

## 1. ABOUT ROMANIA

*"Considered by many the most beautiful country in Eastern Europe, Romania still claims regions that seem bastions of a medieval past long since lost elsewhere."*

(Fodor's Eastern and Central Europe)

### **Short History of Romania**

In the first century BC, Dacian and other Thracian tribes form in present-day Romania an independent state of Dacia. Dacia is conquered by the Roman Empire in 106 and it becomes the province of Dacia. The Dacians mingle with the Roman conquerors. After the collapse of the Roman power, this area gets under the control of different migratory (barbarian) tribes that have passed here in turns. After the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Slavonic tribes enter the area, followed of ninth century by Hungarians.

After the year 1000, three states appeared on the Romanian territory: Transylvania, which will be an autonomous principality in the Hungarian kingdom until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; after 1550, it will alternate between the authority of the Ottoman Empire and of the Habsburg Empire until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Austria integrates it as an autonomous principality; Moldova, and Walachia will end up under the ottoman suzerainty after 1550.

As a result of the Crimean war, the principalities Moldova and Walachia form in 1859 a personal union, the

United Romanian Principalities, renamed Romania in 1866. This Romania does not yet include Transylvania – which is under the Austro-Hungarians – or Basarabia – under the Russians.

After the defeat of Austro-Hungary in World War I, the region of Transylvania is added to Romania, as is the Bessarabia.

After the Second World War, as the result of the military occupation and the agreements of I. V. Stalin and W. Churchill in Moscow (in the autumn of 1944), Romania falls under the Soviet influence, with the communism becoming its governing system.

Due to the unpopular policy, the terror and the violation of human rights, that increased in the last years, under Nicolae Ceaușescu and encouraged by the fall of communism in the other Eastern European countries, the people rebelled. In December 1989, antigovernment violence break out in Timișoara and spreads to other cities. When army units join the uprising, Ceaușescu flees, but he is captured, deposed, and executed along with his wife, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 1989.

After the revolution, a democratic regime is installed, which re-establishes connections with the western world, starts the reform and begin the negotiations with the European Union for Romania's accession.

**Facts and Figures**

**Location:** South-eastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea (SE), Bulgaria (S), Serbia (SW), Hungary (NW), Ukraine (N and E), Moldavia (E).

**Territory:** 237,500 km<sup>2</sup>

**Capital:** Bucharest

**Weather:** temperate; cold, cloudy winters with frequent snow and fog; sunny summers with frequent showers and thunderstorms

**Relief:**

**Mountains:** "Carpați" (the Carpathians), which cover 30% of Romania's territory. They are situated in the centre of the country. The highest top is "Moldoveanu", which measures 2,544 m. Here you can find beautiful sights, endangered species, rare plants, the destruction of which is prohibited by law.

**Hills:** There are sweet mineral waters (and sweet wines), muddy volcanoes, very old forests, health resorts, and monasteries.

**Plains:** They cover the other 30% of Romania's territory. They are the most populated parts of the country. The biggest cities are here. For a long period of time, Romania's plains were considered some of the most important cereal producers.

**The Danube Delta:** It is Romania's youngest area. It is only 2000 years old. It was born from the silts brought by the old Danube. Here there is a big number of species of plants and animals. That is why it became a National Natural Park.

**Danube:** It's Romania's most important river. It is located in the South, building a natural border with Bulgaria.

**Seaside:** The Romanian coast is 245 Km long. Many beautiful resorts are situated here and you can choose a romantic or a very populated and noisy one.

### **People**

Foreign visitors consider Romanians among the friendliest and most hospitable people on earth. Romanians are by nature fun loving, warm, hospitable, and playful, with an innate sense of humour.

Total population: 21.680.974

**Distribution:** 52.7% urban population, 47.3% rural population

**Ethnic groups:** Romanian 89.5%, Hungarian 6.6%, Gypsy (Roma people) 2.5%, Ukrainian 0.3%, German 0.3%, Russian 0.2%, Turkish 0.2%, other 0.4% (2002)

**Religion:** Orthodox (86.8%), Roman Catholic including Greek rite (6%), Protestant (6%), other (1.2%)

**Time zone:** Eastern Europe Daylight Time, (GMT + 02:00)  
Bucharest

### **National holidays:**

The 1<sup>st</sup> of January – New Year

Orthodox Easter Sunday and Monday

Pentecost

The 1<sup>st</sup> of May – Labour Day

The 15<sup>th</sup> of August – St. Mary

The 30<sup>th</sup> of November – St. Andrew

The 1<sup>st</sup> of December – National Day (celebrating the 1918 Union of all Romanian regions)

The 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December – Christmas Days

### **Form of government: Republic**

The president is the head of state, but also has broader powers. The Prime Minister is the head of the government.

The parliament has a Senate and an Assembly of Deputies. The voting age is 18.

**Administrative divisions:** Romania is split into 8 regions, each of them containing four to seven districts.

### **EU-Romania Relations**

Romania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to have official relations with the European Community. In 1974, an agreement included Romania in the Community's Generalized System of Preferences and an Agreement on Industrial Products was signed in 1980.

Romania's diplomatic relations with the European Union date from 1990, and a Trade and Co-operation Agreement was signed in 1991.

Romania submitted its application for EU membership on June 22, 1995.

Following the Helsinki European Council's decision in December 1999, accession negotiations started with Romania on February 15, 2000.

Romania became an EU Member State in 2007.

### **Romanian Traditions**

Romanian holidays tend to be very traditional, especially in the villages. The area of Romania called Maramureş is known for being the most traditional. Among all of the religious holidays, Christmas and Easter are the most beloved.

