

Understand Romania

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Romania finds itself in clean-up mode, scrubbing streets and buildings for an influx of visitors and tossing out corrupt officials in the wake of scandal.

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

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

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

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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.

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

Romania Today

Romania finds itself in a clean-up phase, both physically and metaphorically. Towns and cities around the land are sprucing themselves up, renovating and modernising in step with the country's expanding reputation as a tourist destination. The new emphasis on tidiness extends to the upper reaches of government. Officials have launched a long-awaited crackdown on corruption in the hope of winning the favour of Brussels and finally gaining all of the benefits of EU membership.

Best on Film

4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days (2007) Breakthrough drama on illegal abortion that kicked off the 'Romanian New Wave'.

Tuesday, After Christmas (2010) Slow dissolution of a marriage, with the pressure of the holidays in the backdrop.

Child's Pose (2013) Gripping story about bending the system to get a man absolved of a crime.

Best in Print

Between the Woods and the Water (Patrick Leigh Fermor; 1986) Reminiscences of an Englishman who undertakes a remarkable journey through Transylvania in the '30s.

The Historian (Elizabeth Kostova; 2005) Brilliantly reanimates the Dracula myth focusing on Vlad Țepeș.

Nostalgia (Mircea Cărtărescu; 2005) Short stories on modern Romanian life weaving together dream and reality.

Best in Music

Band of Gypsies (Taraf de Haïdouks; 2001) Roma-inspired folk music.

OM (Negură Bunget; 2006) Metal band blending folk and noise.

Romanian Rhapsodies (George Enescu; 1901) The best-known compositions of Romania's greatest classical composer.

Not Quite a 'Full' EU Member

While Romania has been a formal member of the EU since 2007, visitors to the country will notice that not all perks of membership appear to apply.

The first major difference is that entry into the country from the EU requires you to show a passport. Romania is still not a member of the EU's common border and customs 'Schengen Zone'. Membership in Schengen was part of the original package when Romania and Bulgaria were negotiating EU membership in the run-up to 2007, but Brussels delayed the decision for both. More recently it has again deferred the question of Schengen entry, and at the time of research it wasn't clear when or if Romania would receive this coveted perk.

The other big difference is that Romania still does not use the euro. It is among a handful of EU states where old national currencies still circulate. The reasons are complex. At first, Romania didn't meet stringent EU budget and inflation standards for joining the common currency. Later, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, particularly with problems in EU-member Greece, neither Bucharest nor Brussels appeared eager to force the euro on Romania. Central banks still make occasional noises about joining the euro, but the date keeps getting pushed off further and further into the future.

Growing 'Colectiv' Conscience

The evolution of Romanian society since the fall of communism in 1989 has been an amazing process. In the first decade after the revolution, it looked (from the outside at least) as if little had changed. After all, the new election cycles seemed only to return the same old and familiar faces to power. More often than not, these leaders had ties to the old regime.