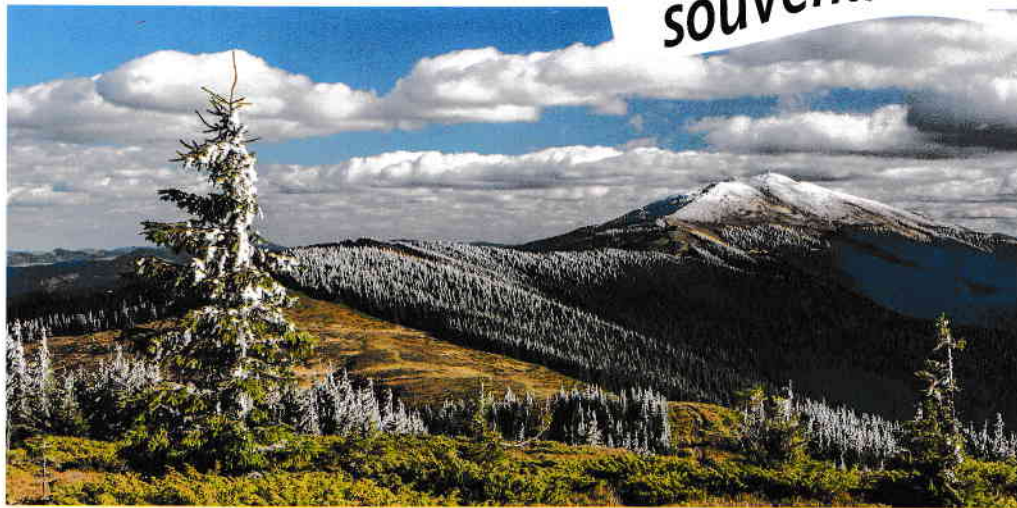


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ROMANIA

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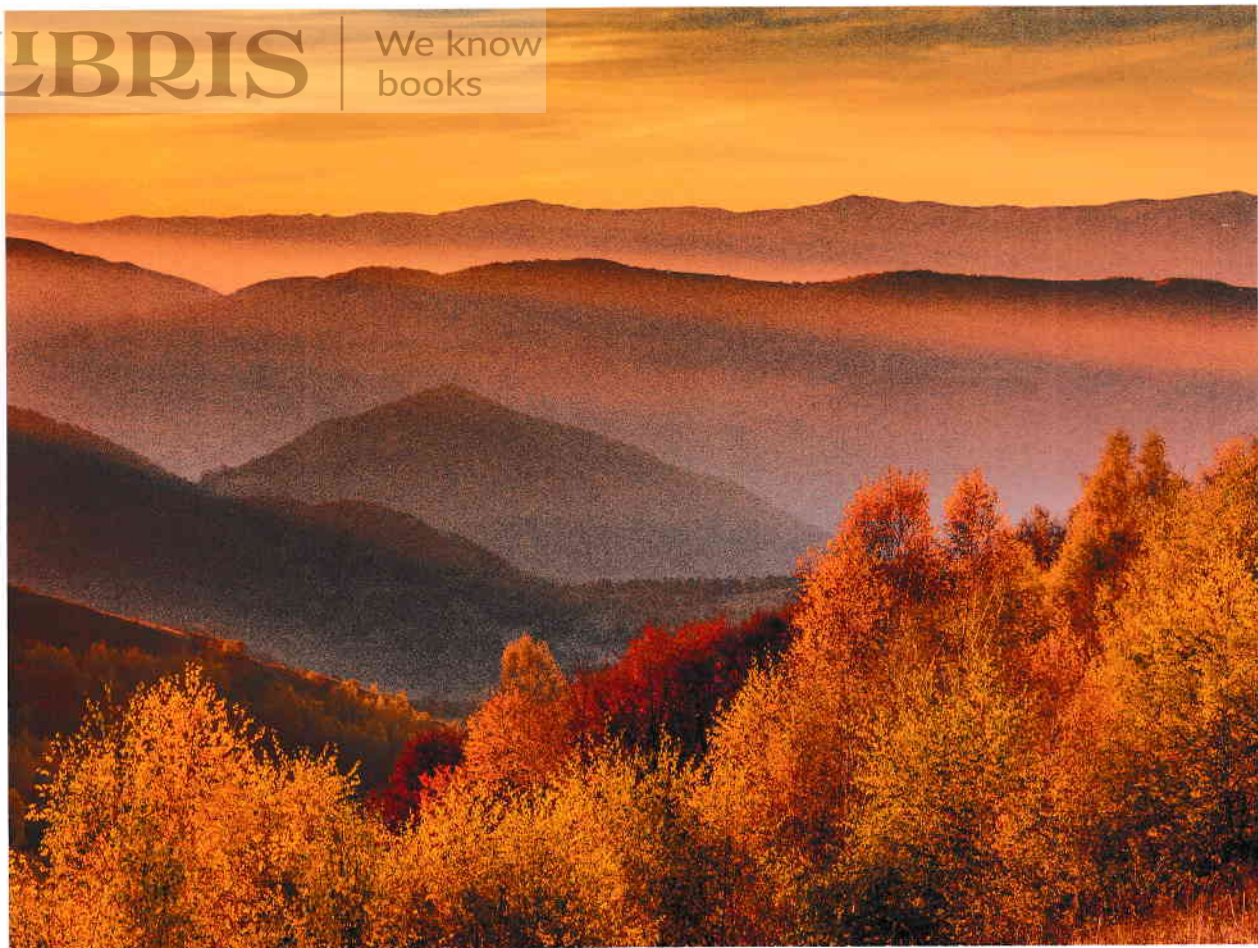
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Some travellers are drawn to Romania by its famous architectural monuments, some of which are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites; and all of which are testimonies to a long and complex national history. Others come to see the Palace of Parliament, the world's second largest administrative building after the Pentagon. Still others visit Romania to see its natural wonders: the Danube Delta and the Carpathians, with their lofty peaks, gorges, cataracts and caves, and the idyllic foothills that roll down from their slopes, with villages nestling among them, where a simpler way of life still survives and the ancient customs have been preserved. Known in the past to but few travellers, Romania is now an increasingly popular destination, and many are those who come here to discover a unique and surprising country, which is worth seeing at least once, if not more times.

