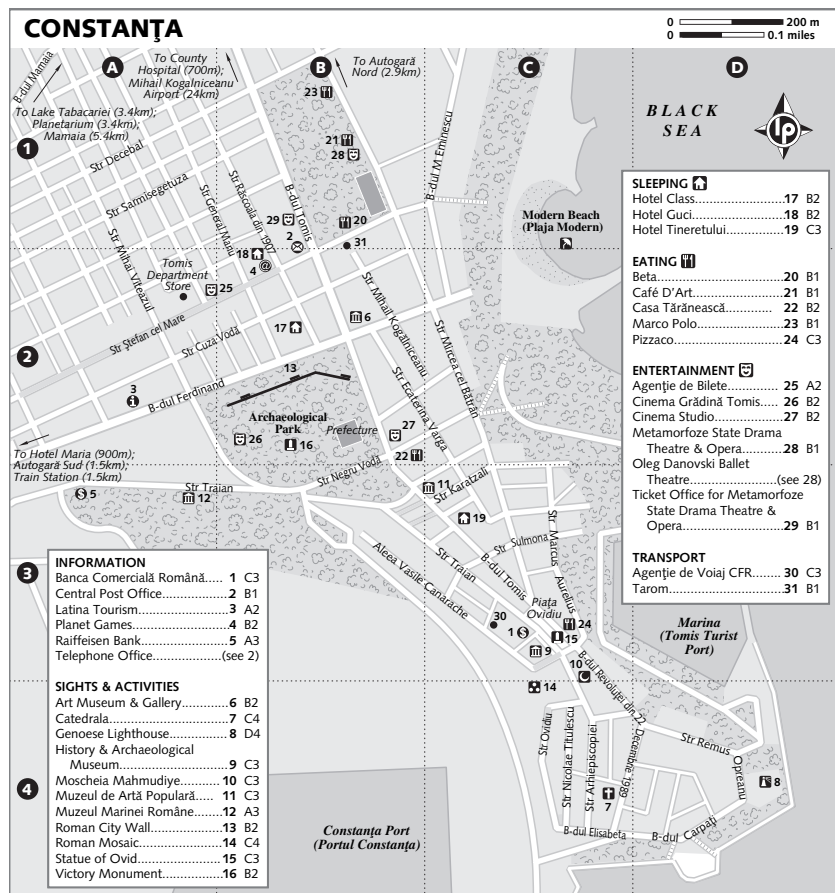
Casa Tărănească (☎ 665 606; Str Negru Voda 9; mains €3.50-7; ☎ 24hr) This traditional restaurant stays open day and night, offering detoxing clubbers Romanian comfort food such as *sarmale* (ground beef, vegetables, rice and spices wrapped up like a burrito in cabbage or vine leaves), *ciorbă* and *mămăligă*,

knuckle of pork and an um, 'bear with wild sauce' (dare you).

Entertainment

New foreign films are presented at **Cinema Studio** (☎ 611 358; cnr B-bul Tomis & Str Negru Voda). In summer, films are also screened at **Cinema Grădină Tomis** (B-dul Ferdinand), an outside cinema in Archaeological Park.

Tickets for the **Metamorfoze State Drama Theatre & Opera** (☎ 615 268; Str Mircea cel Bătrân 97) are sold at the **ticket office** (B-dul Tomis 97; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat, 5-6.50pm Sun) or the **Agenție de Bilete** (☎ 664 076; Str Ștefan cel Mare 34; ☎ 10am-5pm). The theatre is also home to the Filarmonica Marea Neagră (Black Sea Philharmonic) and the **Oleg Danovski Ballet Theatre** (☎ 488 202).



Getting There & Away

AIR

In summer there are international flights from Athens and sometimes Istanbul to/from Constanța's **Mihail Kogălniceanu Airport** (☎ 255 100; aeroport@aic.ro), 25km from the centre.

Tarom (☎ 662 632; Str Ștefan cel Mare 15; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) has a once-weekly flight to Bucharest (US\$75 plus tax US\$5; Tarom does not accept euros). **Carpatair** (☎ 255 422; constanta@carpatair.com) flies to Timișoara six days a week with connections to numerous cities beyond. Their office is at Constanța's airport.

BUS

Constanța has two bus stations. From the **Autogară Sud** (Southern Bus Station; ☎ 665 289; B-dul Ferdinand), next to the train station, buses to Istanbul (17½ hours) depart daily. Tickets are sold in advance from **Özlem Tur** (☎ 514 053) just outside the bus station. There are three maxitaxis daily to Braila (€5.60) and 10 daily to Galați (€6.70), each of which stop at the **Autogară Nord** (Northern Bus Station; ☎ 641 379; Str Soveja 35) on the way. Maxitaxi 23 to Mamaia also departs from here.

From Constanța's northern bus station services include at least one daily maxitaxi to Chișinău (€13, nine hours) and Iași (€11.20, seven hours), and four to Histria (€1.75). Maxitaxis leave for Tulcea (€3.70, 2½ hours) every 30 minutes from 6am to 7.30pm.

If you're travelling south along the Black Sea Coast, buses are infinitely more convenient than trains. Exit Constanța's train station, turn right and walk 50m to the long queue of maxitaxis, buses and private cars destined for Mangalia, stopping at Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud, Neptun-Olimp, Venus and Saturn.

TRAIN

Constanța's train station is near the southern bus station at the west end of B-dul Ferdinand.

The **Agente de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 617 930; Aleea Vasile Canarache 4; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) sells long-distance tickets only; for the local train service (down the coast) buy tickets at the train station.

There are 11 to 15 daily trains to Bucharest (€8.75, 2½ to 4½ hours). There are daily services to Suceava, Cluj-Napoca, Satu Mare, Galați, Timișoara and other destinations. As many as 19 trains a day head from Constanța to Mangalia (€1.30, one to 1¼ hours). There are one to two daily trains to Chișinău in

Moldova (€20, 12 hours). The Ovidius train to Budapest also runs overnight (17 hours) via Bucharest and Arad.

MAMAIA

☎ 0241

Mamaia is where the real action is, if by 'action' you mean pretty beaches, pretty people and pretty dreadful hangovers. It's a mere 8km strip of beach between the freshwater Lake Mamaia (also known as Lake Siutghiol) and the Black Sea, but it's Romania's most popular resort. It floats over golden sands, an aqua park, restaurants, nightclubs and a raucous atmosphere.

Information

Info Litoral Tourist Information Centre (☎ 555 000; www.infolitoral.ro; 185 Al Lăpușeanu Blvd, Constanța Chamber of Commerce Bldg; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is a highly recommended first stop. The friendly, well-informed staff will help answer any kind of questions. They also sell maps and booklets.

Every hotel has a currency exchange, and ATMs are easy to find, but to change travellers cheques you have to go to Constanța.

The **post office & telephone** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) is 200m south of the Casino complex on the promenade.

