

Getting Started

Half the fun is planning a trip – and Romania and Moldova offer a range of diverse possibilities. See our suggested itineraries (p17) for more.

Local travel agents offer some excellent trips (or advice) – see p363 for a recommended list.

WHEN TO GO

Its winters are quite cold and summers quite hot, but Romania is a year-round destination. There is 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 recent summer months, temperatures have risen to above 40°C in Bucharest and along the Black Sea coast, while winter chills of below -35°C are not unknown in the Braşov depression and around Miercurea Ciuc in Transylvania.

In general, Romania's climate is transitional between temperate regions (the southeast can feel positively Mediterranean) and the more extreme weather characteristics of the continental interior. The average annual rainfall is 675mm; this figure is doubled in the mountains and in the Danube Delta it's often half that.

Summer (June to August) is an obvious time to visit for beach fun on the coast and for hiking and mountain biking in the Carpathians; all tourist facilities are open then and the weather is usually great, but you will have to share the sites with more tourists. Best times for bird-watching in the Danube Delta are mid-April to mid-May, and in October. Spring in Romania is a pastiche of wildflowers, melting snow and melodious bird song.

At higher elevations, snow lingers as late as mid-May (the Transfăgărăşan road doesn't open until June!) and the hiking season doesn't begin in earnest until mid-June. The best months for skiing are December to March, though the season extends either way some winters.

Moldova is best to visit from spring to autumn, as skiing is almost non-existent and winter sports are not well-developed there. October's Wine Festival is an especially tempting time to visit, though spring and summer are best for city strolling and hiking in remote areas.

COSTS & MONEY

Cheaper than much of Europe, Romania and Moldova have nevertheless graduated from the dirt-cheap-trip category in recent years, with basic, modern hotel rooms edging into the €40-per-night level, and a sit-down meal with a beer, some meat and soup costing between €7 and €10 (and higher in Bucharest or Chişinău). Car-hire rates tend to be high too – up to €40 per day – but bus and train tickets are quite cheap (about €3.50 to €7 per 100km by train).

Those looking to save can relish the abundant fast-food stands selling burgers, kebabs and pizza slices (about €1.50 to €2.50), and the abundance of *cazare* (private rooms) available from entrepreneurs loitering at train stations or the more organised *agroturism* B&B network, which run about €10 to €15 per person, including breakfast. These can provide lunch and dinner upon request.

For a couple wishing to stay in mid-priced hotels, dine out once or twice a day and perhaps hire the occasional guide or go on guided tours, expect to pay €60 to €100 per day total, excluding travel. Backpackers staying in private rooms, eating only one meal in a restaurant and excluding guides or travel expenses can expect to pay more like €20 to €30 per day.

See Climate Charts (p346) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

In Romania/Moldova
 Bottle of Mufatlar/Cricova table wine €3-5/US\$2-4
 Museum admission (adult) €0.60-2/US\$0.40-1.15
 One-hour internet access €0.60-1.50/US\$0.50
 Phonecards €3/US\$2.25-3
 Local map €2.50-4/US\$1.50

Some remote areas – such as Maramureş, Transylvania’s Saxon churches, Moldavia’s painted churches, much of Moldova – are far easier to see with a guide or a hired car. Those wanting to go on long-term hikes should consider going with a guide too; see p48.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Much of the travel literature about Romania deals with historical or topical social issues. Olivia Manning’s *Balkan Trilogy* (1987, reprinted 1998) is a colourful portrait of Bucharest at the outbreak of WWII that has long been considered the classic work on Romania. Serialised on British TV as *The Fortunes of War*, it has reached a large audience with its details about life in the capital in the late 1930s.

Norman Manea’s *The Hooligan’s Return: A Memoir* (2003) details this accomplished author’s return to his homeland in the late 1990s, unleashing not only a search for identity and a flood of memories (of having lived in a Transnistrian transit camp), but also many memorable observations on contemporary life in Romania.

