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10 ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS

There are spectacular areas in Romania that are worth discovering! Visiting them, you feel great surrounded by nature, you are introduced to the local culture - still vibrant with vitality, and you find high-quality local services and products. Your vacation becomes a small "investment" in a local economy that is starting to work by integrating nature conservation and local culture into the economic equation, through ecotourism.

The Association of Ecotourism in Romania and its partners invite you to discover 10 destinations where ecotourism becomes the engine for local development. These destinations use the innovative concept of ecotourism, combining the attraction of protected areas (e.g., national parks, nature parks or Nature-2000 sites), with the enjoyment of discovering the real lives of traditional local communities. These communities are encouraged to develop family businesses in tourism (e.g., guesthouses and guiding) and to use local products. In this way, the destinations begin to develop a unified tourism identity, using images of nature and the local communities. Thus, respect for nature and the local people becomes the essential value of local development, both for the business sector and for the local administration.

The status of Ecotourism Destination is officially granted by the Ministry of Tourism following an evaluation according to criteria developed on the basis of international expertise in the field of ecotourism. For 10 years, the Association of Ecotourism in Romania has been supporting the development and promotion of various micro-regions in Romania, by applying the ecotourism destination model. Five destinations have been officially recognised by the Ministry of Tourism in recent years, and the others are in the process of being recognized as ecotourism destinations.



Băile Tușnad and Surroundings

The place where beavers have returned

Located in eastern Transylvania, this destination is the perfect choice for a rejuvenating cure for body and soul. Its miraculous springs of mineral waters with healing powers restore the balance and inner peace in those who try them. Complemented by mofettas, richly ionised air and a sub-alpine climate, they will transform you into the fairy-tale hero who regains his strength and vitality overnight.

With fresh strength, you'll be able to walk or cycle the many trails to the only volcanic lake in south-eastern Europe, Saint Ana Lake. Leave room for a walk in the Mohos Peat Bog, a special nature reserve with relict plants from the Ice Age.

If you're lucky, you might even spot a bear in the area. However, the safest way to watch a bear is at the observatories specially set up by Máté Bence, one of the world's most famous nature photographers. Access to these is by reservation only, in the presence of a guide. And, if you're so passionate about nature, in the presence of a specialist you can also watch the beavers that have returned to the Olt River after hundreds of years since their extinction.

Activities

Location:





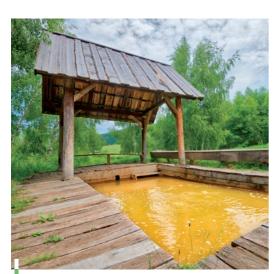
Horse-Drawn Cart / Sleigh Ride

It is a unique experience, adapted for any season, which will allow you to interact with the locals, especially after tasting the brandy and the traditional dishes they have prepared. You will start from Tuṣnad Nou village to a meadow in the Harghita Mountains, from where you will have a delightful view over the Ciuc Depression. For horse lovers, advanced or beginners, there is also the possibility of a short riding lesson.



Cultural Tours

Here many of the old Szekler traditions have been preserved and are still part of the daily life of the community. You will discover old fortified churches, wooden gates that are hundreds of years old and carved with ancestral motifs, as well as living crafts. The customs of these places confer authenticity to the area, so you will be surprised by the beauty of these traditions and the hospitality of the locals.



Rejuvenate at Nyír public bath!



Enter the magical world of Mohoș Peat Bog!



Enjoy the panorama from the Falcon Stone!



Transylvanian Highlands

The last mediaeval landscape of Europe

Adored by contemporary princes and visited by guests from all over the world, the Transylvanian Highlands ecotourism destination instils in your soul the special charm of the last truly mediaeval landscape in Europe. Besides the beautiful villages with fortified churches, here, in the heart of Romania, you will find meadows exploding in colour, with a variety of flowers and butterflies, as you can rarely see. Through the cool forests, with impressive trees, you can discover fresh deer or bear tracks and you can hear the birds chirping their charming trills.