1 Romania has an impressive list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site listing is not easy to come by, which is why Romania has every reason to be proud of the nine sites that have been granted this status, from extraordinary man-made structures to vast, priceless natural treasures: the churches of Bukowina, with their exterior murals; the historic centre of Sighișoara; the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century churches of Maramuresch, with their soaring wooden spires; Horezu Monastery, a masterpiece of the Brîncoveanu style; the fortified churches built by Saxon settlers in Transylvania from the twelfth century onward; Roșia Montană, the world's largest and most significant example of historic goldmining, dating from the time of Roman Dacia; and the Dacian fortresses of the Orăștie Mountains, which formed the nucleus of the Dacian state, one of the largest military powers of ancient Europe—all are wonderful examples of Romania's cultural heritage and are of importance for the whole of mankind. Besides these, Romania also has extraordinary natural splendours that have been accorded UNESCO World Heritage status.

Thanks to the diversity of its more than thirty habitats and the lifeforms it hosts in a relatively compact area, the

Danube Delta, formed over the last ten thousand years by the Danube Delta where it empties into the Black Sea, is a vast museum of biodiversity and a priceless natural gene pool. Alongside the Danube Delta, another storehouse of fantastic biodiversity is the centuries-old virgin beech forests of eight separate areas of the Carpathians, where nature can be found in its purest state.

2 In Romania can be found the world's second largest administrative building: the Palace of Parliament, a symbol of Ceaușescu's megalomania and communism's brutal destruction of Bucharest's architectural heritage.

Covering a surface area of three hundred thirty thousand square metres and eighty-four metres tall (twelve floors and eight subterranean levels), the Palace of Parliament, or House of the People as it was originally known, is the world's second largest administrative building after the Pentagon, and the heaviest. One million cubic metres of marble, seven hundred thousand tonnes of steel, nine hundred thousand cubic metres of wood, three thousand five hundred tonnes of crystal, two hundred and twenty thou-

sand square metres of carpet, and three thousand five hundred square metres of leather were used in its construction. After the foundation stone was laid in 1984, twenty thousand people worked in three shifts building the palace over the first five years. To make way for the gigantic building and its surrounding district, an old quarter of picturesque old houses, shops and churches was razed—an area four and a half kilometres long by two kilometres wide, making up a fifth of Bucharest.