More of a history book, Lucian Boia’s interesting *Romania* (2001), published in the UK, is the rare Romanian-written overview, with a rather philosophical perspective on its complex history. Boia, now living in France, nobly tries to show all sides to continually debated questions like nationalism, Romania’s Slavic/Roman background – while adding an unexpected Bucharest ‘walking tour’.

Dominique Fernandez’ political *Romanian Rhapsody: An Overlooked Corner of Europe* (2000) is a good bet. This French author made four trips through Romania and Moldova and nicely interweaves history, culture and art with everyday people’s stories, and in the process shakes up some distorted notions the West has of Romania and Eastern Europe in general.

Isabel Fonseca’s *Bury Me Standing – the Gypsies and their Journey* (1996) offers one of the best insights into the Roma and their culture that you can find. The author spent several months travelling with the Roma in Eastern

DON’T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

‘Western-style’ shops sell just about anything you need, but it can be more expensive than back home. Camping supplies aren’t always readily available but outdoors equipment shops generally have pretty good stock on offer. Remember these few things:

- Extra tissues or toilet paper
- First-aid kit
- Swiss army knife
- Three-prong European adaptor
- Torch (flashlight)
- Universal sink plug
- Sun block lotion
- Insect repellent
- Ear plugs
- Extra video tapes or memory cards
- Contact lens solution
- Souvenir flag pins or postcards of your home country (to give as gifts!)
- Checking the latest visa regulations (p354) – especially for Moldova

Europe between 1991 and 1995. The chapter covering Romania looks at racial attacks against Roma in Transylvania.

Bruce Benderson’s unusual *The Romanian: Story of an Obsession* is an account of nine months spent in the hay with a Romanian hustler who maintains his heterosexuality – Benderson weirdly compares his exploits with kings, writers and artists from Romania’s past.

One of the more intriguing titles is Alan Ogden’s 2000 book *Romania Revisited: On the Trail of English Travellers 1602-1941*. The author travelled the country in 1998, following in the footsteps of historical travellers, from the first motorists to romantics like Leigh Fermor. Dacian, Byzantine and Saxon Romania are beautifully evoked in this gripping series of tales. Ogden’s *Winds of Sorrow: Travels in and Around Transylvania* is an ensemble of essays written following travels there between 1998 and 2002.

Compare Transylvania today with its 1930s state in Patrick Leigh Fermor’s classic *Between the Woods and the Water*, based on the author’s shoestring romp across Europe on foot.

Princes Among Men: Journeys with Gypsy Musicians describes Garth Cartwright’s fascinating, if on occasion annoying, travels with Roma musicians across the Balkans.

Highly recommended is Stephen Henighan’s *Lost Province: Adventures in a Moldovan Family* (2003). One of the best travelogues about Moldova, it follows a Canadian’s experiences teaching English in this forgotten country and is humorous and touching while bringing up astute, even disturbing points about Soviet cultural colonisation and the inter-ethnic tension he finds there.

There are very few English-language accounts of travelling through Moldova, but Tony Hawks’ *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis* provides a witty but respectful travelogue account of the author’s exploits pursuing members of the Moldovan football team for a game of tennis – all to win a bet.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Go to Thorn Tree to talk with travellers in or just back from Romania. Lots of news items and features too.

Moldovan Ministry of Tourism (www.turism.md) This state site is extremely helpful with news bulletins, the latest visa regulations, festival information and travel advice.

Nine O’Clock News (www.nineoclock.com) Website of English-language paper in Bucharest.

Romania National Tourism Office (www.romaniatourism.com) In lieu of tourist information centres in much of Romania, there’s at least this: a detailed site listing special events and overviews of regions.

Romania.org (www.romania.org) Includes many links to sites on Romania.

Rural Tourism (www.ruraltourism.ro) Lists rural B&Bs across Romania; also see p343 for more sites dedicated to accommodation.

Sapte Seri (www.sapteseri.ro) Lists up-to-date restaurants, clubs, events (films, concerts) around Romania.