In sync with nature, people work their land and turn its yield into reasons to celebrate, happily inviting you to join them. Along the many valleys, you have all the time in the world to admire the landscape, while making room for a rainbow of local sensations, sprinkled with wild berries, sturdy households, and welcoming people.

Transylvanian Highlands are an open invitation to appreciate nature, local culture and, above all, people!

Activities:

Location:







Travel Back in Time by Steam Train on Narrow-Gauge Railway

The narrow-gauge railway, which once connected Sighișoara to Sibiu, meanders through picturesque villages. You are surrounded by nature, with its fabulous wildlife and flora, in an idyllic rural landscape, with the snow-capped ridges of the Carpathians as backdrop. A ride on the steam train is an adventure for the whole family, full of the stories that have accompanied it for over a century.



Walking and Cycling

Walk on trails known for centuries only by the locals! They will open the gate of their house and soul, they will invite you into their world, which flows according to other laws, in harmony with nature. Live the story of the last truly mediaeval landscape in Europe here, in the Transylvanian Highlands! Over 500 km of marked trails help you discover the destination on foot, by bike or on horseback.



Walk on pastures with secular trees!



Come to Biertan, one of the UNESCO fortified churches!



Admire the strangely shaped mounds!



Danube Delta

A paradise for birds

Let yourself be carried away on canals bordered by willows and reeds and enjoy the magic of nature in the most surprising place in Romania: the Danube Delta, part of the UNESCO World Heritage! Hundreds of bird species find their shelter in a maze of lakes and canals, dotted with floating islands. The spectacle of nature is complemented by sand dunes, subtropical forests, and a biodiversity unique in Europe for a wetland. After millennia of living there, people add to this magnificent spectacle: traditional villages with a special culture that emerged from the coexistence of many diverse ethnicities.

The common or the Dalmatian pelican, the white-tailed eagle, the famous red-breasted goose, the glossy ibis, the spoonbill, the black-winged stilt and many others are just as many reasons why the delta is a paradise for bird lovers. In the spring, the show is in full swing, and all you need is binoculars, a good guide, and a little patience.

Nowhere else in Europe will you be surprised by such a scenery as the one from the period of migration and mating!

Activities:

Location:

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Slow Boat Trips

Delta is best discovered at a slow pace! If you do not dare on a kayak or canoe adventure, then choose a small motorboat that will go at low speed so that you can enjoy the beauties that will unfold before your eyes. You will slide easily on the canals, and you will cross smooth lakes, full of water lilies, to discover villages, people, birds and to understand why the Danube Delta is so special.

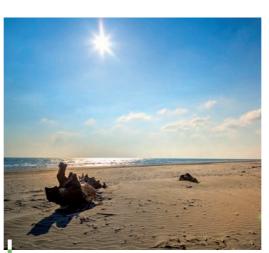


On Foot through Sfântu Gheorghe

Located in the place where the Danube embraces the sea, the village emanates an exotic air and surprises you with its unpaved streets, covered in sand, and traditional houses. Here you can stay with locals or in modern eco-lodges and you can try out local dishes, such as storceag (sturgeon soup), fish jam, malasolka or scordoleaua, various old Ukrainian or Lipovan recipes.



Let yourself be enchanted by the Letea subtropical forest!



Feel the hot sand on the beach in Sfântu Gheorghe!



Discover the beauty of decay in Sulina!



Eco Maramureș

The green heart of Maramures

The Eco Maramureş ecotourism destination is an island of authentic life, where nature and the locals have joined hands to create a unique cultural landscape. As a testimony, we have the villages which still preserve the architecture of Maramures, with wooden houses, gates, and churches, where life unfolds slowly, as if there were no worries at all. Here, there is Creasta Cocoşului (The Rooster's Crest), in the Gutâi Mountains, a huge nine million years-old cliff, made of magmatic rock. There are also lakes and forests, habitats for birds and mammals, meadows with unique flora and healing herbs.