The **Christmas** celebration starts with a six-week fast prior to the holiday. The orthodox fasting pattern excludes from the diet any animal product such as meat, eggs, fish, milk or cheese. It is traditional to buy a pig (or pigs), in the

summer or fall, and raise it until around Christmas time, and then kill it and make traditional food from it.

An important date is December 6, when St. Nicholas brings small gifts to the young children who have polished their shoes and placed them in front of a window in their home.

Christmas carols, traditional food and decorated trees are part of the Christmas traditions. Traditionally, during the first hours after dark on Christmas' Eve is the time for children to go carolling and the adults stay home to greet them. As they go carolling from house to house, the children receive treats like candy, fruit, baked treats and sometimes even money in appreciation of their performance and as a sign of holiday good will.

Sometimes children take a star with them and therefore it is called "to go with a star" or "a merge cu steaua". Children make a star using coloured paper and then they put in its middle an icon of Jesus.

You can also carol in other traditional fashions dressed up as a bear with your very own tambourine man. This is called, "a merge cu ursul".

The other version you may see is someone dressed as a goat, 'a merge cu capra'. This person wears a colourful outfit, with a beak made out of wood.

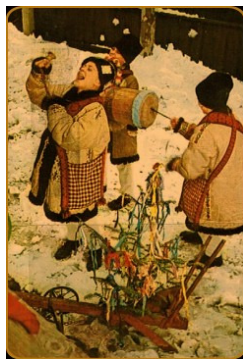


There are also Christmas trees here. People usually decorate the Christmas tree on the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> of December, and throw it away after the 6<sup>th</sup> of January.

Among the traditional Christmas meals are: fresh pork sausages, either grilled or fried, garnished with "murături" (cucumber pickles), as well as hot peppers and green tomato pickles; "tobă" – pork stomach stuffed with meat jelly, liver and rind; "caltaboş" – a kind of liver sausage; Beef salad - steamed or boiled vegetables: carrots, celery, potatoes, peas and pickled vegetables (cucumbers, tomato peppers and green tomatoes), all finely chopped and combined with olives and strips of cooked beef and bound with mayonnaise; "ciorbă de perişoare" - a slightly sour vegetable soup made with fermented bran and pork meatballs; "sarmale" (stuffed cabbage) - Romanians' best-loved traditional dish.

Christmas Day is celebrated among friends and family. Also, the celebration of the Christening of Jesus occurs on January 6 – a date commonly considered to be the coldest day of the year.

### Traditions on **New Year's Eve**



One of the New Year's traditions is the "Pluguşor". In Romanian folklore, it is a traditional procession with a decorated plough, on New Years' Eve. This is a well wishing custom for the field fruitfulness into the New Year. This custom arises from "Carmen arvale", a Roman wish for bountiful crops.

"Sorcova" is a special bouquet used for New Year's wishes early New Year's



morning. Children wish people a "Happy New Year!" while touching them lightly with this bouquet.



**Easter** is the most important event in the Orthodox Christian calendar and it is also preceded by a six-week fast. The Friday before Easter, everyone fasts and goes to church. In the countryside, women paint eggs

after emptying them.

At the Easter Resurrection Mass (*Slujba de Înviere*) just before midnight, the priest comes out to give a blessing and provide the flame from which everyone will light their candles. Suddenly the darkness is lit up and thousands of candles take to the streets.

Everyone tries to keep the flame alive until they arrive home. There, around the table, the family comes together for a special Easter meal. Roast lamb and home-made *cozonac* (sponge cake with nuts and poppy seeds) are the traditional dishes.

In the countryside, the Easter Resurrection Mass lasts until early morning. The custom among country folk is to take their painted eggs, *cozonaci* and specially prepared dishes into the church on Saturday night so they can be blessed by the priest.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> of March** is the coming of spring. This is a day where men give women traditional "mărțișor", gifts of small objects – plants, shells, flowers, animals, snowmen or tools with a red and white ribbon symbolizing life and purity. Women wear



them for the entire month of March, but nowadays, only a few tend to do that. "Mărțișor" are also hung in the tree branches and is meant to bring good luck during the month of March and throughout the year ahead. Overall, Mărțișor signifies the end of winter and the arrival of spring.

The 8<sup>th</sup> of March – Women's Day: On this day, women enjoy small presents from men (friends, boyfriends, fathers, etc).

### **Traditional Food and Drink**

A meal generally begins with a "gustare", or "starter". This normally consists of one or more types of cheeses, salami, fresh vegetables or olives. Romania has a great variety of very good cheeses indeed, ranging from sweet to salty, mild to strong. "Caș" and "Urdă" are especially recommended and do not be squeamish about trying them with green onions, as is the custom in Romania

In the countryside, it is common to drink a small glass of "pălincă", or "țuică" in other regions, which is a traditional alcoholic beverage, usually made from fruit (mostly plums, but also apples or cherry plums), or from the leftovers remaining from wine making, in which case it's called "țuică de borhot".

The first dish consists of soup, which is generally either called "ciorbă" or "supă". The difference is that "ciorbă" is a sour soup. Most Romanians eat bread along with the soup.

The first course is then followed by a traditional Romanian dish, like "sarmale" (sour cabbage leaves stuffed with ground pork) or roast (especially pork) or chicken, prepared in different ways.

Dessert usually consists of small cakes or cookies, ice cream or “clătite” (pancake) filled with jam, sweet cheese or chocolate.

Other traditional specialties you should not miss while in Romania include:

- Mămăligă (Polenta)

- Salată de Vinete (Eggplant salad spread)

- Zacuscă (Veggie salad spread)

- Ciorbă de Burtă (Tripe soup)

- Drob de Miel (Lamb liver)

- Pogaci (Snacking bread)

- Homemade jam

- Homemade pickles