TOP TENS

Top Festivals

Festivals dot Romania all year long (less so in Moldova), running the gamut from film festivals, and DJ contests to shepherd shindigs welcoming the sheep home. Here are our favourites:

- Rooster Shooting, April, Apata (p136)
- Snow Festival, April, Păltiniş (p162)
- Juni Pageant, May, Braşov (p132)
- Sibiu Jazz Festival, May, Sibiu (p159)
- Transylvania International Film Festival, June, Cluj-Napoca (p191)
- Hora de la Prislop, August, Maramureş (p239)
- Mountain Festival, August, Fundata (p141)
- Wine Festival, October, Chişinău (p318)
- National Theatre Festival, December, Bucharest (p80)
- Winter Festival, December, Maramureş (p136)

Top Communist Sites

No, really. Some of Romania's communist achievements may be grisly or ugly or just dreadful seas of concrete, but at least a couple are pretty awe-inspiring. Either way, these 10 sites are such that when you see one it's impossible not to look.

- Palace of Parliament & B-dul Unirii, Bucharest (p68)
- Transfăgărăşan road (p154)
- Soviet tanks, living-and-breathing communism in Tiraspol, Transdniestri (p337)
- National Archaeology and History Museum, Chişinău, Moldova (p323)
- Iron Gates hydroelectric power station (p110)
- Gherla Prison (p199)
- Danube Canal (p301)
- Former Communist party Black Sea resorts, Neptun-Olimp (p297)
- Blackened factory shells at Copşa Mică (p151)
- Ceauşescu's apartment, Villa International, Timişoara (p218)

Top Movies

Both local and international films are finding Romania the perfect back-drop. Here are 10 to whet the appetite: the first two are Romanian stand-outs, the rest are foreign films shot on location in Romania and one is a wacky movie about a guy who hates mirrors:

- *Filanropica* (Nae Caranfil, 2005)
- *The Death of Mr Lazarescu* (Cristi Pulu, 2005)
- *Cold Mountain* (Anthony Minghella, 2003)
- *Vlad* (Michael Sellers, 2004)
- *Elvira's Haunted Hills* (Sam Irvin, 2002)
- *Pulse* (Jim Sonzero, 2006)
- *Beowulf* (Graham Baker, 1999)
- *Wild Dogs* (Thom Fitzgerald, 2003)
- *Bloodrayne* (Uwe Boll, 2006)
- *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992)

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTE

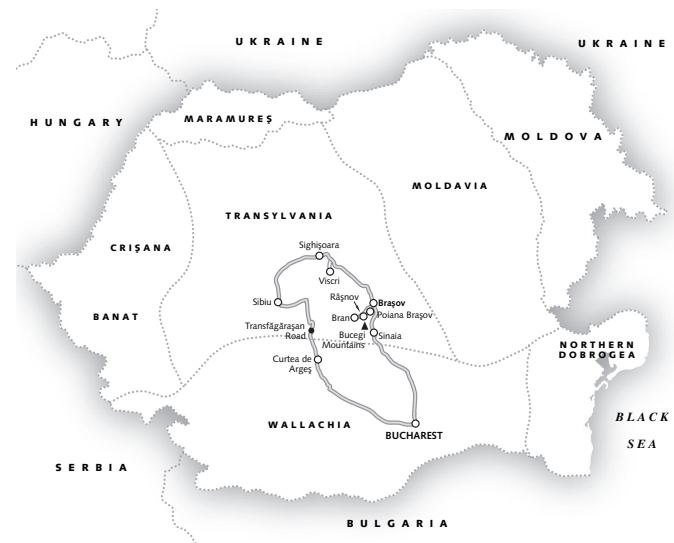
CASTLES, MOUNTAINS & FANGS

10 Days / Bucharest to Sibiu

The classic route for travellers wanting a taste of Transylvania starts outside it at **Bucharest** (p61), where most flights come in. With only 10 days, don't linger. Hire a car from the Bucharest airport (p87) or hop in a train north toward the hills, stopping in **Sinaia** (p118) for a couple nights and checking out Peleş Castle. From there, cable-car up into the **Bucegi Mountains** (p122) for hiking or biking. Drive or bus north for a couple nights in **Braşov** (p127), a surprisingly unjaded hub with a cobbled centre. Take day trips to the infamous 'Dracula Castle' at **Bran** (p138) and the better one at **Râşnov** (p137), with the options of skiing and hiking at **Poiana Braşov** (p136).