Come to the village of Breb to discover some of what this area has to offer! You can follow the easy hiking route that starts from the Church of Breb, for an experience in nature that will reveal the surroundings of the village, with hay meadows, orchards and hay stacks scattered as far as the eye can see. On the way back, you can admire the specific local architecture, experience life in the village and feel that you are a vibrant part of the local community.

Activities:

Location:





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Discover the Stories of the Place!

The story of wood, wool or hay are some of the guided tour programs, specially designed for those who want to explore the fairytale world of the Eco Maramureş ecotourism destination. There are stories about village life, the close ties between the locals and nature, about how nature has influenced the lives of these people along the centuries and provided the resources necessary for their daily lives.



Cycling in Eco Maramureș

164 kilometres of marked cycling routes will introduce you to the world of the seven protected areas of Eco Maramureş destination. During this trip you will discover, at your own pace, the unique life of the villages and the people who maintain and enhance it through working their land. The routes overlap forest roads and cart tracks, shepherding trails, village lanes, short segments of county and communal roads, and old railway embankments.



Go hiking to the Creasta Cocoșului!



Stroll through the Pădurea Crăiască!



Visit the wooden church in Budești!



Mărginimea Sibiului

The land of well-being

Mărginimea Sibiului is a region in southern Transylvania, famous for its tradition of shepherding and sheep cheese. Although located in the immediate vicinity of Sibiu, the chain of villages in the foothills of the Carpathians represents a link with nature, where communities have a slow pace of life and customs are carefully preserved. Discover, on foot or by bike, the narrow streets with brightly coloured houses and large wooden gates! Visit local museums (Săliște, Sibiel, Jina, Rășinari) and participate in local festivals to feel the pulse of the community. The villages alternate with orchards, picturesque valleys, deciduous and coniferous forests, hayfields with huts, pastures enlivened by flocks of sheep, and in the heart of the destination is the mountain resort Păltiniș. Local roads are suitable for cycling, and the mountain area has a dense network of hiking, running and MTB trails. Mărginimea is a paradise for taking up a new sport, but also for challenges in local competitions (Burduf Challenge, Traces on Play, Sibiel Forest Run) and international ones (Sibiu Cycling Tour).

Activities:

Location:

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Hay-Hut Country

This is an idyllic area with a picturesque natural background, the Făgăraș Ridge, where time stands still. Follow the hiking trails and you will reach the land of wildflower meadows, dotted with hay huts whose porches are suitable for picnics. At Râu Sadului village, the community has received support to transform the huts into sleeping areas and to revitalize a unique cultural landscape through ecotourism.



lezerele Cindrelului Nature Reserve

From Gura Râului, Păltiniș and Valea Frumoasei you can follow the hiking trails to the spectacular glacial lakes with turquoise water. In the summer months, the alpine area appeals to all the senses, with the mountain peony in bloom, fast springs and breath-taking views. In Gura Râului, an annual folk festival dedicated to the mountain peony is organised.



Discover the wooden sculpture display on the Poteca Soarelui themed route, in Săliște!



Explore the legends of Rășinari village with the Questo app!



Step back in time to the ruins of the Dacian fortress from Tilișca!



Location:



Activities:

find facilities adapted to any age and fitness level, so that grown-ups and the little ones together can have memorable experiences in nature.

A great family travel destination!

Four show caves with pathways and lighting installations are waiting for you to step into the world under the world, and this is just the beginning! Equipped as a caver and accompanied by a guide, you can continue exploring the depths of the Earth in two caves. They are accessible for most of you and promise an unforgettable experience.

No matter your family travel style, in Pădurea Craiului you will have the opportunity to discover nature, enjoy it and appreciate it. Here you will

In Pădurea Craiului you will find no less than 17 marked hiking trails, 5 themed trails and interactive playgrounds, many cycling trails, a via ferrata route and even an easy rafting route. All of them are designed for families with children and they are excellent opportunities to spend active time in nature.