Sights & Activities

Mamaia's number-one attraction is its wide, golden **beach**, which stretches the length of the resort. The further north you go, the less crowded it becomes.

In summer, **boats** (☎ 252 494; return €3; ☎ departing every 30min 9am-midnight) ferry tourists across Lake Mamaia to **Insula Ovidiu** (Ovidiu Island, where the poet's tomb is located) from the Tic-Tac wharf opposite the Statia Cazino bus stop.

There's a huge **Aqua Park** (adult/child under 12/child under 3 €10/6/free; ☎ 8am-10pm mid-May-mid-Sep) opposite Hotel Perla at Mamaia's main entrance.

Some 50m north of Hotel București, by the banks of Lake Mamaia, is a **water-sports school** (☎ 588 888), offering waterskiing, yachting, windsurfing and rowing.

Sleeping

For information about rooms in private homes, see p677). Most private homes will be a 15- to 20-minute maxitaxi ride from the beach. Camping is no longer allowed on the beach in Mamaia proper. **Centrul de Cazare Cazino** (☎ 831 200, 555 555; ☎ 10am-9pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep) has lists of available accommodation. Booking hotel

rooms through travel agencies (see p679) can save you as much as 15% on the rack rate.

Popas Hanul Piraților (☎ 831 454; tent sites €3, 2-room huts €8) A camping ground 3km north of Mamaia's northern limit, this has shabby huts, but an on-site café and stretches of fine sand nearby. Bus 23 and maxitaxi 23E stop in front of it.

Hotel Turist (☎ 831 006; B-dul Mamaia 288; s/d €32/41) Comfortable and clean rooms for those wanting the beach scene without the beach nightlife blaring through the walls. It's slightly off the main drag, about a 15-minute walk from the beach. Take bus 40 from the train station.

Hotel Perla (☎ 831 995; s/d/ste €43/48/75; ♿ ♻️ 🚰) Lording over the resort's main entrance, this huge hotel is both a landmark and reliable service centre. It's a busy, efficiently run place.

Hotel Boulevard (☎ 831 533; www.complexbulevard.ro; B-dul Mamaia 294; s/d €49/58; ♿ ♻️ 🚰) Modern and offering full services. Next to Hotel Turist.

Flora Hotel (☎ 831 059; d with/without breakfast €26/22.50) and neighbouring **Victoria Hotel** (☎ 831 028; www.hotelvictoria.ro; s/d €31.50/36) are virtually identical. The rooms here are very basic, but clean. Ever-frugal university students often book a double room and cram in eight people for an extreme budget weekend at the beach. Hint, hint.

Eating

Almost every hotel has an adjoining restaurant and there are numerous fast-food stands and restaurants lining the boardwalk. **Orange Plaza** (☎ 0722-500 577; mains €2-5; ☎ 10-6am) is located in the northern part of the resort and a good bet. The eclectic international menu changes every three months. There's also an on-site pub and disco.

Getting There & Around

Tickets for trains to Mamaia departing from Constanța (see opposite) can be bought in advance at the **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 617 930), adjoining the post and telephone office on the promenade.

The quickest way to travel between Constanța and Mamaia is by maxitaxi. Maxitaxis 23, 23E and 301 depart regularly from Constanța's train station, stopping at major hotels. Buses 41 and 47 also take you from Constanța to the northern end of Mamaia.

In summer a shuttle runs up and down Mamaia's 5km boardwalk.

Currently, vehicles not registered in Constanța must pay a €0.50 road tax at the

entrance to Mamaia, though this may be discontinued in 2007.

EFORIE NORD

☎ 0241

Eforie Nord, 14km south of Constanța, is the first large resort south of the city. Beaches are below 10m-to-20m cliffs and are as crowded as in Mamaia.

Orientation

The train station is only a few minutes' walk from the post office and main street, B-dul Republicii. Exit the station and turn left; turn left again after Hotel Belvedere and then right onto B-dul Republicii.

Most hotels and restaurants are on Str Tudor Vladimirescu, which runs parallel to B-dul Republicii along the beach.

Information

There is a currency exchange in practically every hotel. The **telephone office** (☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat & Sun) is inside the **central post office** (B-dul Republicii 11; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat).

Sights & Activities

Tiny **Lake Belona**, just behind the southern end of the beach, is a popular bathing spot, as its water is warmer than the Black Sea.

Southwest of Eforie Nord is **Lake Techirghiol**, a former river mouth famous for its black sapropel mud, which is effective against rheumatism. The lake is 2m below sea level, and its waters are four times saltier than the sea.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Meduza (☎ 742 385; tent sites €3, d €10, 2-bed huts €12) This cramped space is behind the Prahova Hotel at the northern end of town. Doubles are in a drab concrete building. The place is always noisy but it's close to the action and offers laundry service.

Villa Horianana (☎ 741 388; Str Alexandru Cuza 13; s/d €40/60; ♿) No doubt the best place to lay your party-weary head in Eforie Nord is here, in this converted bungalow. Some rooms have their own balcony and the home cooking by the super-friendly owners is reason enough to stay here.

Pensiunea Colonial (☎ 741 561; B-dul Republicii 17; per person €35; ♿ 🚰) This three-star property, has simple, clean rooms, a street-front terrace and a cosy common area. Breakfast is not included.

Cofetăria Pescăruș (B-dul Republicii; mains €1-3; ☎ 11-1am) Opposite the post office, this cafeteria-style joint is handy because you can point to the type of grease you want. It's good for a cheap fill-up and has live music from 9pm.

Nunta Zamferei (☎ 741 651; Str Republicii; mains €2-6; ☎ 6pm-1am) This Romanian restaurant is famed for its folk song-and-dance shows. Walk north along B-dul Republicii and turn left onto the small track opposite the public thermal baths.

Getting There & Away

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 617 930; B-dul Republicii 11) is inside the post office building.

All trains between Constanța and Mangalia stop at Eforie Nord, but you're better off in a maxitaxi (€0.50).

NEPTUN-OLIMP

☎ 0241

Before the 1989 revolution, Neptun-Olimp was the exclusive tourist complex of Romania's Communist Party. Neptun-Olimp is in fact two resorts in one. Olimp, a huge complex of hotels facing the beach, is the party place. Neptun, 1km south, is separated from the Black Sea by two small lakes amid some lush greenery. Together they form a vast expanse of hotels and discos.

Neptun-Olimp is perhaps the nicest and most chic of the Romanian Black Sea resorts. The Info Litoral Tourist Information Centre (p679) in Mamaia can provide you with detailed information about these resorts, and they or any travel agency in Constanța can help with hotel bookings.

The resort complex offers a reasonable range of **activities**: tennis, windsurfing, jet-skiing, sailing, minigolf, bowling and discos.

Hotel Albert (☎ 731 514; hotelalbert@idilis.ro elena borda@yahoo.com; d/ste from €51.50/72) is one of the best bets along the coast, located smack in between Neptun and Olimp. It's slightly secluded from the bustle and tastefully mixes modernity with rustic décor.