If you have a car, spend a night in the timeless Saxon town **Viscri** (p151), before continuing on for a night in **Sighişoara** (p143), where the cute citadel offers B&Bs, espresso and Dracula's birthplace. Head southwest for a night or two in **Sibiu** (p153), Transylvania's most culturally rich town.

If you have a car (and it's summer), drive south along the winding, stunning **Transfăgăraşan road** (p154) that tackles the biggest of the Carpathians. South of the pass, stop in the 'real Dracula castle' at Poienari outside **Curtea de Argeş** (p103) before returning to Bucharest.



This 800km route takes in the 'big three' of Transylvania's Saxon country: Braşov, Sighişoara and Sibiu. On the way are many opportunities to poke into rural life, and up into the mighty Carpathian mountains. Those with a couple extra days should consider spending some time in underrated (and over-criticised) Bucharest.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

DRACULA? SCHMACULA!

21-28 Days / Bucharest to Timișoara

This whirlwind month-long trip around Romania and Moldova skips the heart of Transylvania. Start with a couple days in **Bucharest** (p61), before heading east to hit the beach at **Mamaia** (p294) and visit the **Eforie Nord** mud baths (p295). Go north to **Tulcea** (p303), the springboard for bird-rich boat trips through the **Danube Delta** (p301).

Bus or drive north to **Iași** (p254), a youthful gateway to Moldova, where you spend three or four days in the more Soviet, but surprisingly modern **Chișinău** (p318), with winner day trips to the **Orheiul Vechi Monastery** (p331) and the **Cojușna Winery** (p330).

Return to Iași then head northwest to **Suceava** (p271) for a couple of days' touring the nearby cartoon-esque, colour-coded **Bucovina Monasteries** (p275). Cross into Transylvania's Hungarian-rich Székely Land via the stunning **Bicaz Gorges** (p269), taking in a hike if time allows. Stop in at Székely Land's biggest town, Habsburg-influenced **Târgu Mureș** (p171), then head to **Cluj-Napoca** (p184), home to a lively student base, clubs, quirky museums and a Hungarian/Romanian population. Head west for hiking and caving in the **Apuseni Mountains** (p43); otherwise head southwest to another great under-appreciated city, **Timișoara**, (p214), home to the 1989 revolution and now a popular alternative air hub for Romania.

No castles, no fangs, no blood-red steaks served with a wink. This roughly 2000km trip ventures through some of the region's most diverse and stunning territory. Those going by train and maxitaxi may need to allow more time for transfers. Those saving time with a car could add a few days in Maramureș (p232).



TAILORED TRIPS

THE COUNTRY LIFE

'Peasant' isn't a bad word but a proud one in these parts, and no visitor really can get a sense of Romania or Moldova without spending some time in the sticks – where family-run *pensiunes* (pensions) open their doors as one-stop, kick-back bases. In Transylvania, and within half an hour of Brasov, you can wake to the sound of chickens in **Râșnov** (p137); a bit more rugged is **Vama Buzăului** (p143), in the lesser-visited mountains northeast.

Down from the Bărgău Valley, home to Dracula in Bram Stoker's novel, is remote **Lunca Ilvei** (p211), with horse-riding options.

Outside Sibiu, just a couple kilometres off the highway, are traditional villages that feel worlds away, such as **Sibiel** (p163), with its glass-icon museum and its hillbound paths. For more Hungarian flavour, get to villages outside Cluj-Napoca, including **Rimitea** (p196), and **Sâncraiu** (p197) or **Gârda de Sus** (p198), both on the foothills to the Apuseni Mountains.

The king of rural life is Maramureș, where you can stay in thatched-hut villages. Good options abound in the Izei Valley, such as **Botiza** (p245) or **Săpânța** (p243), home to a 'merry cemetery' of Pop Art–styled headstones.