The Ultimate Adventure!

Are you a mountain sports enthusiast? Look no further! 300 km of mountain biking trails, 9 mountain running trails, 9 adventure caves, and dozens of climbing trails challenge you to a competition with yourself! If you like to experience a rush of adrenaline, on the no less than 6 via ferrata routes you will encounter challenges that will be hard to resist: suspension bridges, zip lines and even some hammocks in the entrance of a small cave!



Relax Your Mind, Body, and Soul

The nature and the hilly landscape invite you to spend a few days in peace and quiet. A walk through Vadu Crişului, at the pottery workshop, will give you the chance to try your hand with the white clay specific to the area and return home with a souvenir.

The wooden churches, the local traditions and customs, the water mill, the traditional cuisine, or a hike to the "whirlpool" of Lake Vida are experiences of a "dolce far niente" holiday.



Admire Vadu Crisului Waterfall!



Try your hand at pottery-making in the workshops in Vadu Crisului!



Visit the Meziad Cave!



Țara Dornelor

Your green destination in Bucovina!

Take the time to discover Tara Dornelor ecotourism destination and choose to spend a few hours or days exploring the mountains. The high-altitude holiday location offers a network of over 400 kilometres of hiking trails, where local guides will be happy to accompany you. In the unique landscape of the Carpathians in northern Romania, nature has stories written on lava formations from prehistoric volcanoes. This is a good reason to go hiking in the mountains surrounding the valley, inviting you to memorable experiences.

The Călimani, Suhard, Giumalău and Bistriței Mountains are an interesting discovery in any season. In winter, the snow cover lasts up to 120 days a year, which is ideal for an extensive ski season. The best time to try cross-country skiing is from January to March, when the immaculate snow rewards your courage and appetite for adventure. The ridge of the Suhard Mountains offers a low difficulty trail and enchanting views throughout the hike. So, are you ready to go up the mountains?

Activities:

Location:







Take a Tour of the Painted Houses in Ciocănești

Over 600 houses decorated on the outside with traditional motifs and a practice of over 100 years in egg painting make Ciocănești village unique in Romania. It's fun to be "gone rafting" here!

During the Traditional Log Rafting Week in Ciocănești, you can venture on a log raft on Bistrița River, as the locals used to do once.



Cool Off with the Most Famous Mineral Waters in Romania

Țara Dornelor has some of the most famous brands of mineral water in the country, appreciated for their therapeutic and prophylactic properties.

More recently, they have become a reason to explore the Land of Springs in Panaci village, where a network of 17 springs of "living water" have become a travel experience in itself.



Enjoy local dishes at the Eco-brunch!



Discover the Călimani National Park Visitors' Centre!



Walk on "The Peat Bog under the Magnifying Glass" interpretation trail!



Țara Hațegului - Retezat

The World before Time

A trip to Țara Hațegului - Retezat is a journey back in time. You will discover lost worlds, you will face life-size dinosaurs, you will explore volcanoes and traces of a former sea. Coming to more recent times, you will see mountain landscapes, lakes and carnivorous plants, all relicts from the Ice Age, 10,000 years ago. Then you will enjoy the traces left by the Romans in antiquity, at Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana, and the first Christian places of worship - the Densuş Church.

70 million years ago, Țara Hațegului was a tropical island with volcanoes and unique dinosaurs! Today, you can discover the secrets of the Cretaceous dinosaurs, explore the lost seas and experience volcanic eruptions! The adventure begins in the town of Hațeg, where you can visit the House of the Hațeg Country UNESCO Global Geopark. Then, in the village of Densuş, you will discover the House of Volcanoes, and on the Valley of the Dinosaurs, at Sânpetru, you will explore the House of Dwarf Dinosaurs and the House of Traditions.