Halta Neptun train station is within walking distance of the Neptun-Olimp hotels, midway between the two resorts. All trains travelling from Bucharest or Constanța to Mangalia stop at Halta Neptun.

The **CFR office** (Str Plopiilor) is inside Neptun's Hotel Apollo, northwest of Lake Neptun II.

Private maxitaxis run between the resort towns and Mangalia.

MANGALIA

☎ 0241 / pop 44,300

Formerly ancient Greek Callatis, Mangalia, founded in the 6th century BC, contains several minor archaeological sites. It is a quiet town, not a place for partying, and attracts many elderly European tour groups.

Orientation & Information

Mangalia spreads beach town-like along the coast, with nothing of note being further than a few blocks inland. The train station is 1km north of the centre. Turn right as you exit and follow Șos Constanței (the main and only road you're ever likely to use, aside from the beach-front road) south. At the roundabout, turn left for Hotel Mangalia, the Izvor Hercules fountain and the beach or go straight ahead for the pedestrianised section of Șos Constanței and most facilities, including the Callatis Archaeological Museum and the Casă de Cultură. Private and city buses stop in front of the train station.

There is a small tourist **information kiosk** (☎ 8.30am-4pm) outside the train station that gives out leaflets and can help with booking accommodation.

Most hotels have currency exchanges. One of the numerous **currency exchange offices** (Str Ștefan cel Mare 16; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) is opposite the post office. Cash travellers cheques or get cash advances on Visa and MasterCard at the **Banca Comercială Română**, (Șos Constanței 25; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri).

The **telephone office** (Str Ștefan cel Mare 14-15; ☎ 7am-10pm) and **post office** (☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) are in the same building.

La Maxim (per hr €0.65; ☎ 24hr) is an internet shack right on the beach, in front of Hotel Zenit.

Sights

The **Callatis Archaeological Museum** (☎ 753 580; Str Șoseaua Constanței 26; ☎ 8am-8pm) has a good collection of Roman sculptures. Just past the high-rise building next to the museum are some remnants of a 4th-century **Roman-Byzantine necropolis**.

At the south side of Hotel Mangalia, along Str Izvor, are the ruins of a 6th-century **Palaeo-Christian basilica** and a **fountain** (Izvorul Hercules) dispensing sulphurous mineral water that, despite the smell, some people drink.

Cultural events take place in the **Casă de Cultură**, which has a large socialist mural on its façade. One block east of the post office is the Turkish **Moschea Esmahan Sultan** (Sultan Esmahan

Mosque; Str Oituz; admission €0.65; ☎ 9am-8pm). Built in 1525, it's surrounded by a lovely garden and well-kept cemetery.

From here, head east down Str Oituz to the beachfront, where, in the basement of Hotel President, remains of the walls of the Callatis citadel dating from the 1st to the 7th centuries are open in the **Muzeul Poarta Callatiana** (Callatiana Archaeological Reservation; ☎ 24hr).

Sleeping & Eating

Antrec (☎ 759 473; Str George Murnu 13, Block D, Apt 21; ☎ 24hr, calls only) They arrange rooms in private homes in Mangalia and other coastal resorts from €13 a night.

Hotel Zenit (☎ 751 645; Str Teilor 7), **Hotel Astra** (☎ 751 673; Str Teilor 9) and **Hotel Orion** (☎ 751 156; Str Teilor 11) are surprisingly pleasant three-star options on the promenade. All have singles/doubles with private bathroom for €32/43.

Hotel Paradiso (☎ 752 052; Str Rozelor 35; s/d €42.50/60; ♿) A 1960s holdout, this is a popular choice. It's one of the few hotels on the coast with full wheelchair access; there are ramps onto the beach.

Hotel President (☎ 755 861; www.hpresident.com; Str Treilor 6; s/d/ste from €53/91/147) This is the top place to stay south of Constanța, a four-star luxury hotel with a fully-fledged business centre.

Cafe del Mar (☎ 0723 356 610; Str Treilor 4; mains €2-4; ☎ 24hr) You can't go wrong here. There's a great double-decker terrace, stylish interiors and one of the most varied, fanciful menus around – it's the only place on the coast to get US-style buffalo wings (€2.60) and potato skins (€4). It's next to Hotel President.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Maxitaxis from Constanța stop at Mangalia's train station and in front of the post office, where all maxitaxis running up the coast to Olimp (every 20 minutes) and down to Vama Veche stop. Maxitaxis to Constanța (€1) run regularly from 5am to 11pm.

TRAIN

The **Agentie de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 752 818; Str Stefan cel Mare 14-15; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun) adjoins the central post office.

Mangalia is at the end of the line from Constanța. From Constanța there are 19 trains daily in summer to Mangalia (one to 1½ hours), five of which are direct to/from Bucharest's Gara Obor (€10, 4½ hours). In

summer there are also express trains to/from Iași, Sibiu, Suceava, Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara.

DANUBE DELTA

The mighty Danube River empties into the Black Sea just south of the Ukrainian border. At this point the Danube splits into three separate channels: the Chilia, Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe arms, creating a 4187 sq km wetland of marshes, floating reed islets and sandbars, providing sanctuary for 300 species of birds and 160 species of fish. Reed marshes cover 156,300 hectares, constituting one of the largest single expanses of reed beds existing in the world.

The Danube Delta (Delta Dunării) is under the protection of the Administration of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA), set up in response to the ecological disaster that befell the delta region during Ceaușescu's attempt to transform it into an agricultural region. Now there are 18 protected reserves (50,000 hectares) that are off-limits to tourists or anglers, including the 500-year-old Lețea Forest and Europe's largest pelican colony. The Delta is also included in UNESCO's World Heritage list.

The part of the delta most accessible to foreigners is the middle arm (Sulina), which cuts directly across from Tulcea to Crișan and Sulina (71km). Most river traffic uses the Sulina arm, including the ferries and touring boats from Tulcea.

It's also a bird-watcher's paradise with protected species such as the roller, white-tailed eagle, great white egret, mute and whooper swans, falcon and bee-eater.