In Moldavia, a good base to see the cartoon-like murals of the Bucovina Monasteries is the High Hostel outside **Suceava** (p273). In Moldova, you can hire an island for US\$12 near a cliffside monastery at **Orheiul Vechi** (p331).



TAKE THE KIDS ALONG

So much of Romania evokes past worlds and eerie myths that it's sure to capture the imagination of any child – or adult. The Dracula thing may be overblown, but the castles are not. Tourists squeeze through the narrow passageways of the so-called 'Dracula castle' – 15th-century **Bran Castle** (p139) – but **Poenari** (p105) is home to the 'real' Dracula's castle and Hunedoara's **Corvin Castle** (p181) looks more the part, with a drawbridge and walkways over deep dungeon-like corridors.

The country route can offer horse-cart rides, walks to meet shepherds' herds of sheep in the hills, or tours of local craftsfolk at work. You can sleep in a fun, drawer-style 'Saxon bed' in traditional homes in **Viscri** (p151).

Underground worlds beg for kids, particularly the **Apuseni Mountain caves** (p197) and the swing sets and sculptures in the bizarre **Praid salt mine** (p171).

For all its noise, **Bucharest** (p80) teems with child-friendly fun, like The Dracula Show and puppet theatre.

Half a million birds, including pelicans, flap some wing in the **Danube Delta** (p301), which can only be seen by ferry or hiring a fisher's boat. Just south of the beach resorts are Eforie Nord's **mud baths** (p296), where you can encourage kids to get slimy. If that's not enough mud, Moldova is home to **muddy volcanoes** (p283) that burp and gurgle out all shades of brown. Cool.



Snapshot

The biggest thing on the minds of Romanians is the EU and whether the last-minute granting of membership in 2006 can propel one of Eastern Europe's slowest-to-start economies. Even before the official word came in, the EU optimistically appointed Sibiu, along with Luxembourg, as European City of Culture for 2007. For much of the midpart of this decade, the EU pressed Romania to address a number of concerns – pollution, corruption, poor conditions for orphans, destitute farmers – that threatened to delay membership indefinitely.

In 2004, Romania voted against a former communist as president for the first time since 1989 and elected ex-Mayor of Bucharest Traian Basescu. While many here were worried about changes the EU may bring (such as disallowing the free-range roaming of sheep or cow herds, and unpasteurised cheese stalls on roadside stands), Romania seems ready for a change. One local said, 'We deserve a better future... we deserve a better present!'

Many Romanian youth can't wait for change though and record numbers are leaving for summer or long-term jobs in the USA, Greece, Italy, Spain or the UK. The latter sees over 75,000 Romanians come annually and has increased civil services in anticipation of many coming after EU membership. The numbers of Romanians in Spain are even higher. Unfortunately many Romanians leave to pursue false dreams and become ensnared in the tragic world of human trafficking. Lured by 'paying jobs' as wait-staff and the like, thousands of boys, girls and young women are sold for as little as €3000 into forced prostitution in Western Europe, the Middle East and North America. The numbers are even worse in Moldova. Both countries have increased investigations and Romania convicted over 200 traffickers in 2005.

In recent years, Romania has made international headlines, when the Danube rose to its highest level in over a century and birds found with the Avian flu led to a short-lived panic (but no human cases). It's also increasingly been used by international filmmakers as a cheap place to shoot big-budget films such as *Cold Mountain* and more, ahem, lowbrow efforts such as *The Seed of Chucky*. Sacha Baron Cohen filmed the 'Kazakh village' scenes from *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* in Romania, with villagers unapologetically speaking Romanian – close enough to Kazakh for the film apparently.

In 2005 Romania passed a property restitution law allowing former owners of communist-held property – often buildings in town centres – to reclaim their buildings. Most famously, Bran Castle returned to Habsburg hands in 2006. A fund of US\$4 billion was set up for property owners not able to recover former property.