Activities:

Location:

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Cycling Tourism

Due to the numerous tourist attractions easily accessible by bike, Țara Hațegului - Retezat is one of the ideal destinations for cycling tourism in Romania. The destination has a network of over 300 km marked tourist routes for bicycles, with varying degrees of difficulty. You can experience them on foot with just as much pleasure, whether you opt for an easy route or a longer and more demanding one.



Hiking

The mountain massifs that guard Jara Haţegului have a rich network of marked tourist trails. Among them, Retezat stands out, with a dense and well-maintained network that ensures access to all the important attractions in the massif. In the area you can also find some interpretation trails, both in the Retezat National Park and in the Grădiştea Muncelului - Cioclovina Nature Park and the Haţeg Country UNESCO Global Geopark.



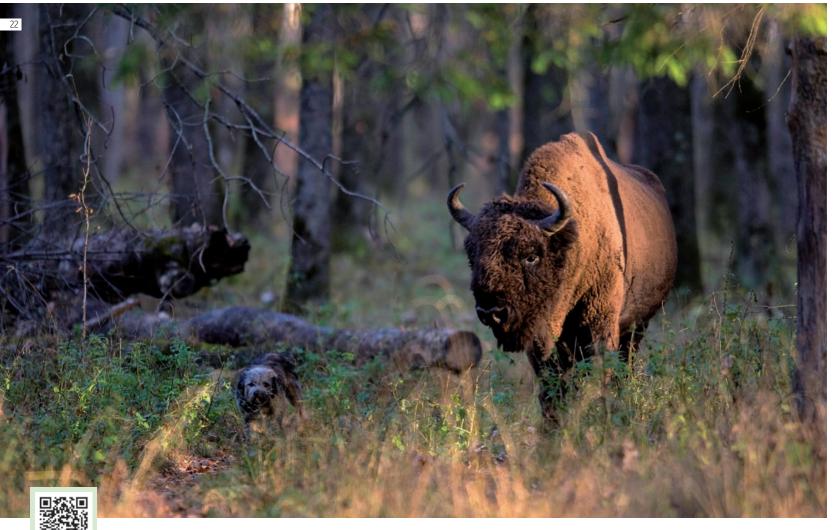
Become an explorer at the House of Volcanoes!



Hike to Fundătura Ponorului!



Capture the beauty of the glacial lakes in the Retezat Mountains!



Bison Land

The place where legends and bisons meet

Travelling around Neamt means secular forests, famous monasteries and hermitages scattered in the mountains, monastic villages, and mediaeval historical monuments. Here you can also see the legendary bison, which has been reintroduced into the natural environment more than two centuries after its disappearance from the wild. Currently, more than 50 bison roam freely through the secular forests of the land.

If you reach the 180 hectares acclimatization enclosure near the Visitor Centre of the Vânători-Neamţ Nature Park, your encounter with bison will be a unique experience. And you will not be alone but accompanied by rangers who will guide you in the footsteps of the largest terrestrial animal in Europe. You will thus understand why the legendary bison is an "architect" of landscapes.

And this is not all! In recognition of the efforts to preserve the cultural and natural wealth of the area, the Bison Land has been, for years, the only sustainable tourism destination in Romania, out of the 100 selected worldwide.

Activities

Location:



Lands with Divine Grace

The Bison Land is also the place where you can rediscover yourself while visiting monastic villages and places of worship full of spirituality, such as Văratec, Agapia, Neamţ and others. The monastic community here is the second largest in Europe, after that of Mount Athos, with a special organisational structure that makes it unique on the continent.



Tasty and Tasteful Local Events

Get to know the local flavour at eco-brunch gastronomic events, at the mediaeval festival at Neamţ Fortress or at the autumn fair. In addition to the culinary experience, the local craftsmen invite you to workshops and demonstrations of clay modelling, crocheting, weaving or carving. By the end of the day, you will have gathered lots of memories and feelings.



Find out the story of the Neamt Fortress!



Discover the Visitor Centre of Vânători-Neamţ Nature Park!



Explore the realm of Romanian writer Ion Creanga's childhood!