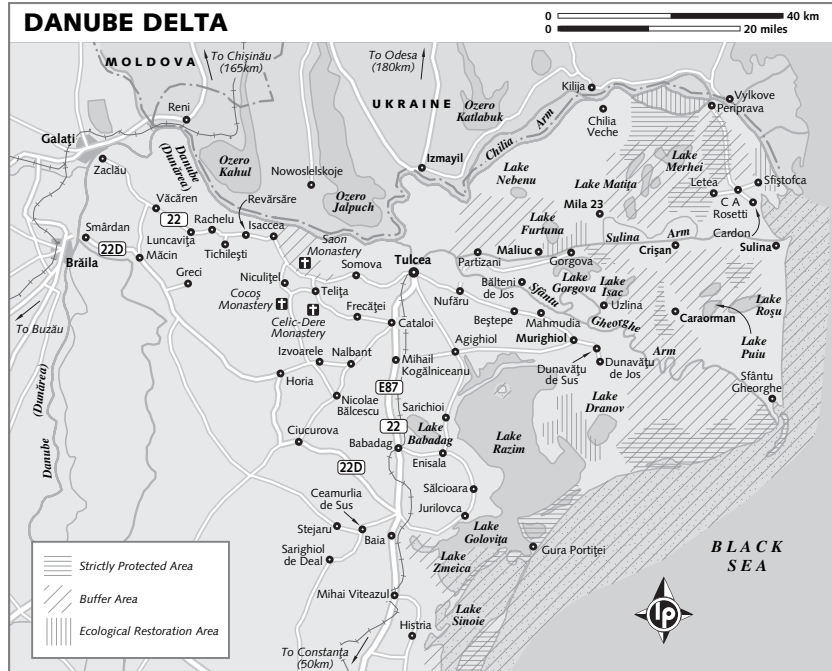
Getting Around

Ibis Tours (p684) in Tulcea arranges bird-watching trips.

In the delta proper it's easy to hire rowing boats from fishermen. This is the only way to penetrate the delta's exotic backwaters.

FERRY

Navrom (☎ 0240-511 553; www.navrom.x3m.ro, Romanian only) operates passenger ferries year-round to towns and villages in the delta. It also runs its own tours on weekends. On Saturday, tours head to Sulina, leaving at 8am and returning at 8pm (€4.80); on Sunday at the same hours tours sail to Sfântu Gheorghe (€4.80). You get



to see the landscape but there is little time for true exploring.

There are fast and slow ferries to Sulina from Tulcea; the slow ferry departs Tulcea at 1pm (€5.20, four hours, Monday to Friday), returning at 7.30am (Tuesday, Friday and Sunday) and the fast ferry leaves Tulcea at 2pm (€10, 1½ hours, daily) returning at 7.30am (daily). Buy a round-trip ticket on the fast ferry to guarantee a return seat.

The slow ferry to Sfântu Gheorghe departs from Tulcea at 1.30pm (€5.75, 5½ hours, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday), returning at 7am (Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday). The fast ferry departs Tulcea at 3pm (€10.50, two hours, on Tuesday and Saturday), returning at 7am (Wednesday and Sunday).

Ferries to Periprava from Tulcea depart at 1.30pm (€5, four hours, on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday), stopping at Chilia Veche. Return ferries leave Periprava at 6am (Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday).

Ferry tickets can be purchased at Tulcea's Navrom terminal from 11.30am to 1.30pm. There are also ticket counters on the ferries themselves.

HYDROFOIL

Hydrofoils to Sulina (1½ hours, €5.25) depart from Tulcea's AFDJ Galația terminal, next to the floating ambulance, every day at 2pm. They stop in Maliuc (€1.80) and Crișan (€2.65) on the way. The return trip is at 7pm. Purchase tickets on board.

TULCEA

☎ 0240 / pop 96,158

Tulcea (tool-*cha*) is an important port and gateway to the Danube Delta paradise. It is usually passed through quickly en route to the delta, so most tourists miss its unassuming appeal. Despite visual reminders that Tulcea is mainly an industrial town, it has a lively energy and an allure of its own, with nightclubs and a sizable Turkish population, which lends it a multiethnic flavour.

It was settled by Dacians and Romans from the 7th to 1st centuries BC.

Tulcea hosts the annual International Folk Festival of Danubian Countries in August, when local songs, games and traditional activities are played out to a Danubian backdrop.

DELTA PERMITS

In principle, visitors need travel permits to travel in the delta. If on a group excursion of any kind, these are automatically handled by the operator. If you hire a local fisherman, ask to see his valid permit. The only time you'll need to buy one (€1) is if you go boating or foraging independently. The Information & Ecological Education Centre (below) in Tulcea can issue these for you. If inspectors (and there are many of them) find you without one, you can be liable for a fine of up to €200. You need separate permits to fish or hunt.

Orientation

With the hills to the south and the Danube to the north, getting oriented in Tulcea is a breeze. The bus and train stations, and the Navrom ferry terminal, are adjacent, overlooking the Danube at the western end of the riverfront promenade, which stretches for about a kilometre east along the river past Hotel Delta and into a residential area with museums and the Azizie Mosque. Most hotels and shopping start a block back from the river and continue up the hill. Lake Ciuperca is west of the stations. Inland two blocks, between Str Păcii and Str Babadag, is Piața Unirii, the centre of Tulcea.

Information

All the hotels have currency exchanges.

Anason Pharmacy (☎ 513 352; Str Babadag 8) Has an all-night dispenser.

Floating ambulance station (stația de ambulanță; ☎ 24hr) Moored in front of the Culture House on the riverfront. Some of its crew speak English.

Ibis Tours (☎ /fax 512 787; www.ibis-tours.ro; Str Babadag 6, Apt 14) Arranges wildlife and bird-watching tours in the delta and Dobrogea, led by professional ornithologists, from €30 a day.

Information & Ecological Education Centre

(☎ 519 214; www.deltaturism.ro; Str Portului 34A; ☎ 8am-6pm) A representative of Antrec and run by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR). In a glass booth inside the building opposite the AFDJ hydrofoil terminal, it can book accommodation in homes, hotels and *pensions* and assist in making tours. It can also help you get fishing, hunting and travel permits.

Post office (☎ 512 869; Str Babadag 5; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Raiffeisen Bank (☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Directly across from Hotel Delta.

Telephone centre (☎ 7am-8pm) In the same building as the post office.

Sights

As you stroll along the river you'll see the **Independence Monument** (1904) on Citadel Hill, at the far eastern end of town. You can reach this by following Str Gloriei from behind the Egreta Hotel to its end; the views are superb.

The **Natural History Museum & Aquarium** (☎ 515 866; Str Progresului 32) highlights the delta's fauna with lots of stuffed birds and a basement aquarium. The minaret of **Moscheia Azizie** (Azizie Mosque; 1863) is down Str Independenței.

The **Folk Art & Ethnographic Museum** (☎ 516204; Str 9 Mai, 4) has Turkish and Romanian traditional costumes, fishing nets, rugs and carpets. In front of the Greek Orthodox church is a **memorial** to the local victims of the 1989 revolution.

Sleeping

No camping is allowed within Tulcea's city limits. However, there are many areas where wild camping is permitted on the banks of the canal within a few kilometres of the city; ask at the Information & Ecological Education Centre for details.

The formerly stout boat hotel ('boatel') industry, with multiday delta tours, was going through a lull at the time of writing. Keep an eye out for new companies opening to fill the void.