3 The Danube Delta, a wonderful museum of biodiversity, lies within Romania's borders.

After a journey of 2,857 km and crossing ten countries and four capitals, Europe's second-largest river empties into the Black Sea by way of a vast delta. Formed around ten thousand years ago, the Danube Delta is a 5,800-square-kilometre mosaic (around eighty-two per cent of which lies in Romania) of channels, lakes, pools, sandbanks, islets, endless expanses of reeds, and subtropical woods. A wonderful museum of biodiversity, the Danube Delta has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1991.

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One of the world's largest wetland reserves and the largest compact area of reedbeds in the world (1,750 km²), the delta is home to around 365 species of bird, more than 2,440 species of insect, 90 species of mollusc, 11 species of reptile, and 44 species of mammal. In the waters of the delta live 133 species of fish.

4 In Romania's villages life proceeds at a slower pace, ancestral crafts are still practised, and archaic customs are preserved.

One of the most interesting images Romania has to offer can be found in the country's villages. Situated on the boundary of great empires and civilisations, Romania's provinces were to a certain extent isolated, which for a long time allowed them to preserve their traditional social structures and an outlook focused on ancestral values. Despite industrialisation and urbanisation, the rural habitat and certain occupations, as well as a way of life little affected by modernity, have been preserved in many Romanian villages in Maramuresch, Bukowina, Oltenia, Mărginimea Sibiului, and Moți Country. Ancient agrarian and pastoral

festivals, customs once charged with magic and mysticism, and archaic crafts such as woodworking, the weaving of rugs and folk costume, potting, and Easter-egg painting are alive and well even today.

5 Romania is home to one of Europe's most beautiful royal residences.

Magnificent, laden with history and mystery, Peleş Castle (1873-1914) is the expression of Carol I's covenant with Romania and his ambition to make Romania a modern European nation state. An integral part of the Sinaia architectural ensemble, Peleş Castle (1899-1902), was also built by Carol I, to serve as a summer residence for the heirs to the throne, Prince Ferdinand and Princess Maria. Its interior decoration is an illustration of the romantic, daring spirit of her who was later to be named the 'Queen of all Romanians'. The stamp of Queen Maria's personality is also visible at the Cotroceni Palace (1893-1926) in Bucharest, the official royal residence, and in Bran Castle, which was donated to her in gratitude for the part she played in bringing about the Great Union of 1 December

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1918. But the symbol of Romanian monarchy is the Royal Palace in Bucharest, which acquired its current look in 1937, during the reign of Carol II. Today it is home to the Romanian National Museum of Art, but a number of historic spaces—the Royal Dining Room, the Voevodas' Stair, and the Throne Room, where Michael I swore his oath on 6 May 1940—still preserve a part of their original décor. King Carol I and Queen Elisabeta, King Ferdinand and Queen Maria, and King Carol II are laid to rest in Curtea de Argeş, in the beautiful monastery founded by Neagoe Bassarab and rebuilt at the behest of Carol I, who added to it a royal palace. The last King of Romania, King Michael I, was buried alongside his wife, Queen Ana, in the Archiepiscopal Cathedral, built nearby at the beginning of the 2000s, modelled on the town's Princely Church.

6Romania has a wonderful mountain landscape, waiting to be discovered thanks to hundreds of marked hiking trails.

Mountains make up a third of Romania's area. More than half of the one-thousand-seven-hundred-kilometre

Carpathian chain lies in Romania, forming a mosaic of bare crests, forested slopes, meadows, valleys, passes, and wild gorges. Făgăraş is spectacular, with its sawtooth row of eight peaks soaring to more than 2,500 metres. Piatra Craiului's lofty peaks, dizzying ledges, and expanses of scree will take your breath away. The Retezat Mountains were carved by glaciers and are home to more than 1,100 species of plant, of which 90 are endemic. Each mountain has its own treasures, beauties, and stories. Hundreds of marked hiking trails climb the highest peaks, and lead to limestone rock formations and impressively long caves (the Cave of the Wind stretches for 50 km), which conceal glaciers, underground rivers (the Ponor Forts), and prehistoric paintings. Wherever you go in the Carpathians, you will discover spectacular waterfalls and lakes of crystalline water, whose hue varies from emerald green (Eagles Lake, Siriu Mountains) to blue (Bucura Lake, Retezat Mountains), turquoise (Bey's Lake, Aninei Mountains), and red (Red Lake, Hăşmaşul Mare), dotted among alpine meadows, nestling among crags, or hidden deep in the forest. The Iezer tarn in the Rodna Mountains has the same outline as the map of Romania when viewed from above. Bilea Lake, at 2,034 metres in altitude, in the