Zărnești - Piatra Craiului

The jewel of the Romanian Carpathians

One of the most famous mountain massifs for hiking in Romania, Piatra Craiului National Park is a limestone castle, guarded by forest. On the way to its heights, you will walk on via ferrata, past caves and scree, and the wonderful view from the ridge will leave you speechless. Along the paths you may spot chamois, or you can admire flower species that are endemic here, such as the little carnation of Piatra Craiului (Dianthus callizonus). Zărnești and the villages around the mountains are places to stop, where you can find accommodation, but also delicious meals made with fresh local produce.

Besides the spectacular trails and scenery, the area is great if you want to discover signs and tracks of all kinds of animals, such as bears, wolves or lynx. In the company of a specially trained guide, you can find animals tracks on the soft earth, or you can watch bears from the safety of a hide, and you will understand how the locals and large carnivores have been living here for thousands of years.

Activities:

Location:

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Photo Session with Nature

The Zărnești - Piatra Craiului destination is a paradise for any photographer!

If you choose to go on a photo tour, you will have the chance to capture natural landscapes, but also the portraits of local people, traditional houses, or rural occupations.

In late autumn, when winter is on its way, the colour show is fantastic!



Discover the Area on Two Wheels

There are countless possibilities for mountain biking trails in the area, and 11 of them have been selected and marked by the Piatra Craiului National Park Administration, so it will be easier for you to find your way. The routes are of varying difficulty levels, but the most beautiful of them will take you from the deep valleys to the highlands with dotted villages on a background of crenelated mountain ridges.



Visit the impressive Zărnești Gorge!



Discover the Piatra Craiului National Park Visitor Centre!



Be amazed by the greatness of nature at Cerdacul Stanciului!

Destinations	*	%	50	A			*	0	H	×	
Băile Tușnad and Surroundings	✓	✓	√			✓					✓
Transylvanian Highlands	✓		√	✓	✓			√	✓	√	✓
Danube Delta				✓		✓		√	✓	√	✓
Eco Maramureș	✓	✓	√					√	✓	√	✓
Mărginimea Sibiului	✓	✓	√	✓	√			√		√	✓
Pădurea Craiului	✓		✓		√	✓	✓	✓		√	✓
Țara Dornelor	✓	✓	√	✓	√	✓					✓
Țara Hațegului - Retezat	✓	✓	√					√			✓
Bison Land	✓		✓	✓							✓
Zărnești – Piatra Craiului	✓	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	✓

Icons:

Hiking

Winter activities

Cycling tourism



Animal watching



Horse riding





Nautical activities



Speleology



Photo tours



Bird watching



Gastronomy



Cultural activities

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The Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER), in an innovative manner, brings the public and private sectors together, in a partnership for nature conservation and sustainable tourism development. AER contributes to the quality improvement of ecotourism related services and promotes nature as an essential element of the Romanian tourist destination image. The Association addresses the development of ecotourism services and infrastructure within ecotourism destinations, along with nature conservation and sustainable development in Romania.

WHAT DOES AER DO?

AER is committed to developing and promoting REAL ecotourism in Romania. Its members participate at international travel trade exhibitions around Europe, promoting ecotourism as an activity and Romania as an ecotourism destination. AER assists in developing a series of ecotourism destinations in Romania, supporting small scale local services and products, keeping tourism standards at the highest level and supporting local and national nature conservation efforts.

ECOTOURISM CERTIFICATION: "ECO-ROMANIA CERTIFIED BY AER"

The AER Ecotourism Certification system helps interested tourism providers to achieve ecotourism status. Participation is voluntary, but only organizations with ECO-CERTIFIED products will be able to display the "CERTIFIED ECO-ROMANIA" logo, and receive support from AER with promoting their products.

LOOK FOR THE "ECO-ROMANIA CERTIFIED BY AER" LOGO!

See the "Discover Romania/Descoperă Eco-România" map collection to learn about AER's recommended ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS with ECO-CERTIFIED products!



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