Hotel Europolis (☎ 512 443; www.europolis.ro; Str Păcii 20; s/d €24.50/34.50; ☎) Rejoice over the spacious rooms with huge bathrooms. For the same prices, you can stay at its Complex Touristic Europolis, a resort-like hotel by Lake Cășla, 2km outside of Tulcea's city limits. Though favoured by groups, the site is lovely, in the thick of nature. Water-bikes and small boats can be rented and there are walking trails.

Insula Complex (☎ 530 908; Lake Ciuperca; s/d €26/35) Seconds from the train station on Lake Ciuperca, this two-star option has an on-site restaurant and pleasant rooms. Turn right out of the train station and cross the bridge to the island.

Hotel Delta (☎ 514 720; www.deltahotel.ro; Str Isacsei 2; s/d €48/60; ☎) A city landmark, it boasts the most luxurious rooms around, some affording a unimpeded views of the river. There's a restaurant and bar.

Casa Albastra Hotel (☎ 535 662; s/d without breakfast €16/20) Near Insula Complex is this typical Romanian sport hotel.

Eating & Drinking

There's a string of cafés, and kebab and fast-food joints along Str Unirii.

Restaurant Select (☎ 510 301; Str Păcii 6; mains €3-9; ☎ 9am-midnight) Treat yourself to a top-notch meal here. From its varied menu, choose from fish, frog legs, pizza and the local speciality, *tochitura Dobrogeana* (pan-fried meat with spicy sauce).

Fast Food Trident (Str Babadag; mains €2-4; ☎ 8am-11pm) This is an excellent spot for cheesy pizzas and pasta. It's opposite the Winmarket Department Store.

Carul cu Bere (Str Păcii 6; mains €1-3; ☎ 9am-midnight) Adjoins Restaurant Select and has a terrace; enjoy a beer and people-watch. Meals are courtesy of Restaurant Select.

Getting There & Away

The **Agenție de Voiaj CFR** (☎ 511 360; Str Unirii 4; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) is on the corner of Str Babadag. From the **train station** (☎ 513 706; Str Portului) there are only two, slow trains a day to Constanța (€5.10, five hours). There's one daily train to Bucharest (€9.80, six hours).

The **bus station** (☎ 513 304) adjoins the **Navrom ferry terminal** (Str Portului). As many as 15 buses and maxitaxis head to Bucharest (€9.80), at least nine to Galați (€3.15) and one a day each to Iași (€12.60) and Piatra Neamț (€13.70). Maxitaxis to Constanța (€4) leave every half-hour from 5.30am to 8pm. One bus a day heads to Istanbul (€40).

TULCEA TO SULINA

☎ 0240

The Sulina arm, the shortest channel of the Danube, stretches 63.7km from Tulcea to Sulina. The Navrom ferry's first stop is at **Partizani**, from where you can find a fisherman to row you to the three lakes to the north, Tataru, Lung and Mester. Next stop is **Maliuc**, where there is a hotel and camping ground for 80 people. North of Maliuc is **Lake Furtuna**, a snare for bird-watchers.

The next stop for the ferry is the junction with Old Danube, 1km upstream from **Crîșan**. There are several *pensions* in the village, all charging about €10 per person. Try **Pensiune Gheorghe Silviu** (☎ 511 279) or **Pensiune Pocora** (☎ 511 279). There is also the DDBR's **Crîșan Centre for Ecological Information & Education** (☎ 519 214; office@deltaturism.ro; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun), which features wildlife displays, a library and a video room. At the main Crîșana

ferry dock, ask about side trips to **Mila 23** or **Caroorman**.

There is a camping area on the road to the beach.

A few hundred metres west along the riverfront from the Sulina Cinema is a small sign pointing to **Pensiune Astir** (☎ 543 379; s/d €10/20). The **Pensiune Delta Sulina** (☎ 0722-275 554; r with/without breakfast & dinner €40/30) is a comfortable, three-star option.

For information on ferries and hydrofoils see p682 at the start of this Danube Delta section.

ROMANIA DIRECTORY**ACCOMMODATION**

Prices for Romanian accommodation have risen in recent years. There are five basic options: hostels, private homestays (promoted by the 'bum-rush the traveller' at the train station technique), family-style guesthouse *pensions* (*pensiunes*), hotels (a grab-bag of communist leftovers and comfy, if standard, business hotels), and camping grounds that usually include simple *căsuțe* (wooden huts).

Budget travellers should look out for *pensions*, which are often lovingly run, offer insight into how Romanians live, and cost about €15 to €20 per person (an extra €5 or more for full board), and a little more in cities. The best online resource is www.ruraltourism.ro; otherwise contact **Antrec** (National Association of Rural, Ecological & Cultural Tourism; www.antrec.iiruc.ro), whose headquarters is in Bran (p644).

Hostels usually cost around €10 for a dorm bed; sometimes private rooms (with shared bath) are available for between €20 and €30. Hostels vary in quality, with Bucharest's topping in terms of travel-savvy hang-outs. **Youth Hostels Romania** (www.hihostels-romania.ro) has information on HI hostels.

Hotel prices have risen in recent years, but these tend to offer the most privacy and comfort. Some old stalwarts have been scrubbed up. The polished B&B world hasn't made much of a dent in Romania. Midrange hotels tend to cost from €30 to €60, more so in Bucharest.

In-town camping is often in less-than-ideal locations, and conditions are sometimes quite shoddy. In most mountain areas there's a network of *cabanas* (cabins or chalets) with

restaurants and dormitories. Prices are much lower than those of hotels and no reservations are required, but arrive early if the cabana is in a popular location.

Apă caldă (hot water) is common at most accommodation, but air-conditioning is a luxury. Many hotels advertise 'internet connections', meaning just plug-in capability if you have a local ISP.

All reviews in this chapter include breakfast unless otherwise noted. Listings are ordered by price.

ACTIVITIES

Most outdoor fun sticks with Romania's Carpathians, which stripe the country impressively. Emergency rescue is provided by **Salvamont** (www.salvamont.org, in Romanian), a voluntary mountain-rescue organisation with 21 stations countrywide.

Biking

Mountain-biking has taken off in recent years. Some roads can be hair-raising to ride along as traffic zooms by. A great place to go is Sinaia (p637), where you can rent a bike and take it to the plateau atop the Bucegi Mountains by lift. **Clubul de Cicloturism Napoca** (office@ccn.ro; Cluj-Napoca) was looking for a new office at research time, but can offer bike-rental advice. **Transylvania Adventure** (www.adventuretransylvania.com) offers eight-day trips (including bike and accommodation) from mid-May to mid-October for about €700.

Bird-Watching

Europe's greatest wetlands, the Danube Delta (p682), is home to the continent's largest pelican colony, plus most of the world's population of red-breasted geese (up to 70,000) winter here.

Hiking

Hiking is the number-one activity, which is not surprising considering the intensity of the Carpathians cutting across the country. The most popular places are in the Bucegi (p640), and Făgăraş (p652) and the Piatra Craiului (p645).

