



# Understand Romania

## **ROMANIA TODAY .....228**

Just as Romania feels ready to reveal its considerable charms to the world, it finds itself struggling with both the pros and cons of EU membership.

## **HISTORY .....230**

From Greeks and Romans to Turks and Hungarians, plucky Romania has often found itself at the centre of others' attentions.

## **THE DRACULA MYTH .....240**

Romania has gotten a lot of touristic mileage out of the Dracula myth. We separate the fact from (Bram Stoker's admittedly overheated) fiction.

## **OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & WILDLIFE .....242**

Whether you're into hiking and trekking, skiing, cycling, caving, fishing or even birdwatching in a marshy wetland, Romania's got something for you.

## **VISUAL ARTS & FOLK CULTURE ..... 247**

Over the centuries, Romanians have made a virtue of necessity, transforming church exteriors and many ordinary folk objects into extraordinary works of art.

## **THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE .....250**

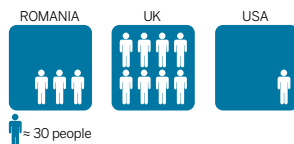
Romanians are often described as 'an island of Latins in a sea of Slavs' but that doesn't even begin to describe this diverse nation.

## **THE ROMANIAN TABLE .....252**

Comfort-food lovers have much to cheer about when it comes to Romanian food, and the *țuică* and wine are pretty good too.



## population per sq km



# Romania Today

## EU Membership: Pros & Cons

After joining the European Union in 2007, Romania was told it could access up to €20 billion in aid until 2013 in order to catch up with more advanced fellow members. According to EU monitors much of that money has not been spent on the promised development programs and, five years after it joined the EU, Romania still has villages without electricity or running water, and a mere 300km of highway. Conversely, new EU regulations are also endangering classic aspects of Romanian life, such as free-range roaming of livestock and the selling of unpasteurised cheese by the roadside, but typically – like the ‘no smoking’ law, which has had little effect on the average Romanian who lights up pretty much all the time except during sleep – both still endure.

Pressure from the EU to address concerns such as pollution, corruption, destitute farmers and poor conditions for orphans has shown mixed results. Encouragingly at least, the number of children in public institutions has been significantly decreasing since foster-care facilities have been introduced, and many orphanages have been forced to close. Another plus, the presence of the EU stamp of approval has catapulted Romania to the top of consideration for European companies looking to relocate facilities in an effort to cut operating costs. Romania’s abundance of multilingual, overeducated, underemployed college graduates make it a popular place for companies looking to outsource pan-European call centres. Employers can easily fill a telephone bank with agents that satisfactorily speak three languages (or more), with starting salaries as little as €300 per month.

- » Number of people bitten by stray dogs in Bucharest (2010): 8348
- » Average percentage of alcohol in Țuică (plum brandy), the national drink: 50%
- » EU country with the highest road mortality rate (2009): Romania
- » The average age a Romanian male/female marries is 31/27 years old.

## Superstitions

- » Don’t sit at the corner of a table or you’ll never marry.
- » If your right hand itches, you’re about to lose some money.
- » If you spill your coffee, you’re in for some good luck.
- » If you spill your salt, you’ll receive bad luck.

## Social Faux Pas

- » Don’t sit down while a woman is standing up.
- » Men shouldn’t shake hands with gloves on.
- » Don’t accidentally imply Transylvania belongs to Hungary – you’ll open a Pandora’s box.
- » Don’t call someone in Romania after 10pm.
- » Don’t point at someone with your index finger.
- » Don’t enter someone’s house with shoes or a hat on.