midst of a superb mountain landscape, can be reached by the Trans-Făgăraș Highway, one of the world's most spectacular passes, nicknamed 'the road in the clouds'. The Transalpina Highway, Romania's highest road, reaching an altitude of 2,145 metres in the Urdele Pass, provides both adrenaline and spectacular views.

7 Romania's historic regions have a unique culture and picturesque towns.

Today's Romania is made up of the old provinces of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, regions whose historical development has differed to various degrees, but which are for the most part inhabited by Romanians, the only descendants of the Romans, other than Romantsch speakers in Switzerland, to have preserved the name. Sited at the boundary of great empires—the Roman, Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian—the Romanian provinces experienced multiple ethnic influences and assimilated different social models, sometimes enthusiastically, sometimes with reservations, gradually constructing their own complex and highly nuanced cultural physiognomy. The same goes for

the country's towns, which are worth discovering at leisure. Bucharest is cosmopolitan and dynamic. Brașov, Sibiu and Sighișoara can boast magnificent mediaeval architecture. Cluj and Jassy have had outstanding cultural vocations. Constanța is a historic city, for decades the epicentre of seaside summer holidaymaking. Timișoara and Oradea are both wonderful open-air museums of Baroque, Secession, and modernist architecture.

8 Romanian cuisine delights the senses with its intense and surprising aromas.

Romanian cuisine owes its diversity and wealth of flavours and aromas to the country's geographic position and tumultuous history. A combination of Turkish-Balkan, Russian, German, Austrian, Hungarian, and French gastronomic traditions, its delicious highlights include fish borsh, belly broth, stuffed cabbage rolls with maize porridge, Moldavian stew, shepherd's maize porridge stuffed with cheese, skinless beef and mutton sausages, haidouk skewered meat, and fried pastry served with jam and sour cream—just a few of Romania's tasty recipes.

9 Romania has a number of towns whose historic mediaeval centres are well preserved.

Transylvania, Romania's central region, is one of the country's most beautiful and interesting regions, thanks to its multi-ethnic past, best reflected in its urban landscapes. The most important seven cities founded by the Saxons, settlers brought by Hungarian King Géza II to defend the eastern frontier of the empire, are the origin of the German name for Transylvania: Siebenburgen, and have preserved their historic mediaeval centres. Sighișoara, founded at the end of the twelfth century, was comparable with west-European burghs in its heyday in the seventeenth century, and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Brașov, a wealthy Saxon manufacturing and commercial centre, developed around the Black Church (fourteenth-fifteenth century) in Council Square, still the city's heart. Sibiu has preserved its fortified walls and towers, its web of narrow streets, its gothic and baroque churches, and its historic houses with their fish-scale-like tiled roofs pierced by lenticular skylights. Cluj, founded by the Saxons on the site of

an old Roman settlement, Mediaș, and Orăștie preserve significant traces of the mediaeval period, merchant houses, walls, fortified towers and churches, while Bistrița has also preserved a unique commercial ensemble dating from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, known as Sugălete.

10 Romania is the venue of a number of major music and film festivals.

Year after year, Romania has consolidated its status as a popular venue for international festivals. Featuring dozens of orchestras and thousands of artists, the Georges Enesco Festival, launched in 1958, is among the world's most prestigious classical music festivals. Winner of the prize for Best Major European Festival at the first European Festival Awards, the Untold mega-festival, held in Cluj, is a favourite among electronic music fans from all over the world. One of Romania's most dynamic and creative cities, Cluj is the venue of the Transylvania International Film Festival, Romania's first and biggest international feature film event.

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The endless arable fields that surround Romania's villages create a picturesque mosaic of shapes and colours from spring to late autumn.



The ruins of Enisala Fortress (also called Heraclea), built by the Genoese in the fourteenth century on a chalky hill by Lake Babadag