Trails are generally well marked, and a system of cabanas, huts and hotels along the trails on the mountain tops and plateaus make even a several-day trek more than comfortable. A good source of guides can be found at www.alpineguide.ro.

Skiing

Ski and snowboard centres are popular, but ski runs tend to be fewer (and costlier) than many Bulgarian slopes. Sinaia (p637) and Poiana Braşov (p645) are the most popular ski slopes. The ski season runs from December through March. Resorts rent skis and snowboards (about €10 to €12 per day); lift tickets are sometimes bundled by number of trips (10 trips can run €20).

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks can be expected to open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 9am to noon on Saturday. Most museums open from 9am or 10am to 5pm or 6pm Tuesday to Sunday. Opening hours for many institutions change slightly following daylight-savings. Restaurants can be expected to stay open roughly from 10am to midnight.

CUSTOMS

Officially, you're allowed to import hard currency up to a maximum of US\$10,000. Valuable goods and foreign currency over US\$1000 should be declared upon arrival. For foreigners, duty-free allowances are 4L of wine, 2L of spirits and 200 cigarettes. For more information check www.customs.ro.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Romania's sometimes gets a rip-off reputation that's hardly justified. Taxi drivers at train stations are likely to overcharge, a few Bucharest restaurants add extra charges to some bills, and pick-pockets target wallets and mobile phones (cellphones) in busy areas such as buses. Another problem are the many stray dogs seen nationwide, but particularly in Bucharest. Take the necessary precautions and you're likely to have a trouble-free visit.

The biggest annoyances are trying to get someone to change a 50 lei note, museums that charge upwards of €15 to take photographs, and the lack of laundry facilities.

Also be sure to take some food and water and lots of mosquito repellent on any expedition into the Danube delta. Warning: do not drink Danube water!

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Romanian Embassies & Consulates

Romanian embassies and consulates abroad:
Australia (☎ 02-6286 2343; http://canberra.mae.ro; 4 Dalman Crescent, O'Malley, ACT, Canberra)

Canada (☎ 613-789 5345; www.cyberus.ca/~romania; 655 Rideau St, Ottawa, Ontario)

France (☎ 01 47 05 10 46; www.amb-roumanie.fr, in French; 5 rue de l'Exposition, Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-212 39 202; www.rumainische-bot-schaft.de; Dorotheenstr 62-66, Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 031-668 1275; ambrom@eircom.net; 26 Waterloo Rd, Dublin)

Moldova (☎ 22-228 126; http://chisinau.mae.ro; Str Bucureşti 66/1, Chişinău)

UK (☎ 020-7937 9666; www.roemb.co.uk; 4 Palace Green, Kensington Gardens, London)

USA (☎ 202-232 3694; www.roembus.org; 1607 23rd St NW, Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Romania

Unless stated otherwise, the following embassies are in Bucharest.

Australia (Map p626; ☎ 021-316 7558; don.cairns@austrade.gov.au; B-dul Unirii 74)

Canada (Map p626; ☎ 021-307 5000; bucst@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; Str Nicolae Iorga 36)

France (Map p626; ☎ 021-303 1000; www.ambafrance-ro.org; Str Biserica Amzei 13-15)

Germany Bucharest (Map p626; ☎ 021-202 9830; www.bukarest.diplo.de; Str Gheorghe Demetriade 6-8); Sibiu (☎ 0269-211 133; www.hermannstadt.ro; Str Lucian Blaga 15-17); Timişoara (☎ 0256-309 800; www.german-consul-timisoara.ro; Spl Vladimirescu 10, Timişoara)

Ireland (☎ 021-212 2088; embassybucharest@yahoo.ie; Str Vasile Lascăr 42-44)

Moldova Bucharest (Map p626; ☎ 021-230 0474; ambasadamoldova@zappmobile.ro; Aleea Alexandru 40); Bucharest (Map p626; ☎ 021-410 9827; B-dul Eroilor 8)

UK (Map p626; ☎ 021-201 7200; www.britishembassy.gov.uk/romania; Str Jules Michelet 24)

USA Bucharest (Map p628; ☎ 021-210 4042; www.us-embassy.ro; Str Tudor Arghezi 7-9); Bucharest (Map p628; ☎ 021-316 4052; Str Nicolae Filipescu 26)

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Romania became one of Europe's last countries to decriminalise homosexual activity in 2001. Bucharest has the most active gay and lesbian scene, including the emergence of GayFest in late May that features events, films and disco nights. **Accept** (www.accept-romania.ro) is a gay-, lesbian- and transgender-rights group.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

A few favourite festivals include the following (but watch out for horse trades and shepherd cheese measurement celebrations):

Juni Pageant (April) Braşov

Bucharest Carnival (late May to early June) Bucharest

Medieval Festival of the Arts (July) Sighişoara
International Folk Music & Dance Festival of Ethnic Minorities in Europe (August) Cluj-Napoca
Sămbra Oilor (September) Braşov
Laşi Days (mid-October) Iaşi
De la Colind la Stea (December) Braşov

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Romania:

New Year 1 and 2 January

Catholic & Orthodox Easter Mondays In March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Romanian National Day 1 December

Christmas 25 and 26 December

LEGAL MATTERS

If you are arrested, you can insist on seeing an embassy or consular officer straight away. It is not advisable to present your passport to people on the street unless you know for certain that they are authentic officials – cases of theft have been reported.

Romanians can legally drink, drive and vote (though not simultaneously!) at 18. The age of consent in Romania is 15.

MONEY

In Romania the only legal tender is the leu (plural: lei). From January 2007, the old lei was taken out of circulation, and the new lei (abbreviated 'RON') – with four less zeroes – took over. If someone offers an old note (say a 500,000-lei note instead of a 50 RON note), don't take it. The new lei comes in denominations of 2000, 10,000, 50,000, 100,000 and 500,000. There are (heavy) coins for one, five, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 lei.

Prices are frequently quoted in euros – especially at hotels – and prices in this chapter are quoted in euro. If Romania joins the EU, it's possible prices may rise.

ATMs are everywhere and give 24-hour withdrawals in lei on your Cirrus, Plus, Visa, MasterCard and Eurocard. Some banks, such as Banca Comercială Română, give cash advances on credit cards in your home currency.

Moneychangers are just as ubiquitous. Dollars and euros are easiest to exchange, though British pounds are widely accepted. You often must show a passport to change money. Be wary of changers with bodyguard goons out front. Some changers advertise juicy rates, but subtly disguise a '9' as a '0' etc. Count your money carefully.

All branches of the Banca Comercială Română, among others, will cash travellers cheques. Credit cards won't get you anywhere in rural areas, but they are widely accepted in larger department stores, hotels and most restaurants in cities and towns.

POST

A postcard or letter under 20g to Europe from Romania costs €0.85 and takes seven to 10 days. The postal system is reliable, if slow.