In Moldova, EU integration remains a far-off dream. Currently there are too many problems to be resolved, especially Moldova's unsettled internal integration, namely with the breakaway region of Transdnestr, which erupted onto worldwide newspapers following a bomb explosion on a bus in summer 2006. The contentious possibility of Moldova becoming a federation of several autonomous regions has not been completely abandoned. Until these issues are cleared up, it will be hard to deal with other major issues of a backwards economy: lack of foreign investment, corruption and unemployment, to name just a few.

QUICK FACTS

Romania/Moldova
 Population (millions):
 22.3/4.5
 Area (sq km):
 238,391/33,700
 GDP growth (2005):
 4.5%/7.1%
 Inflation rate (2005):
 9%/11.9%
 Official unemployment
 rate: 5.9%/8%
 Average monthly salary:
 €320/80
 Life expectancy (male-
 female): 68-75/62-70
 Number of people bitten
 by stray dogs in Bucha-
 rest (2005): 15,000
 Percentage of working-
 age Moldovans living
 abroad: 25%
 Price of nice house in
 wine-rich Prahova Valley:
 €70,000

The Authors



ROBERT REID

Coordinating Author, Bucharest & Transylvania

Raised in Oklahoma, Robert skipped *Rambo* films and looked to the Soviet bloc for a source of rebellion and inspiration. After spending a summer studying in Russia and travelling across Eastern Europe, Robert has returned with LP business cards to update Bulgaria for the *Eastern Europe* guide, and then the Russian Far East for *Russia & Belarus* and the *Trans-Siberian Railway*. Romania's mountains, villages, Latin way and friendly locals have always been a European highlight for him. His dream? Driving an East German Trabant from Bulgaria, across Romania's Carpathians into Moldova, maybe up through Minsk en route to the former East Germany. Meanwhile he lives quietly in Brooklyn, New York.

My Favourite Trip

A lot of travellers miss the area entirely, but I found Transylvania's Székely Land (p163), home to many ethnic Hungarians, something like going to Eastern Europe shortly after the area 'opened' to the West. Locals are poised for conversation and seem particularly happy that you've taken the trouble to visit their home. Plus the food's a little better here. In Târgu Mureş (p171) I sat in on a raucous high-school talent show in the Habsburg-era Culture Palace. To the south is Praid (p171), a weird salt mine that feels like a post-apocalyptic world. My favourite, though, is Odorheiu Secuiesc (p169), an almost purely Hungarian town where there's little to get in the way of hanging in bars or cafés and talking with some of Romania's friendliest people.



LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



LEIF PETERSEN Wallachia, Crişana & Banat, Maramureş, Moldavia, Northern Dobrogea & Moldova

In 2003, Leif Pettersen's 'unhinged contempt for reality' spurred him to abandon an idiot-proof career with the US Federal Reserve and embark on an odyssey of homeless travel writing. Despite no leads or training – and a dubious grasp of grammar – he somehow managed modest success by deluging hapless editors with material so raw and protracted that a trilingual international support group was formed to cope with the situation. Leif's weakness for pretty girls first brought him to Romania in 2004, where the low cost of living compelled him to stay. Speaking the language, having an apartment and owning a 1990 Dacia 1310, it's said Leif needs only to learn *ţuică* distilling to gain honorary Romanian citizenship. You can read more on Leif's travels at www.killingbatteries.com.

My Favourite Trip

Vexingly, there are must-see destinations scattered around Romania and Moldova, but with the great distances and slow transport between them, my favourite trip can only comprise a compact area – until the introduction of rocket buses.

Start in Suceava (p271) and take a guided tour of the wondrous Painted Monasteries (p275). Then head south and spend a few days tramping through the Ceahlău (p267) or Rarău (p280) mountains. Take a swing through the mindbending Bicz Gorge and the mysterious Lacu Roşu (p269) on your way to Iaşi (p254). After wandering through Iaşi's deluge of attractions, zip over the border to Chişinău (p318) to drink in excellent wine tours (p329) by day and party by night (p327). Break up the carousing by spending a day at the fantastic cave monastery at Orheiul Vechi (p331).