Poste restante is held for one month (addressed c/o Poste Restante, Poșta Romană Oficiul București 1, Str Matei Millo 10, RO-70700 București, Romania) at Bucharest's central post office (p625).

TELEPHONE

Romania's telephone centres and phone booths are a sad sight, almost completely ignored amid mobile-phone revolutionaries. Cellphones are preferable to land lines for many Romanians. Cellphone numbers are 10 digits, beginning with 07. Phonecards (€3) can be bought at newsstands and used in phone booths for domestic or international calls.

European cellphones with roaming work in Romania; otherwise you can get a Romania number from Orange or Vodaphone, which have shops everywhere. The SIM card costs about US\$5 including credit; calls are about US\$0.10 to US\$0.30 per minute.

Romania's international operator can be reached by dialling ☎ 971.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Information is a problem, as very few towns keep open tourism information centres (Sibiu's is the darling of info); there's no national tourist-office network and even Bucharest lacks even the dinkiest info centre. Most travel agents are geared to get you out of Romania, but some can help, or will try to. The best information often comes from travel-oriented accommodation such as hostels or *pensions* that offer day trips.

The so-called **Romanian National Tourist Office** (www.romaniantourism.ro) amazingly has no offices in Romania, but keeps an active **London office**

EMERGENCY NUMBER

Call ☎ 112 for an ambulance or other emergency services.

(☎ 020-7224 3692; infoUK@RomaniaTourism.com; 22 New Cavendish St) and **New York City office** (☎ 212-545-8484; infoUS@RomaniaTourism.com; 355 Lexington Ave, 19th fl).

VISAS

Your passport's validity must extend to at least six months beyond the date you enter the country in order to obtain a visa.

Citizens of all EU countries, USA, Canada, Japan and many other countries may travel visa-free for 90 days in Romania. Australians and New Zealanders no longer need to arrange visas prior to arriving in Romania. As visa requirements change frequently, check with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mae.ro) before departure.

Romania issues two types of visas to tourists: transit and single-entry. Transit visas (for those from countries other than the ones mentioned earlier) are for stays of no longer than three days, and cannot be bought at the border.

To apply for a visa you need a passport, one recent passport photograph and the completed visa application form accompanied by the appropriate fee. Citizens of some countries (mainly African) need a formal invitation from a person or company in order to apply for a visa; see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website for details.

Regular single-entry visas (US\$25) are valid for 90 days from the day you arrive. Single-entry visas are usually issued within a week (depending on the consulate), but for an extra US\$6 can be issued within 48 hours.

Transit visas can be either single-entry (US\$15) – valid for three days and allowing you to enter Romania once – or double-entry (US\$25), allowing you to enter the country twice and stay for three days each time.

Check your visa requirements for Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Bulgaria and Ukraine, if you plan on crossing those borders. If you are taking the Bucharest–St Petersburg train, you need Ukrainian and Belarusian transit visas on top of the Russian visa.

TRANSPORT IN ROMANIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Tarom (Transporturile Aeriene Române; code RO; www.tarom.ro) is Romania's state airline. Nearly all international flights to Romania arrive at Bucharest's **Henri Coanda International Airport** (formerly

Otopeni; OTP; ☎ 201 4788; www.otp-airport.ro; Șos București-Ploiești, Bucharest).

Major airlines flying into the country:

Air France (code AF; ☎ 021-319 2705; www.airfrance.com)

Air Moldova (code 9U; ☎ 021-312 1258; www.airmoldova.md)

Austrian Airlines (code OS; ☎ 021-204 2208; www.austrianair.com)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 021-303 2222; www.britishairways.com)

ČSA (Czech Airlines; code OK; ☎ 021-315 3205; www.csa.cz)

KLM (code KL; ☎ 021-312 0149; www.klm.com)

LOT Polish Airlines (code LO; ☎ 021-314 1096; www.lot.com)

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 021-204 8410; www.lufthansa.com)

Swiss Airlines (code LX; ☎ 021-312 0238; www.swiss.com)

Turkish Airlines (code TK; ☎ 021-311 2410; www.turkishairlines.com)

Carpatair (☎ 256 300 900; www.carpatair.com) connects Timișoara with Italy, France and Germany; it also runs a flight from Budapest to Cluj-Napoca. Air Moldova and Tarom together operate daily flights between Chișinău and Bucharest; **Wizz Air** (www.wizzair.com) started flying between Budapest and Târgu Mureș in 2006. and **Transaero** (www.transaero.md) also has flights on that route.

Maxitaxis connect Cluj-Napoca with the Budapest airport, making that cheaper hub an attractive alternative to Bucharest for those heading to Transylvania.

Land

BORDER CROSSINGS

Expect long queues at checkpoints, particularly on weekends. Carry food and water for the wait. Don't try bribing a Romanian official and beware of unauthorised people charging dubious 'ecology', 'disinfectant' or other dodgy taxes at the border.

BUS

Romania is well linked by bus lines to central and Western Europe as well as Turkey. While not as comfortable as the train, buses usually tend to be faster, though not always cheaper.

Eurolines (www.eurolines.ro) has a flurry of buses linking numerous cities in Romania with Western Europe. Buses to Germany cost from €75 to

€125 one-way, while buses to Paris and Rome cost about €125.

Eurolines and other private companies have many daily buses to Budapest from cities throughout Romania, including Bucharest, Arad, Brașov and Cluj-Napoca, with stops along the way.

Various companies connect Bucharest and Istanbul (p633); buses also leave from Constanța.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The best advice here is to ensure your documents (personal ID, insurance, registration and visas, if required) are in order before crossing into Romania. The Green Card (a routine extension of domestic motor insurance to cover most European countries) is valid in Romania. Extra insurance can be bought at the borders.

TRAIN

International train tickets are rarely sold at train stations, but rather at CFR (Romanian State Railways) offices in town (look for the Agenție de Voiaj CFR signs) or Wasteels ofices. Tickets must be bought at least two hours prior to departure.

Those travelling on an Inter Rail or Eurail pass still need to make seat reservations (€4, or €15 if using a couchette) on express trains within Romania. Even if you're not travelling with a rail pass, practically all international trains require a reservation (automatically included in tickets purchased in Romania). If you already have a ticket, you may be able to make reservations at the station an hour before departure, though it's preferable to do so at a CFR office at least one day in advance.

There are five Budapest–Bucharest trips daily; the 873km trip takes 13 to 16 hours, by way of Arad and the Hungarian border town of Lököshaza. It's also possible to pick up the Budapest-bound train from other Romanian cities including Constanța, Brașov and Cluj-Napoca.

The train service between Bucharest and Bulgaria is slow and crowded but cheap. Between Sofia and Bucharest (€18, 11 hours) there are two daily trains, both of which stop in Ruse.

Other train service from Bucharest includes three to Chișinău (13+ hours) and Istanbul (19 hours); one daily to Moscow (39 hours) – via Kyiv – and Vienna (17+ hours).

GETTING AROUND

Air

State-owned carrier **Tarom** (www.tarom.ro) is Romania's main carrier. **Carpatair** (www.carpatair.com) runs domestic routes – and ones to Western Europe – from its hub in Timișoara, making this western city a great back-up hub for getting in/out of Romania.

Bicycle

Cyclists have become a more frequent sight in Romania, particularly in Transylvania, Maramureș and Moldavia, but rental is not that widespread. There are generally bike and bike-repair shops in most major towns. A good place to rent one is Sinaia (p637).

Boat

Boat is the only way of getting around much of the Danube Delta; see p682.

Bus

A mix of clunky buses, minibuses and maxi-taxis combine to form the seriously disorganised Romanian bus system spread across a changing array of bus companies. Finding updated information can be tough without local help. Sometimes stations themselves move around, particularly the migratory lots where maxitaxis leave from. Some routes – such as Brașov–Sinaia, or Sibiu–Cluj–Napoca – are more useful than others. Generally it's easier to plan on the train.

Fares are cheap though and calculated per kilometre – it's about 1 lei (€0.29) per 10km; the 116km trip from Brașov to Sighișoara is about (€3.50).

This chapter reflects the situation at research time; the routes should remain roughly the same.

Car & Motorcycle

Even if you're on a budget, it's well worth splitting the costs of a car – sometimes as low as €25 per day – and getting out into rural areas like Maramureș (p663) and Saxon Land (p648). It's amazing how much things can change only 2km from a 'main' paved highway. More than a couple of roads are best suited for 4WD, though everything in this chapter can be reached by a Dacia Solenza (the cheapest rental car, and a fine one), if you take extra precautions.

Brașov has some of the country's higher rental rates, whereas Bucharest, Sibiu and Cluj–Napoca have lower rates. Drop-off serv-

ice is allowed by many companies, with an extra fee of not less than €50. See destination sections for car-rental recommendations.

TIPS

- Plan on time – Things go slower; flocks of sheep, horse carts, full-lane tractors, construction and giant potholes halt traffic.
- Get a map – A map is mandatory if you're planning to go back roads. Maps can be found in bookshops, but highway petrol stops don't tend to carry them. A good one is Cartographia's 1:800,000 *Romania* (about €3.50).
- Hitchhiking – It's a part of life, and you'll see old women, even children, hailing rides. Generally there are no problems doing so, though we 'enjoyed' the company of an extremely drunk man looking to go 500m.
- Parking – In most places, a sidewalk is fair game to park your car. In some, however, note the 'P cu plata' sign meaning payment is required. Usually a bloke trolls the area and charges €0.30 or €0.50 to park a few hours. A local in one town explained what happens if they get a ticket: 'It's their job to ticket us, and ours to throw it away.'

RULES

Your country's driving licence will be recognised here. There is a 0% blood-alcohol tolerance limit. Seat belts are compulsory in the front and back; children under 12 are forbidden to sit in the front.

Speed limits are 90km/h on major roads and 70km/h inside highway villages and towns unless otherwise noted. A few motorways allow faster driving. Speed traps – such as the video ones between Brașov and Bucharest – are common; drivers warn each other with a flash of the headlights.

Local Transport

Buses, trams and trolleybuses provide transport within most towns and cities in Romania, although many are crowded. They usually run from about 5am to midnight, although services can get thin on the ground after 7pm in more remote areas. Purchase tickets at street kiosks marked *bilet* or *casă de bilete* before boarding, and validate them once aboard.

In many rural parts, the only vehicles around are horse-powered. Horse and cart is the most popular form of transport in Romania. Many

carts will stop and give you a ride, the driver expecting no more than a cigarette in return.

Bucharest is the only city in Romania to boast a metro system.

Train

Rail has long been the most popular way of travelling around Romania. **Căile Ferate Române** (CFR; Romanian State Railways; www.cfr.ro) runs trains over 11,000km of track, providing service to most cities, towns and larger villages in the country. The *mersul trenurilor* (national train timetable) is published annually and sold for €2 from CFR offices. It's also available at www.mercultrenurilorcfr.ro, but it's complicated picking the right array of destinations; better (for times, but no prices) is the German site www.bahn.de.

Sosire means 'arrivals' and *plecare* is 'departures'. On posted timetables, the number of the platform from which each train departs is listed under *linia*.

CLASSES & TYPES OF TRAINS

In Romania there are five different types of train, all of which travel at different speeds, offer varying levels of comfort and charge different fares for the same destination.

The cheapest trains are local personal trains. These trains are achingly slow. *Accelerat* trains are faster, hence a tad more expensive and less crowded. Seat reservations are obligatory and automatic when you buy your ticket. There's little difference between *rapid* and *expres* trains. Both travel at a fair speed and often have dining cars. Pricier Inter-City trains are the most comfortable but aren't faster than *expres* trains.

Vagon de dormit (sleepers) are available between Bucharest and Cluj–Napoca, Oradea,

Timișoara, Tulcea and other points. First-class sleeping compartments generally have two berths, 2nd-class sleepers generally have four berths and 2nd-class couchettes have six berths. Book these in advance.

Fares listed in this chapter generally indicate one-way, 2nd-class seats on *rapid* or *accelerat* trains.

BUYING TICKETS

Tickets are sold in advance for all trains except local personal ones. Advance tickets are sold at an Agenție de Voiaj CFR, a train-ticket office found in every city centre. When the ticket office is closed you have to buy your ticket immediately before departure at the station.

Theoretically you can buy tickets at CFR offices up to two hours before departure. Sometimes they don't sell tickets for same-day trips, so try to plan a day ahead.

You can only buy tickets at train stations two hours – and in some cases just one hour – before departure. Queues can be horrendous. At major stations there are separate ticket lines for 1st and 2nd classes; you may opt for 1st class when you see how much shorter that line is. Your reservation ticket lists the code number of your train along with your assigned *vagon* (carriage) and *locul* (seat).

If you have an international ticket right through Romania, you're allowed to make stops along the route but you must purchase a reservation ticket each time you reboard an *accelerat* or *rapid* train. If the international ticket was issued in Romania, you must also pay the *expres* train supplement each time.

In a pinch you can board a train and pay the ticket-taker for the ride; ask how much. As one local told us: 'This is Romania – you can do anything if you pay for it.'

COMPARING TRAIN COSTS

This chart is here to help gauge how train fares ebb based on speed and condition. In our experience, the 1st-class price wasn't worth the hike; personal trains went nearly as quickly on some routes, but were scappier and fuller.

Trip	Personal	Accelerat	Rapid	Inter-City
100km (1st Class)	€3.50	€6.40	€8.10	€9
100km (2nd Class)	€2.20	€4.40	€5.80	€6.65
Bucharest–Brașov (1st)	€5.70	€10	€11.20	€12.10
Bucharest–Brașov (2nd)	€3.50	€6.50	€7.90	€8.70

